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**FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE HEART-MIND:
A CONSTRUCTIVE COMPARATIVE PROJECT**

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The ways we dress, speak, eat, run, argue, work and love are all gendered: There are ‘male’ and ‘female’ ways of going about a task, behavior is called inappropriate if it doesn’t correspond to the behavior expected from a member of a certain gender, and our lives, our reality, seem to be divided along the sharp line of ‘male vs. female’. In these rigid distinctions behavior and values are prescribed to us because of our gender. This also applies to the practice of knowing. Since rationality was deemed the superior way of knowing by Western thinkers, and identified with masculinity, which stood atop the patriarchal social hierarchy, knowledge has had a gendered character, as we will explain below. Rationality is hereby understood as the polar opposite of non-rationality (whether the latter is represented by emotion, body, desire, intuition, or even “merely” empirical research). The same is true for the understanding of gender: male and female are considered polar opposites in a traditional account of gender. Through this association of rationality and masculinity, knowledge-practices propagate and solidify a rigid gender-dichotomy: By marking certain epistemological practices as ‘male’ or ‘female’, these practices are prescribed to members of a gender as expected behavior and are taken to be inappropriate to those who are not of this gender. In the larger scheme, a hierarchy between genders and between ways of engaging with the world, as well as their association, are solidified.

This gendered character of knowing is extremely limiting and prescriptive, leading to toxic reproductions of gender-stereotypes and a narrow selection of ‘appropriate’ knowledge-practices. Additionally, it makes us all, men and women, miss out on certain paths to knowledge and leads to an imbalanced community of knowers, favoring the rational approach to research and associating kinds of intellectual work with men and marginalizing kinds of research and knowledge that are understood as ‘female’. Therefore, I believe, we are in need of a new framework of knowing that: a) does not ascribe gender to any way of knowing, b) does not propagate a male-female dichotomy and hierarchy, c) includes all genders in all operations and modes of knowledge and can be used by all genders and d) allows for non-toxic, fluid and free manifestations of gender based on epistemological practices. How can we construct such a new and non-gendered framework of knowledge?

For this construction of a non-gendered epistemology, we will turn to the Confucian idea of the ‘heart-mind’ as an epistemologically non-binary or non-gendered locus of knowing. In contrast to the rigid ideas of separate ‘male’ and ‘female’ epistemologies in Western traditions, the concept of the ‘heart-mind’ encompasses both rational and non-rational operations and thereby offers a non-

gendered type of knowing and learning, in theory. By considering the concept of the ‘heart-mind’ and also the work already done in feminist epistemology, we seek to find a new way of conceiving of epistemology that operates outside of this gender-binary.

After explaining the problem and some core issues in the first chapter, the second chapter will introduce the relevant work done in the field of modern feminist epistemology. Its naturalized branch will especially help us construct a new knowledge-framework. In the third chapter, we will explain the Confucian concept of the ‘heart-mind’ and its relevance for this new framework of knowing, before fleshing out this framework in more detail in the final chapter. With a constructive comparative approach and a creative handling of the concepts we will ground our framework in naturalized feminist epistemology and employ the Confucian ‘heart-mind’ as a personal and practical locus of non-gendered knowing that addresses all the criteria (a-d) of our solution above.

CHAPTER 1: SETTING UP THE PROJECT

A) Our Understanding of Knowledge

In this thesis we will explore gendered ways of knowing and what we will call gendered ways of ‘engagement with the world.’ This includes not only ways of knowing (which would be the literal sense of the term epistemology¹) but also different ways of reacting to, thinking about, feeling and processing one’s experiences and one’s environment. Due to a lack of space, we cannot spend much time on an exact definition of epistemology or of the concept of knowledge. Instead, we will focus on an understanding of knowledge that includes as many modes of engaging, learning, thinking, feeling, perceiving and processing the world as possible, which we will still refer to as ‘knowledge’ or sometimes as ‘engagement with the world’. We are thus not focused exclusively on what we as humans learn from rational operations, but include intuition, emotion or other subjective activities that any external event can trigger within us. The term ‘epistemology’ will still be used, but in a critical and expanded sense. We thus count intuition, subjectivity, etc as robust components in an epistemological framework.

¹ Matthias Steup and Ram Neta, “Epistemology,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/epistemology/> (accessed February 5, 2021).

Furthermore, moral capacities and their cultivation play an important role in the project. Topics such as moral cultivation, values, norms and judgements are central to the Confucian account we will draw on in the second half of this thesis. For this purpose, we will include concepts and ideas from both the field of ethics and the field of epistemology. What we want to understand is how gender influences the way we as individuals are taught and are expected to engage with the world, how our actual lived experience is judged or determined by gender-roles inherent in moments of knowing, thinking, feeling, etc. This is a broad exploration and can thus not be limited to a specific sub-field of philosophy. We deal here with many elements of practical philosophy and everyday life situations like the ways to solve a problem one encounters, reactions to events, the treatment of moral decisions, etc. The main focus will however be on modes of knowing.

B) The Central Question and its Relevance

Within this broad field we situate our question. We seek to transcend knowledge in its gendered manifestation as we experience it in Western society today and aim to replace this framework with a new account of engaging with the world, one free of gender-prescriptiveness. In this project we will ask the following questions: Why ought we move beyond a gendered understanding of knowledge and experience? How can we transcend a world of knowledge that is rigidly structured according to gender-dichotomies? Can a non-gendered way of knowing foster and support a more diverse and fluid gender-expression? The need to ask these questions can be explained by taking a look at the reality of gendered epistemology in the West. We can easily see that the traditional celebration of rationality, on the one hand, and masculinity on the other, have led to an association of masculinity with rationality.

The importance of rationality in the West can be found in writings spanning from antiquity and the Stoics, over religious philosophy and the connection of salvation to rationality and sin to embodiment, to Descartes and Kant and the Enlightenment, understanding reason to be what allows us to be free and independent beings. Many thinkers after this time too have celebrated rationality. As mentioned above, the association of the dominant mode of cognition - rationality - with the dominant gender - the male gender - can easily be ascertained. As this association was made by most thinkers implicitly, it was simply assumed that men were the more capable and therefore the more rational gender, while women were less capable of rationality in general. However, many thinkers also explicitly express this. Kant, for instance, writes: "They [women] do something only

because it pleases them, and the art [of moral education] consists in making only that please them which is good. I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles, ” to name only one example.²

Women thus found themselves excluded from rationality and associated with all the ‘leftover’ modes of engaging with the world: emotion, embodiment, instinct, passion, desire. All these elements seen as opposites to rationality in some sense are attributed to the female. All these traits that are, from a dominant male perspective, ‘other’, foreign, deviant, are associated with the woman, herself understood as the ‘other’.³ Faced with these claims, feminists in different eras and belonging to different branches of thought have argued that this rigid distribution of capacities is not an accurate representation of the truth, that women are capable of rationality too.

Mary Wollstonecraft, for instance, in her response to a work by Rousseau arguing for separate education and moral standards between men and women, argues for the equality in the moral and intellectual capacities of men and women and fights for both sexes being educated in the same ways and with the same content.⁴ She writes: “[...] women must be allowed to found their virtue on knowledge, which is scarcely possible unless they be educated by the same pursuits as men. For they are now made so inferior by ignorance and low desires, as not to deserve to be ranked with them.”⁵ We can note her commitment to education for men and women alike in order to perfect rationality and virtue which both genders are equally capable of, in her eyes. Others, thinking along more radical lines, have defended the validity and importance of the distinct ‘female way of knowing’ and have fought for an acceptance of embodied, subjective and non-rational ways of knowing. The explicit acknowledging of ‘female’ non-rational modes of engagement in order for those to be respected and taken seriously are discussed for instance by radical feminist Mary Daly, who refers to a “native talent and superiority of women,” which goes hand in hand with a “celebration of womanhood” and the recognition of the special way in which women see the world, as Alison Jaggar describes.⁶

Returning to the traditional association of rationality with the male gender, we can see that

² Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1960), 70.

³ See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011), ebook, 41.

⁴ Lisa Raphals, “Gendered Virtue Reconsidered: Notes from the Warring States and Han,” in *The Sage and the Second Sex: Confucianism, Ethics and Gender*, ed. Chenyang Li. (La Salle: Open Court, 2000), 235.

⁵ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 205.

⁶ Alison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983), 95-96.

this association entails different layers of problems. One of them is that the existing gender-hierarchy strengthens a hierarchy of modes of knowledge and vice-versa. This way, 'feminine' ways of knowing are not taken seriously and are deemed less important than all 'male' (rational) modes of thinking. The existing hierarchy of genders and its manifestation in the world of knowledge are thus one fundamental problem here.

Another problem that follows from this is that, because of these gender-stereotypes propagated in the world of knowledge, the rigidity of gender-expression is aggravated: a prescriptive dimension is added to the concept of gender. This way, for instance, we are taught that a man has to be reasonable, or that a woman is naturally emotional and nurturing and is socially conditioned into roles requiring these traits. Assigning a 'male and female' way of engaging with the world thus not only perpetuates rigid binary gender distinctions but limits and restricts one's way of interacting with the world based on one's gender. Something as basic as the way one engages with the world being limited by one's gender highlights a profoundly problematic aspect of gender distinctions in general and of normativity and cultural conditioning related to gender more specifically. By understanding rationality as a male and emotionality, intuition or bodily engagement as a female way of world-engagement, we attribute values and ways of living fundamentally to gender.

The reality and rigidity of the category of gender itself can be put into question, however, as we can read in, for instance, Judith Butler. She argues that the concepts of gender and sex itself are socially constructed and quite arbitrarily loaded with meaning and considers "the univocity of sex, the internal coherence of gender, and the binary framework for both sex and gender [...] as regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalize the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression."⁷ Butler also speaks of gender as a "performatively enacted signification,"⁸ thus considering gender not to reflect any truth about our identity, but instead consisting in a performance. The attribution of knowledge-practices to gender supports toxic gender-expectations and heightens the need for 'performing' one's gender in a very specific manner, as Butler suggests. This determination of gender-presentation via epistemological elements seems harmful, narrow and, as mentioned above, contributes to a solidification of gender-hierarchies in the world.

Beyond this skepticism of the 'reality' of a gender-binary, the fact that for many individuals the rigidity of the gender-binary cannot accommodate their lived and felt gender-identity justifies the importance of seeing gender as a spectrum with many facets and nuances that greatly transcends

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York/London: Routledge Classics, 2006), 46.

⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 46.

a binary structure. It is now important to translate this idea of a spectrum affording freedom and expression beyond binaries into the world of knowledge: Seeing knowledge as a multi-faceted endeavor containing many rational and non-rational elements can help us break the associations of gender with certain types of knowledge, a necessary and long overdue move.

It seems important to note here that we have to be critical of claims made by any thinker, feminist or not, that commits to any essentialist over-generalization or stereotypical thinking. Seeing all men as rational and women as emotional is just as inaccurate as taking an allegedly more empowering stance and focusing on the ‘special female’ perspective on the world. In this thesis we will thus try very hard to steer clear of essentialist claims. We will not focus on a ‘male’ or ‘female’ way of knowing, but will seek to discover a framework of knowing that includes both, all gender-expressions without explicitly mentioning or preserving gendered categories of knowledge, and all knowledge-practices as open to anyone, regardless of gender-identity.

C) A Creative Comparative Project

We will now shift our focus to briefly sketch the Confucian concept of the ‘heart-mind’ and how we believe it can be helpful to this project. How, we wonder, can the Confucian concept of the ‘heart-mind’ help us in this new form of engagement with the world we want to construct?

The concept of the ‘heart-mind’ is a central concept from Confucian thought and represents an essential human ‘location’ where reasoning, distinguishing and the ordering of sensory data take place. At the same time, the ‘heart-mind’ is strongly moved by desire, which, in its natural and uncultivated state, is a desire for personal benefit. If cultivated and trained the ‘heart-mind’ is a powerful mechanism for the balancing of a human’s rational and non-rational faculties. The side-by-side existence and acting of its rational and non-rational components are interesting to us, as they avoid a rigid hierarchy, let alone opposition between what is rational and what is not. In this way, the concept of the ‘heart-mind’ differs clearly from the standard Western approach to knowledge and learning, rigidly structured along a polar opposition of rationality and emotion/desire/body.

In addition to the ‘heart-mind’ and its capacities not being gendered, both the natural state and the process of cultivation needed to perfect and balance the ‘heart-mind’ are described in classical Confucian texts in neither masculine nor feminine terms. Members of both genders are

able to cultivate their 'heart-mind', thus being able to reach a state of balanced and well-rounded decision making. While this openness to cultivation of the 'heart-mind' is limited severely on a practical level for women in historically Confucian societies, in theory it provides us with a personal framework of diverse engagement with the world while avoiding rigid binaries. We will delve deeper into this concept and what it affords this project in chapters 3 and 4.

It is important to point out here that our interpretation of the Confucian concept of the 'heart-mind' takes a creative approach. We will use this concept originating from classical Chinese philosophy for a project taking place in the contemporary world and bring it into contact with modern feminist epistemology: In order to yield a constructive result, that of a new framework of knowing, we will make use of building blocks taken from different traditions and eras. This transcendence of millennia and continents, which might be deemed a misunderstanding or an inauthentic interpretation of certain concepts or as the committing of an anachronism, is a path we consciously choose and the perils of which we acknowledge. As we explicitly engage in a creative and comparative project, we hope that this approach will bring about an innovative solution and provide an example of constructive intercultural philosophy.

Drawing on Confucianism, I thus believe it to be possible to develop an alternative account of knowledge that allows and opens up any kind of engagement with the world to everyone, regardless of gender. This project does not argue for an increased valuation of non-rational modes of knowing or of female knowers, but aims instead at demonstrating that a varied and diversified way of engaging with the world provides a representation of knowledge, which encompasses all its facets for all knowing subjects. Through this encompassing view of the 'heart-mind' we obtain a correspondingly encompassing way of engagement with the world, which defies rigid gender-roles that demarcate 'typically male' and 'typically female' modes of engagement. By promoting such a non-binary way of knowing, a broad landscape of identity opens up. If enacted, I believe, this encompassing engagement with the world could foster an authentic and diversified way of life, and would contribute to the de-gendering of knowledge, rationality and emotion.

CHAPTER 2: ISSUES WITH FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGY

We will now turn our attention to the field of feminist epistemology and its relevance for this project of designing a non-gendered framework of knowing. One major concern in feminist epistemology is taking a kind of ‘meta-view’ of the field and exploring the general ways in which debates in the field revolve around the structuring of gender-factors. Elizabeth Anderson phrases the project like this: “Feminist epistemology studies the influence of gender on the (production of) knowledge.”⁹ The branch of thought that is feminist epistemology is thus interested in exploring ways in which gender influences and shapes the ways we know. It is often centered around the fields of the natural and social sciences, but overlaps in many places with feminist ethics. There is no single representative or central figure of this branch of thought: it is comprised of many thinkers intrigued by the relation of knowing and gender. The broad nature of this field allows scholars to focus on very different topics. As Sandra Harding explains in her work *The Science Question in Feminism*, feminist epistemology can be understood along three lines: feminist empiricism, feminist standpoint and feminist postmodernism.¹⁰

The first, feminist empiricism, strives to tackle sexism, a form of social bias, by promoting more accurate empirical scientific work. Including women in science will provide a more complete picture and will help correct androcentric bias in the sciences.¹¹ Feminist standpoint theory, the second branch Harding identifies, sees women’s position as unique and valuable, and understands women as having access to a truer and less distorted reality through their subjugated existence - for instance when it comes to science or ethics.¹² The third branch, feminist postmodernism, comes at the issues brought about by gender from an intersectional angle and aims to capture the diversity of the lived world.¹³ These very brief summaries cannot capture the nuances, tensions and details of these branches of feminist epistemology, of course. Their differences will not be part of our focus. It suffices to know, for the sake of this project, that feminist epistemology explores and often critically analyses the influence of gender on knowledge - both on its content and on the structure of institutions and fields that seek knowledge.

⁹ Elizabeth Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense,” In *Philosophy of Science: Contemporary Readings*, ed. Yuri Balashov and Alex Rosenberg. (Oxon/NYC: Routledge, 2002), 459.

¹⁰ Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 24.

¹¹ Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, 24-25.

¹² *Ibid.*, 26.

¹³ Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, 28.

A major point of critique expressed by feminist epistemologists is this: knowledge is gendered, and this influences the way we gain knowledge and work in the fields of the sciences (along with other fields). That this factor is often overlooked and has thus lead to an implicitly unbalanced discipline is one reason why feminist epistemology is necessary. In addition, thinkers point out that knowledge associated with typically female ways of knowing is valued and respected much less than those associated with typically male knowledge practices. Anderson explains that this dilemma entails two aims for feminist epistemologists: criticizing science and explaining these critiques on the one hand and defending “feminist scientific practices” on the other hand.¹⁴

However, before moving our focus to the claims and perspectives of feminist epistemology, we need to address another issue first: There is a risk inherent in this discourse of speaking of ‘female knowledge,’ and thereby of committing ourselves to essentialist and universalist positions when it comes to characterizing how men and women differentially know. We will spend the first part of this chapter, therefore, on navigating this risk and explaining how to deal with this slippery slope in any conversation on gender. We will spend the remainder of this chapter on the issues discovered by feminist epistemologists and on the ways they aim, through what they call “naturalized” epistemologies, to counteract or change the projected structuring of women's ways of knowing that they unearth.

A) The Risk of Essentialism

When proffering descriptive characterizations of any group of individuals, overgeneralization is a constant risk. Deducing from the behavior, opinion or from any characteristics of one or a handful of individuals one is familiar with what the group as a whole is like or what members of this group behave like, think or are is problematic and rarely captures the truth. Additionally, general descriptions portray diverse members of a group as a homogenous mass and ignore their diversity. Avoiding overgeneralization in projects on gender is crucial: It is simply not correct to claim that, for example, all women are nurturing or all men are rational. We thus need to avoid such claims and preserve nuance when speaking of diverse groups such as ‘women’ and ‘men’.

Aside from overgeneralization, we should also strive to avoid essentialism. Essentialist claims are such that try to capture an essence inherent in all members of a group, shared by them

¹⁴ Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense,” 460.

and characteristic of them. Examples of such essentialist claims would be that all women are emotionally intelligent and that men should learn from women by improving their emotional skills. Such a claim might seem practical for a project like this, but it too does not capture the truth. The overgeneralization inherent in this essentialist statement does not capture the diverse lives and emotions of women or men. Alison Jaggar describes that essentialism is opposed by many feminist philosophers: “[...] feminist philosophers regularly challenge “essentialist” assumptions that categories such as those of man and woman identify types of beings that exist independently of specific conceptualizations.”¹⁵ It is, in fact, in our cultural and social activities that the concepts of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ gain their meaning, and not in nature or independently of us.

An additional problem with essentialist claims is the natural or inherent difference one propagates with them. According to a statement like the one above, women possess a special essence that is different from men. This claim seems to state that a natural and simply distinct characteristic which enables women to reason in a way informed by emotions is exclusive to them and cannot be grasped by anyone who is not female. This is highly problematic.

Anderson asserts that universalizations of gender are non-factual and inaccurate. She explains that often there is confusion between something that is truly gendered, on the one hand, and something that can be socially treated as ‘gender-symbolism’ on the other hand. That certain ways of knowing, for instance, are labeled ‘feminine’ does not mean that all women employ them or that they are indeed ‘feminine or female’ ways of knowing. Anderson adds that these vague symbolisms have the power they have because of a lack of “any nuanced or complex models of how women entering certain fields have changed their ways of theorizing.”¹⁶

An essentialist view of gender is thus problematic for multiple reasons: It solidifies gender as a natural category, inherent in, most typically, biological factors that it identifies. By being a natural and inherent matter, gender is thus a matter of birth, and any kind of fluidity or self-determination with regards to gender seems incoherent and problematic. This way of seeing gender makes changing perspective or patterns of conduct impossible and sees one gendered experience as inaccessible to the other gender. Moreover, this essentialist idea of gender supports gender as a binary classification, according to which one is either male or female, as one carries the special perspective of either gender. This binary view of gender, as already mentioned, does not capture the

¹⁵ Alison Jaggar, “Ethics Naturalized: Feminism’s Contribution to Moral Epistemology,” *Metaphilosophy* Vol. 31, No. 5 (2000): 463.

¹⁶ Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense,” 465.

diverse reality that exists among particular individuals. An essentialist view of gender is thus not a position we can accept.

B) Gendering Knowledge?

We will now move on to one of the central themes feminist epistemology deals with: that of gendered knowledge and the impact this gendering has on knowledge-production and -valuation. In this core-observation of feminist epistemology we can see several issues: Associating gender with knowledge and knowledge practices is the first issue, that we will focus on in this part, before shifting our focus to the valuing and hierarchization of knowledge along gender lines. What we are considering now is the ascription of a gender to a form of knowledge, for instance calling emotion a 'female' process and rationality a 'male' one. We want to understand this association and uncover why it is problematic.

The origin of this kind of association of certain knowledge-forms with gender can be seen as being based on the history of the dominance of masculinity and of rationality mentioned in the first chapter. The association of specific knowledge-practices with a gender are a consequence of this. All of these are deeply rooted in culture and social values: It was Western thinkers who decided rationality was the ultimate (male) mode of engaging with the world, and that women were not capable of it. This is not a fact, or a natural characteristic of gender: it is done merely by fiat of definition. Anderson demonstrates that knowledge practices have been and often still are androcentric when she explains that these practices consider man the norm and see women as occupying 'deviant' positions.¹⁷ Also Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka explain in the introduction to *Discovering Reality* that "we cannot understand women and their lives by adding facts about them to bodies of knowledge which take men, their lives, and their beliefs as the human norm."¹⁸ Knowledge and its production is thus modeled after man, his body and priorities.

The standard model for cognitive and mental operations was set in the West as the rational and often analytical mode of thinking that was taught and praised everywhere. In this glorification of rationality, any other mode of knowing was considered inferior or even harmful. In this way, for

¹⁷ Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense," 473.

¹⁸ Sandra Harding, and Merrill B. Hintikka. "Introduction," in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983), ix.

instance Marcus Aurelius writes in *The Meditations* “If thou workest at that which is before thee, following right reason seriously, vigorously, calmly, without allowing anything else to distract thee, [...]; if thou holdest to this, expecting nothing, fearing nothing, but satisfied with thy present activity according to nature, [...], thou wilt live happy.”¹⁹ With reason as the main approach to life, avoiding any distractions or hopes, one can, according to Aurelius, lead a great life. Emotions should be avoided, as they turn us away from reason. Aurelius writes: “For he who is excited by anger seems to turn away from reason with a certain pain and unconscious contraction; but he who offends through desire, being overpowered by pleasure, seems to be in a manner more intemperate and more *womanish* in his offense.”²⁰ (Emphasis added) We see here the entering of gender into his line of thought: Emotions distract and are harmful; they deviate from the male norm. Therefore they must be tied to femininity.

There are many other examples of philosophical and religious writing claiming reason to be crucial and emotion, embodiment and other typically ‘female’ cognitive processes to be inferior. Medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas, for instance, wrote that “it is natural that just as women have softer bodies than men, so too they have weaker reason.”²¹ He also explains that their weaker reason is the reason for woman’s subjection to man: “Woman is naturally subject to man, because the discretion of reason is naturally greater in man.”²² Later, during the time of Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant agrees. He writes, as seen above, “Nothing of duty, nothing of compulsion, nothing of obligation! [...] I hardly believe that the fair sex is capable of principles.”²³ Woman’s inferiority to man lies for Kant too in her weaker reason, her inability to act reasonably and dutifully. Another philosopher positing the intellectual inferiority of women is Arthur Schopenhauer. In his *Essay on Woman* he writes that women are “intellectually short-sighted”²⁴ and claims that “women’s reasoning powers are weaker” than men’s.²⁵ He also uses the phrase “deficiency in the power of

¹⁹ Marcus Aurelius, “The Meditations.” MIT, *Internet Classics Archive*. <http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.3.three.html> (accessed January 20, 2021).

²⁰ Marcus Aurelius, “The Meditations.” <http://classics.mit.edu/Antoninus/meditations.2.two.html>, (accessed January 20, 2021).

²¹ Johnston, Eric M. “The Biology of Woman in Thomas Aquinas,” *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* Vol. 77, No. 4 (2013): 582.

²² Johnston, Eric M. “The Biology of Woman in Thomas Aquinas,” 585.

²³ Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, 70.

²⁴ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays of Schopenhauer* (Auckland: The Floating Press. 2010), 106.

²⁵ Schopenhauer, *Essays*, 107.

reasoning” to describe woman’s intellect.²⁶ The association of the ‘female’ with the inferior grasp of rationality and her ‘deviant’ modes of engagement is thus perpetuated over centuries by many different philosophers, of which we have only highlighted a small selection.

There is, of course, nothing objectively rational about man and inherently emotional about woman, nor is the opposite true. As Evelyn Fox Keller explains “Whatever intellectual or personality characteristics may be affected by sexual hormones, it has become abundantly clear that our ideas about the difference between the sexes far exceed what can be traced back to mere biology; that once formed these ideas take on a life of their own - a life sustained by powerful cultural and psychological forces.”²⁷ This kind of association is the product of culture, strengthened and supported in education and through cultural conditioning in the media, many professional environments and the family. Anderson explains that within the “ideology of masculinity” the association of any thinking containing emotion is equated to sentimentality.²⁸ This view of any and all emotion as exaggerated, inappropriate and self-indulgent helps to understand the vehement rejection of emotion by those striving for masculinity.

When studying feminists’ claims about gendered knowledge we have to put into question first the process of gendering knowledge itself, which Jaggar explains as being a core-interest of feminist epistemologists: “[...] feminist approaches are distinguished by their interest in the ways in which the reason/emotion dichotomy is symbolically gendered – as well as associated symbolically with racial and class divisions.”²⁹ Jaggar also explains that in the West, traditionally emotion was attributed not only to women but also to those considered the ‘lower’ races and classes.³⁰

We can find this understanding of rationality as an exclusive quality of the ‘normal’ white man in many colonialist discourses as well. Rationality, in the eyes of the Western man, cannot be shared: it is what sets them apart, what elevates them above all others. John McLeod uses this language when he describes Franz Fanon’s work: “The colonizers are civilized, rational, intelligent: the ‘Negro’ remains ‘other’ to all these qualities against which colonizing peoples derive their sense

²⁶ Ibid., 108.

²⁷ Evelyn Fox Keller, “Gender and Science,” in *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983), 191.

²⁸ Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology,” 471.

²⁹ Jaggar, “Ethics Naturalized,” 460.

³⁰ Ibid.

of superiority and normality.”³¹ This idea of the norm *and* the superiority of the Western man both inherent in his being “civilized, rational, intelligent” at the same time is a powerful one. It makes us understand the way in which these qualities (civilization, rationality, intelligence) are assumed as the standard and the core value in the self-identification of the colonizers. Anyone who, in their eyes, didn’t fulfill these criteria cannot be like them, cannot be human. Fanon illustrates this when we writes that “he [the colonized subject] is reduced to the state of an animal. And consequently, when the colonist speaks of the colonized he uses zoological terms.”³² The colonized subject is thus reduced to an animal, wild and a slave to his impulses. Later, describing certain forms of self-destructive behavior Fanon claims that this “reinforces the colonist’s existence and domination and reassures him that such men are not rational.”³³ Seeing the colonized subject as non-human, as irrational and deviant - all of these notions capture the exclusive humanity that the white colonizers lay claim to.

This superiority that the white Western upper-class male derives from reason³⁴ to the exclusion of all other individuals helps us understand that women are not excluded from rationality because of anything other than their being women, their deviation from a norm of ‘maleness’. Perhaps the position society has put women in fosters among them more emotional behavior or perhaps this is simply a male interpretation: In any case, women, we know this clearly today, are rational. They are “just as capable of moral rationality as men,” writes Jaggar, but we can extend this to rationality as a whole.³⁵ Furthermore, also male emotionality is something that is progressively acknowledged, accepted and normalized. The fact that it has to be ‘normalized’ shows that it has always been there, but considered ‘wrong.’ Non-white individuals, working-class individuals and women have always been rational and men always emotional; we simply ignored this for millennia.

It is important to point out that we face a certain duality with the theme of gendered knowledge: On the one hand we see gender-symbolic ways of reading knowledge, which are what we want to let go of. Within this domain we can find the rigid distinction between ‘female’ and ‘male’ ways of knowing, that exclude each other and are accessible to members of a certain gender only. This gender-symbolism can be found in claims like those excluding women from rationality.

³¹ John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 22.

³² Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of The Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 7.

³³ Fanon, *Wretched of The Earth*, 18.

³⁴ Or ‘civilization’ or ‘intelligence’ - all referring to one specific idea of living according to a specific standard.

³⁵ Jaggar, “Ethics Naturalized,” 455.

This is thus a form of gendered knowledge that we want to do away with.

On the other hand, we cannot simply adopt a ‘gender blind’ perspective with regards to knowing, according to which a knower’s gender has no significance at all. We must acknowledge a possible and actual difference in perspectives between genders, when it comes to certain experiences, which can, for instance, be based on the effects of sexism on structural and institutional levels. This might at first sound like it is contradicting what we argued before. Yet, while it is true that women do not have a special, universal ‘essence,’ they occupy a perspective that, because of the structures created in society, can differ from a man’s. Anderson illustrates this with an example from the field of anthropology: “In many societies, male anthropologists have less access to women’s social worlds than female anthropologists do.”³⁶ We can see in this example that a woman might thus be allowed into a setting which a man is excluded from, thereby acquiring knowledge that her status as ‘female’ grants her.

Other factors such as race can have a similar effect as Anderson continues: “The race of the researcher affects access to social worlds as well. Native Americans sometimes grant Asian anthropologists access to religious rituals from which they ban whites.”³⁷ This second example helps to understand how a factor such as gender or race can be seen as granting a certain perspective without supporting essentialism: An Asian researcher might be a second generation immigrant of Asian parents and have grown up in New York City speaking fluent English and completely immersed in American culture. He would perhaps be granted access to a ritual in a Native American community in the same way a researcher from Tokyo or Manila, identifying with Asian culture and having spent their entire life immersed in an specific Asian community, would. What unites the researcher from New York and the one from Tokyo is nothing but their visible ‘Asian-ness’. They live distant lives and probably have no common social experiences. But their being Asian (to some degree) does grant them a special perspective: at the moment of arrival in the Native American community they would both be read as ‘Asian’ and therefore be considered not to intrude on the ritual were they to attend. This parallel-example can help us understand the position of women: female researchers might be ‘read’ as female and solely based on this be granted or denied a certain access or given different information than a male researcher. We can thus see the second dimension of gendered knowledge in this distinct perspective, which is manifested in the different research results that are produced by scientists. These differences can be explained by the affordances given to or refused them by their gender and the perspectives it allows them to have.

³⁶ Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology,” 463.

³⁷ Ibid.

A connected line of feminist thought that is very interesting is that of feminist standpoint theory. We will not go into much detail on this branch of thought here, but it seems important to point out that in this line of thought the nature of knowledge is tied closely to the identity of the knower. Kevin de Lapp explains that feminist standpoint theory, provides a way to combat the ideal of ‘objectivity’ as a response to sexism in society, politics and science. He explains: “The motivation [is] that, instead of trying to attain some genderless epistemic ideal, epistemic justification ought to be responsive to the lived experiences and embodied differences of actual epistemic agents; the experience of some of whom, of course, is marked by social-political marginalization.”³⁸ For standpoint-epistemologists the importance of perspectives (standpoints) that can be involved in any epistemic operation, as opposed to the project of finding one ‘universal truth’ and one ‘objective reality,’ is understood as a method for achieving structural change. De Lapp summarizes feminist standpoint theory in the claim “that knowledge always retains certain ineliminable traces of the knower’s particular situation, experience, and identity.”³⁹ This approach can help us understand the importance of a knower’s identity for their epistemic operation.

It is crucial to understand that accepting this is not the same as accepting gendered knowledge. Pointing out a possible difference in knowledge produced by individuals of different gender confirms the diversity inherent in individuals and the reality of patriarchal power-structures and gender-symbolisms. If only a male scientist is granted access to certain data, this researcher’s gender has an impact on the knowledge he can produce.⁴⁰ If a female researcher is trusted with access into private areas of someone’s life, mind, or home, this can be linked to gender-symbolic ways of seeing women as kind, trustworthy, gentle, and, if the individual they are interacting with is female herself, might be linked to a felt solidarity as a women, in contrast to men who can be seen as a threat or intruder in certain intimate topics.

Now, in this project, we seek to focus neither on female nor on male knowledge exclusively, but on the interplay and intertwinement of all of these forms, regardless what gender they can be labeled to be typical for. What we seek to put into question is thus the practice of gendering forms of knowledge in the first place. Most importantly, we want to avoid missing out on knowledge just because it might not fulfill the dominant criteria of what knowledge is or how it presents. We need to end the process of culturally gendering knowledge altogether. It leads to separation, hierarchy

³⁸ Kevin deLapp, “Role Epistemology: Confucian Resources for Feminist Standpoint Theory,” in *Feminist Encounters with Confucius*, ed. Mathew A. Foust and Sor-hoon Tan. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016), 128.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ This is not a very likely example today, but it is imaginable in the past.

and differentiation where this is not necessary.

C) Hierarchy and Preference

Another issue central to feminist epistemologists is the value associated with ‘female’ knowledge versus the value associated with the ‘male’ types of knowledge. If we look beyond the issue of gendered knowledge in the first place, we can see that another fundamentally problematic aspect lies in the fact that, because a kind of knowledge is deemed ‘female,’ it is considered less valuable than a male counterpart as a contribution to the scientific field it takes place in. This differentiation on a value-level is a result of millennia of patriarchy and misogyny. And while we have elaborated on these power- and value-structures above, it seems particularly unfortunate that this hierarchy of genders impacts knowledge-production, innovation, and human knowledge as a whole.

We can read in Elizabeth Anderson’s writings how this differentiated valuing takes place: “For instance, feminist epistemologists suggest that various kinds of practical know-how and personal knowledge (knowledge that bears the marks of the knowers biography and identity), such as the kinds of untheoretical knowledge that mothers have of children, are undervalued when they are labeled ‘feminine.’”⁴¹ Knowledge read as ‘feminine’ is thus considered less valuable, is relied on less and taken less serious as a whole. This hierarchy of knowledge, with rational and theoretical at the top and more subjective or non-rational modes of knowing ‘below,’ mirrors the hierarchy of genders, as we have mentioned above.⁴²

That this is not simply another unfortunate manifestation of the patriarchy, however, can be seen in the results of a multitude of research endeavors as Anderson explains: “[...] if the gender of the inquirer makes a difference to the content of what is accepted as knowledge, then the exclusion and undervaluation of women’s participation in the theoretical inquiry does not merely set up randomly distributed roadblocks to the improvement of understanding. It imparts a systematic bias on what is taken to be knowledge.”⁴³ We are thus missing out on knowledge by discriminating between ‘male’ and ‘female’ knowledge and only truly accepting the former, while marginalizing and ignoring the latter.

⁴¹ Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology,” 460.

⁴² Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology,” 463.

⁴³ Ibid.

We can see that the gendered character that knowledge seems to exhibit has an effect on the knowledge produced or made available in certain fields. We should note that this dichotomy also influences what we consider to be knowledge, in the first place. A researcher's interest and opinion always have an influence on their work. A researcher's paradigm of knowledge, no matter whether it is conscious or unconscious, will also guide and structure their research. We can easily see that in a male-dominated world, a knowledge-paradigm will be structured by the male view. Seeing rationality as the main mode of engagement with the world, men do not need nor have an incentive to see beyond that: Rationality covers all areas of research they might deem important. Through the exclusion of female thinkers and researchers this potential oversight or under-valuation of the huge domain of empirical, contextualized or non-rational thought will never be rectified without significant effort from feminists and female thinkers. The androcentric view of knowledge leads to a significant limitation and imbalance.⁴⁴

This pattern of seeing as knowledge only what fits into the male rationality-paradigm gets strengthened by many factors and is difficult to transcend. It is not just male domination and the male characterization of knowledge that propagate this, however. Evelyn Fox Keller explains that the understanding of science as masculine that is strengthened this way is difficult to transcend, not simply because most scientists are men, which she considers a consequence rather than a cause of this association, but due to a deeply engrained belief in our society that science simply is a field for men. She describes that even the phrasing of the opposition of 'hard' scientific facts and 'soft' feminine domains of thought, rooted in biological and sexual imagery, supports this gendered view of science. This rigid association reaches so far, that we think one must be a man, in order to do science. This means that "A women thinking scientifically or objectively is thinking 'like a man', conversely a man pursuing a nonrational, nonscientific argument is arguing 'like a woman'" as Keller writes.⁴⁵ The association of science and rationality with masculinity has a great impact on our view on the world: because of this association we have difficulty conceiving of a female scientist. Because of it we believe scientific thinking is male thinking, incommensurable with female thinking. Importantly, by not receiving the same education as boys and men, and therefore being taught and raised to play social roles that centre emotion, nurture and embodiment, women are guided, if not forced, to fulfill this association that men believe in: men are rational, women are not. Fox Keller also points at this circularity, which she sees as reinforcing the rigid associations in

⁴⁴ Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology," 478.

⁴⁵ Fox Keller, "Gender and Science," 188.

the social world.⁴⁶

Another important aspect in this process of devaluing the ‘feminine’ forms of knowledge is that, because women’s knowledge is considered to prevail within the “private” realm, female matters and concerns are often deemed private matters and therefore less important or relevant to ‘real world’ issues than men’s ideas.⁴⁷ Questions of truth, morality or reality matter less when they have a subjective note than when they strive for objectivity and an impersonal character. These subjective moral or epistemological questions thereby are considered important for family, education and the private sphere, if at all. Certain approaches to knowledge or morality are thus excluded from public meaning-making. A consequence of the division of society along public and private lines and the separation of men and women along the same lines thus decides the relevance of knowledge produced in either realm.

What we need, what feminist epistemologists seek, is breaking free of all of these divisions and creating a world of knowledge that includes and balances in a fair and representative manner. Anderson summarizes: “Feminist Epistemology would [...] recommend that these knowledge-practices actively seek gender diversity and balance among inquirers and actively attends to the gender of the researchers in evaluating their products”⁴⁸ The goal is thus not to ignore gender altogether, but to utilize it as a serious factor to help diversify science, research and fields of knowledge in general.⁴⁹ In the next section, we will elaborate on this aim of feminist epistemology for a balanced and diverse knowledge-framework.

D) Naturalized Feminist Epistemology

We will now see in more detail what feminist epistemology, and especially the naturalized branch of it, call for: a field of knowledge that includes and accepts different modes of knowing and that no longer differentiates these in terms of gender. This new field of knowledge would allow us to include the kinds of knowledge and modes of knowledge-production ‘lost’ up till this point due to

⁴⁶ Fox Keller, “Gender and Science,” 202.

⁴⁷ Jaggar, “Ethics Naturalized,” 455.

⁴⁸ Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology,” 463.

⁴⁹ That this approach is necessary and more suited to achieving true equality in knowledge can be explained when considering Iris Young’s concept of an equality of difference, a topic we unfortunately cannot go into more detail about, but with is worth mentioning nevertheless. See Iris Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 158.

their being labelled 'female' and would at the same time create a more diverse and just epistemological landscape.

While it is important to mention that improving women's status in these fields of science and epistemology does not amount by itself to an ideal improvement of their condition and treatment, I believe that a more diverse epistemological framework, such as the one feminist naturalized epistemologists are advocating, could be an important step to a more diverse society at large. Feminist epistemologists agree.⁵⁰ The relevance of this project has been explained at length above. It is important to note, that knowledge concerns not only scientists, philosophers and teachers. It concerns all of us in our everyday lives.

Engaging with the world in a certain way, complying to a certain knowledge-framework and producing knowledge of a certain kind, hoping to be taken seriously: these are all expectations we face in some form. Gender plays a big role in many domains. Men are being raised to be rational and hide their emotions, because 'boys don't cry'. Girls are being called 'bossy and talkative' if they reason and argue instead of fulfilling the expected (and paradoxical) roles of emotional or compliant girlhood. Certain jobs are being filled predominantly by men because of their rational skills, while women are being taught to be nurturing, be it with their own family or in a care-profession. These are by no means universal examples but they capture a hint of reality nevertheless. And despite formal progress, there is a long way to go before we reach a true state of equality. Knowledge is heavily involved in this process. Opening up the field of knowledge to a different way of engaging with the world as an alternative to pure and theoretical rationality might seem like a small step on the journey towards gender-equality. It is, however, much more intertwined with the general improvement of women's situations and with the diversification of many private and professional contexts.

It is crucial here to navigate the fine line between valuing and including women for the sake of equality while celebrating the possible enrichment they can offer to the field of knowledge, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, committing an essentialist move by claiming this inclusion of women taps some unique resources from a "feminine" realm of knowledge. We claim the former here and want to avoid the latter. This is not always easy, however. While, following Anderson, we can agree that women are not a group of 'privileged knowers' sharing a 'special feminine universal quality' for the field of knowledge, it seems important to underline the necessity of including them into research and epistemology.⁵¹ Including women would produce more diversity and equality in

⁵⁰ Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology," 483-4.

⁵¹ Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology," 483-4.

science and research, as Anderson explains. Women make up at least half of the world's population, they thus deserve to be represented and be considered valid and 'full' knowers. Also, as explained above, including the subjective experience and specific perspective that womanhood might constitute for female researchers, knowers, authors, scientists or thinkers - in its huge diversity and pluralism - would do this diverse experience of womanhood justice and perhaps even contribute to a less hegemonic view of femininity and being a woman. Ruth Hubbard explains why this is so crucial:

"The mythology of science asserts that with many different scientists all asking their own questions and evaluating the answers independently, whatever bias creeps into their individual answers is canceled out when the large picture is put together. This might conceivable be so if scientists were women and men from all sorts of different cultural backgrounds who came to science with very different ideologies and interests. But since, in fact, they have been predominantly university-trained white males from privileged social backgrounds, the bias has been narrow and the product often reveals more about the investigator than about the subject being researched."⁵²

Thus, including women as serious knowers could help diversify the field of knowledge. This is true also in a methodological sense. With the inclusion of female knowers comes a smoother transition towards the inclusion of a variety of modes of knowing, some of which non-rational and thereby typically read and interpreted as female. This twofold diversification of knowledge, by including female knowers as valued and valid members of an epistemic community and by including non-rational (and therefore traditionally 'female') modes of knowing within it, constitutes one of the main aims of feminist epistemology.⁵³

A very helpful branch of thought supporting this diversification can be found in naturalist feminist epistemology. It stands for the inclusion of empirical methods of engaging with the world aside pure and theoretical rationality. Jaggar explains: "Naturalism in this sense denies the existence of a pure realm of reason, to be studied by methods that are distinctively philosophical. Instead, it advocates multidisciplinary approaches to understanding human knowledge, utilizing the findings and methods of a range of disciplines with special reliance on the empirical sciences."⁵⁴ With this

⁵² Ruth Hubbard, "Have only Men Evolved?" In *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*, ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1983), 65.

⁵³ Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology," 460.

⁵⁴ Jaggar, "Ethics Naturalized," 457.

inclusion of empirical methods of research and knowing, naturalism thus contains many modes of knowledge that transcend pure theory, which would traditionally be deemed accessible via rationality only. Grounded in a Cartesian doubt regarding everything but one's reason, a pure realm of theory is at the core of many traditional scientific and generally intellectual operations. By embracing empirical approaches to reality, we embrace more than the isolated Cartesian mind: we embrace body, context, imperfection. By including sense-perception, experience and actual lived reality as valuable sources of knowing, the empirical approach that naturalist feminist thinkers take can help us transcend the traditionally 'male' realm of pure, isolated, theoretical reason. Considering both rationality and non-rationality to be anchored in much more than theory and one's mind, these embodied, subjective and contextual kinds of knowing can offer knowledge that would not be considered traditionally 'male'.

A focus within naturalism is placed on context, situation and the relationality of agents and knowers. Naturalist feminist epistemologists move away from the search of a single, monolithic, objective truth. An acknowledgment of context and social environment takes place that strengthens the idea of epistemic communities and a multitude of perspectives. "All the paths by which naturalized epistemologists find gender to influence theoretical knowledge are local, contingent and empirically conditioned. All the paths by which they propose to change these influences accept rationality as a key epistemic ideal and empirical adequacy as a fundamental goal of acceptable theories. This ideal and this goal are in principle equally open to pursuit by male and female inquirers, but may be best realized by mixed-gender research communities," Anderson explains.⁵⁵ This move away from singular truths and objectivity, towards context, relation and perspective certainly succeeds in proposing a solution for the diversification of the modes of knowing by proposing the serious inclusion of non-rational methods of research and knowing. At the same time it accomplishes a diversification of knowers by relying heavily on context and relation, which, in order to be captured accurately, necessarily include female epistemic agents. Naturalist feminist epistemology also seems to avoid essentialism by committing itself to a variety and multiplicity of methods and perspectives. This can include 'a female perspective' and still preserve the multiplicity within it, allowing rational and non-rational approaches to matter, theory and embodied knowing to count side-by-side. Naturalism, so understood, sees knowledge as a diverse endeavor and provides alternatives to purely theoretical rationality; it does not seek to replace or downgrade rationality as a mode of operating. Rather, it is the isolated, intellectual and Cartesian approach to rationality that

⁵⁵ Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology," 483.

feminist thinkers seek to transcend. They recognize that particularity and context matter: For instance, Jaggar explains that naturalism wants to investigate moral reason in the contexts of diverse and real moral agents, human beings and their lives. Recognizing the importance of “their particular social experiences and locations” for the formation and conditioning of individuals’ insights and knowledge and the imperfections that this can entail, “feminists generally conceptualize moral rationality as a process that is collaborative rather than individual and its conclusions as partial, situated, and provisional rather than universal or absolute.”⁵⁶

The naturalized aspects of feminist epistemology allow for the acknowledgment and valuing of the plethora of modes of engagement with the world that exist in addition to theoretical reason. The fact that a turn to such an explicitly interdisciplinary framework is needed to consider the huge variety and wealth of fields and methods itself reveals how influential the male-dominated rationality-paradigm has been.

As mentioned above, in this project the aim is not the de-valuing of rationality. Naturalism as we are characterizing it here simply gives a voice and platform to members of other scientific communities and their forms of inquiry. Naturalists are fostering the inclusion of the multi-faceted ways of producing knowledge and the empirical work of a diverse group of scholars and thinkers into a mainstream narrative that has traditionally been dominated by male rationality. Such a naturalized position thus seems to open up possibilities towards a framework of knowledge (and morality) that *includes*, more than anything. It provides a theoretical branch of thought that can help situate our project. This depiction of naturalized epistemology remains, so far, primarily on the meta-level of philosophy, but it will be a perfect foundation for our construction of a more precise personal framework through which individuals of any gender can act and live. Recognizing the need and having accomplished the grounding for a more personal account of moral and especially epistemological gender-neutral action, we will now turn to Confucianism. As we will see, the concept of the ‘heart-mind’ developed in the classical Confucian tradition will provide us with a relational and non-gendered framework for knowing and acting.

⁵⁶ Jaggar, “Ethics Naturalized,” 463.

CHAPTER 3: THE HEART-MIND AND GENDER

We will now shift our focus to classical Confucian philosophy. More precisely, we will explore the notion of the ‘heart-mind’ and seek to understand its working and relevance, in addition to its relation to gender. Towards the end of this chapter, we seek to posit how exactly the ‘heart-mind’ can be useful to our project of a non-gendered framework of knowing. First, we will briefly sketch the concept of the ‘heart-mind’ in its Confucian context: that of the cultivation of one’s self and the ultimate goal of attaining sagehood.

A) Background: The Heart-Mind and its Cultivation

The concept of the ‘heart-mind’ (also translated as ‘heart’ or ‘mind’ or written as ‘heartmind’ or ‘heart/mind’) can be found most robustly formulated in Confucian philosophy and is used by Confucius himself, as we can read in the *Analects*, but also by other Confucian thinkers like Xunzi or Mencius. The heart-mind, ‘*xin*’ in classical Chinese, is the most important ‘organ’ in human emotional, cognitive and active life. In writings by both Xunzi and Mencius we can read that the heart-mind ‘rules’ the other senses.⁵⁷ While seeing, hearing, tasting, etc have their distinct kinds of awareness, the heart-mind is in the central position from where these individual senses are governed and steered. In the image of a bureaucracy of the senses, popular in Chinese philosophy, the senses are government officials and the heart-mind is the ruler. For instance, after listing the five senses, Xunzi writes: “the heartmind dwells in the central cavity and governs the five officials.”⁵⁸ We can thus see the centrality and superiority within the hierarchy of the bodily functions that Xunzi attributes to the heart-mind.

The necessity of a ‘ruler’ in the realm of sensory perception is explained by Confucian thinkers by pointing out the desires inherent in any individual sense. The ears, in their framework, love sound and the eyes love color: they will be attracted by sensations that appeal to them and will not be able to ‘think’: this latter function is the heart-mind’s task.⁵⁹ The heart-mind is thus responsible for thinking and thereby ordering and interpreting all of our sensory input. It is also

⁵⁷ Jane Geaney, *On the Epistemology of the Senses in Early Chinese Thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 19.

⁵⁸ Geaney, *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 19.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

capable of making distinctions among all the sensory input it receives. It can divide and distinguish elements of sense data and prioritize their importance in accord with prevailing patterns of order like the social, moral or natural hierarchies.⁶⁰

It is important to note, however, that the heart-mind has inherent desires or aims as well. It is dominated by a wish to realize what is advantageous for us and what can lead to ‘profit,’ seeking to maximize the advantages of any situation.⁶¹ Xunzi writes for instance “the heart likes what is beneficial”⁶² and also “Liking what is beneficial and desiring gain are people’s inborn dispositions and natures.”⁶³ This tendency to seek what is beneficial to us, originating in the heart-mind, thus guides us to behave in certain ways and to put our own desires first. Aaron Stalnaker points out that Xunzi, by highlighting the heart-mind’s love for profit or benefit, is indicating “the basic selfishness and acquisitiveness he finds to be characteristic of the human heart/mind.”⁶⁴ Consequently, just as the senses can be led by their desire or obstructed by external factors such as darkness or drunkenness, the heart-mind can be imbalanced by focusing only on what will benefit one individually.⁶⁵ Stalnaker describes this as an “innate impulse”, which dominates the natural state of a human, unless trained and refined.⁶⁶

For Mencius, on the other hand, the heart-mind contains our capacity to be good, to be moral. In his view we are born with this inclination towards morality, which can grow and be strengthened throughout our life. He describes that humans have hearts that are “not unfeeling towards others”, which can be seen in the four ‘sprouts’ humans possess: A sprout of benevolence manifesting in compassion, a sprout of righteousness manifesting in disdain, that of propriety manifesting in deference and that of wisdom manifesting in approval and disapproval.⁶⁷ These four sprouts that make us human and allow us to be good to each other are thus expressed in certain (moral) feelings. In what follows we will place the focus on Xunzi’s rather than Mencius’ approach to the heart-mind. However, their thoughts bear similarities that will strengthen our account. The

⁶⁰ Aaron Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil: Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 67.

⁶¹ Winnie Sung, “Ritual in the Xunzi: A Change of the Heart/Mind,” *SOPHIA* Vol. 51 (2012): 215.

⁶² P.J. Ivanhoe and Bryan W. Van Norden, *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2005), 300.

⁶³ Ivanhoe and Van Norden, *Readings*, 301.

⁶⁴ Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil*, 59.

⁶⁵ Geaney, *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 40.

⁶⁶ Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil*, 59.

⁶⁷ Ivanhoe and Van Norden, *Readings*, 130.

inclusion of emotions and affective elements into the domain of the heart-mind is one of these similarities.

What we can clearly see is that the heart-mind has a rational function of ordering and distinguishing an extensive range of sense-data, but also contains an affective component: it seeks to steer our life into a certain direction, hoping to realize what is best for our flourishing. That even the heart-mind, even the ‘ruler’ of the other senses, can be flawed, demonstrates that its superiority over the other senses does not make it immune to going astray. Its rational engagement with the senses and the organized nature of its activity can be skewered, either by excessive selfishness or morally defective education, and can lead a person off the right path (or incapacitate them from finding the right path in the first place). In this potential for a flawed orientation we can see a first glimpse of the way in which the heart-mind’s rationality is seen as vulnerable.

Both the senses and the heart-mind can thus be imperfect. While the senses’ imperfection can perhaps be balanced by the heart-mind, which orders and checks the input they deliver, or by the removal of obstructing external influences, by contrast, the heart-mind’s imbalance is not subject to a higher power’s control, as it is itself the ‘ruler’ of the system. In order to avoid selfishness and a skewered heart-mind, we need to cultivate our desires and learn to reform our natural state of selfishness into one of moral goodness and compassion. Xunzi writes that:

“[...] if people follow along with their inborn nature and dispositions, they are sure to come to struggle and contention, turn to disrupting social divisions and disorder, and end up in violence. So, it is necessary to await the transforming influence of teachers and models and the guidance of ritual and the standards of righteousness, and only then will they come to yielding and deference, turn to culture and order, and end up under control. Looking at it this way, it is clear that people’s nature is bad, and their goodness is a matter of deliberate effort.”⁶⁸

Although he doesn’t mention the heart-mind in this excerpt, Xunzi speaks of cultivating one’s self. He clearly understands human nature as “bad” or “mal-formed” (*e*) and in need of laborious efforts of self-cultivation in order for this to change. In addition to facilitating social order and control, this training of the self, which effectively consists in the training of the heart-mind, is important because an unstable heart-mind, aside from providing us with morally wrong priorities and leading us to act selfishly, can even obstruct the senses: it is possible to perceive ‘wrongly’ due to our heart-mind’s inclination.⁶⁹ We can no longer trust our senses if our heart-mind is out of order. The need to bring

⁶⁸ Ibid., 298.

⁶⁹ Geaney, *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 41.

the 'ruler' back on track, is thus crucial to the entire way we perceive the world around us. The cultivation of the heart-mind requires a variety of practices. It demands intellectual education through reading and study of history, but also the emotional and aesthetic learning of ritual practices and the order inherent within them. This twofold cultivation, containing rational and emotional practices, will be explained in more detail in the next part of this chapter.

B) The Heart-Mind's Engagement of the Rational and Non-Rational

As we have seen, the heart-mind has the role of ordering the sensory data. Itself, it strives towards maximizing benefit for me as an individual. It thus simultaneously contains an element of rationality and order and an element of desire and emotion. These dual capacities inherent in the heart-mind become even clearer when we study the recommendations of Confucian thinkers regarding the training and cultivation of one's heart-mind. Ellie Hua Wang writes that Xunzi believed that in order to cultivate one's heart-mind, both ritual and study (thus emotional and rational training) are necessary.⁷⁰ With this kind of training, one strengthens both the heart-mind's rational and emotional capacities, allowing it to become a well-rounded system. Studying literature and history are crucial to help the heart-mind understand the different forms of social order and structure better, which the heart-mind's capacities to organize and distinguish, enable it to make sense of. Experiencing and practicing ritual, on the other hand, helps the person to learn about order not in the social or hierarchical sense, that is on the conceptual plain, but in an aesthetic and artistic sense. According to Confucian thought, ritual has great potential to teach us to manage our emotions better: it helps us create a well-balanced and harmonious mental state.⁷¹ Stalnaker writes that: "for Xunzi, human desire restlessly seeks satisfaction, and only the Confucian ritual order can provide a way for people to live in harmony with each other and the natural environment, moderating and ordering everyone's pursuit of satisfaction, for the greater good as well as individual flourishing."⁷² Ritual is thus a crucial tool accompanying the study of texts and history, which facilitates the cultivation of one's heart-mind.

Ritual provides an 'outlet' to emotions when they occur within us: For instance, a mourning

⁷⁰ Ellie H. Wang, "Moral Reasoning: The Female Way and the Xunzian Way," in *Bloomsbury Research Handbook on Chinese Philosophy and Gender*, ed. Ann Pang White. (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), 145.

⁷¹ Wang, "Moral Reasoning," 151.

⁷² Stalnaker, *Overcoming Our Evil*, 63.

period after the death of a family member allows us to be sad and express this grief openly, within a ritual context, for a certain period of time after a loved one's passing. At the same time, this period of mourning encourages us to pay our elders the respect they are due: we are given an appropriate and balanced frame for our emotions. In *The Analects* Confucius explains "A child is completely dependent upon the care of his parents for the first three years of his life - this is why the three-year mourning period is common practice throughout the world."⁷³ In a footnote to this section of *The Analects* Ivanhoe and van Norden explain that during this three-year mourning period food, drink and clothing are to be kept very simple and "one is to suspend most normal social activity, maintain particular demeanors and refrain from familiar pleasures."⁷⁴ There are thus clear guidelines a Confucian ought to follow in the time of mourning a parent. Within this time of mourning it is not simply allowed, but even *required* that we be sad and express this emotion in the public settings of a ritual, a shared space where emotions are appropriately expressed in community. The ritualized space of this mourning does, however, give a *regulated* outlet to our emotions and thereby seeks to avoid us becoming an emotional 'wreck' for very long, unable to do anything and stuck within our grief. Not grieving the passing of a person who was important to us, on the other hand, would be morally wrong, and would leave us vulnerable to psychological and social instability to boot.

In ritual we are thus afforded a time to express our emotions, to 'let it all out'. In this way, we neither need to repress our feelings of sadness in situations, in which we are expected to function and move on, nor do we sink into a 'bottomless pit' and let ourselves be consumed by our grief indefinitely. Ritual provides emotional stability by giving us a designated time and space to express what might have built up inside us. It is regulated by clear rules and guidelines that help in the creation of an intentional and meaningful framework, within which these emotions have their place. This also teaches us that in other moments emotions in excess can become a hindrance or be inappropriate. This is not about all emotions at all times, but within ritual we learn about measure and balance, which concerns our emotional expression, and does so as part of an aesthetic and social order.

Ritual, it is worth pointing out, is an instance of practical or empirical learning, distinct from what one could learn from consulting books and facts only. As Karyn Lai explains: "this approach to learning reveals aspects of Confucian epistemology, whose emphasis is on *practical* learning. The thesis that Confucian philosophy prioritises practical knowledge is buttressed by its empirically-grounded methods of acquiring knowledge; knowledge is acquired through seeing,

⁷³ Ivanhoe and Van Norden, *Readings*, 51.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

observing, familiarising, listening and practising.”⁷⁵ We can see that ritual as a form of empirical learning and practical training transcends any academic and theoretical study. In the process of training one’s heart-mind this practical and applied knowledge is thus indispensable. Next to rational and academic learning, taking place in the study of philosophy and historical events, an individual seeking self-perfection must learn an emotional order as well.⁷⁶

Rosenlee also speaks of “practical ethical knowledge” which one acquires through notions of order and social relations, central to Confucian thought and expressed in text and ritual.⁷⁷ She thus includes social relations and roles, the social hierarchy and order in what one can learn from ritual. These are central ideas to Confucian thought: we should not underestimate how crucial a proper understanding of such workings and relations are on one’s journey to self-cultivation. Practical and relational knowledge is one of the central types of content that one can learn through ritual - a type of knowledge that greatly differs from what one can learn through the mere conceptual study of texts.

It is important to note that the training of one’s emotions, with a concern for appropriateness and order, is not merely a rationalization and ordering of one’s emotions. In other words: ritual should not be misunderstood as a rational operation trying to override and manipulate emotion. This is important to point out because we are here examining the heart-mind and its cultivation in the context of our project of a non-gendered framework of knowledge. Therefore we need to preserve what makes the heart-mind and its cultivation valuable for our project: the co-operation and coexistence of emotion and rationality within it, which we will return to in the last part of this chapter. For now it suffices to keep in mind that within ritual practice, while emotion might be fine-tuned and nurtured, emotions are valued rather than repressed. They are acknowledged in all their complex and multi-faceted reality and are fully relevant to our moral judgments and moral life, and are not ‘trained away’.

Ellie Hua Wang thinks along similar lines when she points out that, at first glance, Xunzi’s understanding of our moral reasoning, (one of the main ideals of self-cultivation and sagehood in general) consisting in ordering, distinguishing and implementing hierarchy and order within perception, desire and knowledge, looks like a very rational operation.⁷⁸ However, she continues,

⁷⁵ Karyn Lai, “Confucian Reliability and Epistemic Agency: Engagements with Feminist Epistemology,” in *Feminist Encounters with Confucius*, ed. Mathew A. Foust and Sor-hoon Tan. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016), 110.

⁷⁶ Lai, “Confucian Reliability and Epistemic Agency,” 113.

⁷⁷ Li-Hsiang L. Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women: A Philosophical Interpretation* (Ithaca: State University of New York, 2006), 156.

⁷⁸ Wang, “Moral Reasoning,” 143.

“Xunzi does not think that natural affective dispositions are distractions for ideal moral reasoning.”⁷⁹ While our emotions thus need to be managed and trained within the project of self-cultivation, emotion is not primarily a hindrance or an obstacle to our intellectual and spiritual journey of self-fulfillment. This becomes extremely clear when Wang describes the importance and influence of well-trained and balanced emotions after the process of cultivation:

“Clearly, before completing cultivation, we may still have uncultivated affect that initiates the heart-mind’s thinking and presents the heart-mind with the option to pursue the object of one’s uncultivated desires. However, in the process of cultivation, not only does the heart-mind develop abilities to entertain options other than the ones presented by the uncultivated affect, but it is also important to note that the cultivated affective dispositions may also present and weigh options that compete with the options presented by uncultivated affect.”⁸⁰

As we can see, cultivated affective dispositions, like desires and emotions that act on the heart-mind, can thus broaden the heart-mind by introducing new possibilities and courses of action that I would not have otherwise known about, had it not been for my cultivated desires and emotions. Through cultivation, the heart-mind is able to prioritize other things over its immediate desires and the desires themselves are rendered more well-rounded and diverse than they were before cultivation.

The result of the process of self-cultivation is moral excellence. Wang, quoting Xunzi, writes that “through cultivation, the heart-mind is ‘[guided] with good order, [nourished] with clarity, and nothing can make it deviate’. [...] The heart-mind then is able to tell right from wrong and make good judgments.”⁸¹ This strong and steadfast heart-mind can guide us through life and help us make good choices, behave in moral ways and maintain an order throughout. Theoretically, the task of undergoing the process of self-cultivation is the only requirement needed to reach a state of ideal personhood. The process of self-development is open to anyone, as Xunzi notes, explaining that anyone can ‘become a Yu’, referring to a famous sage-king. He writes:

“Anyone on the streets can become a Yu. How do I mean this? I say: that by which Yu was Yu was because he was *ren*, *yi*, lawful, and correct. Thus, *ren*, *yi*, lawfulness, and correctness have patterns that can be known and can be practiced. However, people on the

⁷⁹ Wang, “Moral Reasoning,” 144.

⁸⁰ Wang, “Moral Reasoning,” 146.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

streets all have the material for knowing *ren*, *yi*, lawfulness, and correctness, and they all have the equipment for practicing *ren*, *yi*, lawfulness, and correctness. Thus, it is clear that they can become a Yu.”⁸²

He thus explains that the elements that would make one a good person, would make one equal to a sage king, are elements anyone can reach: ‘*ren*’ often translated as ‘humaneness’ or ‘benevolence’, ‘*yi*’ meaning ‘righteousness’, and lawfulness and correctness are what one needs to cultivate within the self, according to Xunzi, to become an ideal person. By including the “people on the streets” as being able to undergo this cultivation and having the potential to become ideal persons, Xunzi posits self-cultivation and the work one has to invest in it as the only formal condition to improve and possibly reach sagehood. Whether this openness also applies to men and women equally is what we will discuss in the next parts of this chapter.

C) A Misogynist Reality: Theory and Practice of Female Self-Cultivation

Before we can truly delve into the ways, in which the heart-mind can be utilized for our project of non-gendered knowledge, we need to acknowledge some facts and point towards misogyny and sexism that exist in China just as they do in the West. This is important because in a creative comparative project such as this there always exists a risk of overlooking a historical reality and misinterpreting the facts in order to ‘make them work’ within one’s argument. Before we can venture any deeper into our exploration of the relationship between the heart-mind and gender, we have to point out that misogyny was a reality in ancient China, a reality which has not yet disappeared. Traces of this sexism and misogyny can be found in various practices women were subjected to in classical Chinese society, which were based in their place within the social order and in spiritual and philosophical ideas from classical times.

As Lisa Li-Hsiang Rosenlee points out in her works, in classical China a normative distinction between the genders existed: men were overtly considered superior to women. This is expressed in the Chinese understanding of personhood, according to which women were seen as neither having complete personhood, nor being able to cultivate their person like men.⁸³ An important distinction that helps us understand the rigid division between genders and their

⁸² Eric Hutton, *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 254.

⁸³ Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 153.

limitation to certain activities and roles within classical Chinese society is that between ‘*nei*’ and ‘*wai*’. While the realm of ‘*wai*’ (the “outer”) encompasses the realms of culture, “personal accomplishment, and extrafamilial relations” and is typically associated with men and male activity, women are confined to the realm of ‘*nei*’ (the “inner”), which entails “concealment, practical household management, and familial kinship relations”.⁸⁴

It is important to realize that by associating the male range of activity with culture and learning, business, politics and social structure and limiting a woman’s range of experience to the hidden, the home, and the family, it becomes evident that self-cultivation and moral perfection are not realistically a part of a woman’s world. While men have access to all they need to cultivate their heart-mind and character (study, ritual, etc), women simply are not granted this access. They are thus kept in the private domain, where they are expected to perform domestic duties and tasks.

Rosenlee elaborates on this notion by explaining that women’s main function in classical China was to obey and cater to their husband and be there for him. A woman’s identity, Rosenlee explains, is to serve her husband.⁸⁵ This becomes even clearer in the fact that a woman cannot earn her own rank within Confucian society: her standing in society is defined first by her father’s rank, then by her husband’s and later her son’s.⁸⁶ Achievements and social roles, central to the Confucian understanding of personhood and fulfillment, are thus never a woman’s own work: they are simply the product of her relationship to a man - at all times in her life. Besides these severe limitations inherent in womanhood, women in classical China had to endure a multitude of sexist practices: foot-binding, female infanticide, concubinage, and even the measuring of a woman’s worth in her ability to produce a male heir to her husband.⁸⁷ Women were thus subjected to practices and expectations that limited their lives immensely and lead to great physical and emotional suffering.⁸⁸

As mentioned above, because of these limitations and restrictions a woman’s possibilities with regards to self-cultivation were in classical China much fewer in practice than in theory: While

⁸⁴ Ibid., 154

This distinction has been compared by scholars to the public - private dichotomy employed in Western thinking - but this will not be our focus here.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 127.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 128.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 122.

⁸⁸ It is important to note here that scholars such as Paul Goldin and Lisa Raphals portray women in classical China as being more involved morally and politically than we would initially assume. Their writing on women’s fruitful involvement in politics and questions of morality stands in contrast to the majority of sources, recounting a life of oppression for women in classical China. There is thus perhaps more nuance than assumed in the majority of sources. Nevertheless, it must be assumed that misogyny and oppression were very real for women in classical China and that these realities would have had a severe impact on a wish for self-cultivation let alone its execution. See Articles by Goldin and Raphals in *The Sage and The Second Sex* for more.

in theory the self-cultivation of the heart-mind through study and ritual and the achievement of perfect personhood was possible to anyone, women lacked the access and acceptance in most spheres relevant to this process to actually be able to practice this self-cultivation.⁸⁹

However, we need to point out the theoretical possibility for self-cultivation once more: The idea of perfect personhood, while not practically available to women, is not inherently gendered. This ideal does not propagate any gendered values, nor does it associate any of the practices required to achieve perfect personhood with any gender. Hall and Ames write:

“[...] in China the realized person has been broadly defined as an achieved harmony of the full range of human traits and dispositions. Male dominance is a consequence of sexual differentiation into „male” and „female”, which has tended to exclude the female from the achievement of becoming human. Thus, the male has been free to pursue the task of realizing his personhood through the creation of an androgynous, or perhaps multigendered personality.”⁹⁰

We can read here that the ideal that any person can cultivate themselves to fulfill are moral ideals that in principle are not gendered or “androgynous”. As a result of the patriarchal power structures and misogyny, however, women were practically excluded from the realization of this ideal. This is important to note and will be one element factoring into a creative approach that this thesis wishes to follow, for which the accessibility of a cultivated heart-mind should be open to anyone, regardless of gender, in both theory and practice.

D) Theoretical Sagehood for Men and Women

Now that we have highlighted the misogynistic realities women in classical China had to face, we will focus on the possibilities the philosophical thematization of the heart-mind we have been examining affords them on a *theoretical* level, namely the attainment of sagehood side-by-side with men. In her article, Wang explains that Xunzi believes men and women to be different, interpreting women’s occasional foolishness as a result of training and experience, rather than innate differences.⁹¹ Differences between individuals of different genders have no essentialist grounds for Xunzi: gender does not constitute for him any inherent or natural difference. Rather, the difference

⁸⁹ Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 154.

⁹⁰ David L. Hall, and Roger T. Ames, “Sexism, with Chinese Characteristics,” in *The Sage and the Second Sex: Confucianism, Ethics and Gender*, ed. Chenyang Li. (La Salle: Open Court, 2000), 77.

⁹¹ Wang, “Moral Reasoning,” 142.

is a result of the experiences undergone by an individual as a member of a gender. As we have seen above, the horizon of experiences differs strongly between men who live and operate in the sphere or 'wai', while women are secluded to the sphere of 'nei'. That these distinct and separate domains of experience contribute to distinct behaviors between individuals living within them is no surprise.

According to Wang, the heart-mind, which is being prepared for moral life requires the same training and cultivation, no matter which gender one belongs to. The affective dispositions and natural inclinations of the heart-mind are the same regardless of gender and the heart-mind will follow these dispositions and desires until it is trained to do otherwise.⁹² It does not matter whether it is a man or a woman who seeks to cultivate their heart-mind: both begin in a similar natural human state, and similar challenges demand the same practices to rectify. This means that, according to this gender-neutral initial situation of the heart-mind, women have 'all it takes' to develop their heart-minds. For Xunzi women are not weak or lacking willpower, they are not slaves to their desires or unable to look beyond these. Women have the same heart-mind with the same issues as men. Their heart-mind is neither more challenged by desires, nor is it impossible for anyone to cultivate their heart-mind.⁹³

In a simple linguistic sense, while there were of course distinct terms identifying males and females in Classical Chinese, general terms for "person," such as *ren* or *shen* are not grammatically gendered, and the term for "sage," *shengren*, is not gendered either, and all these were used prolifically and in the most important moral senses in Confucian texts and Chinese philosophical literature at large. No vocabulary associated with the *xin* or heart-mind, is gendered either. A term which, therefore, consistently appears in the works of Hall and Ames tied to the notion of the ideal person in classical Confucianism is that of 'androgyny'.⁹⁴ This per definition non-gendered or multi-gendered characteristic of the Confucian sage can be realized by the enactment and adopting of attitudes and behaviors that transcend what is classically attributed to be 'male' or 'female.' In this idea we can find the theoretical possibility of self-cultivation for both men and women: That ideal personhood lends itself to a non-gendered construal means that in order to fulfill it no one gender is presupposed or required - in theory. In addition, Raphals explains that Ames "points out that such "androgyny" was claimed by Chinese rulers who portrayed themselves as the "father and mother" of the people; he also describes the *dao* of the *Dao De Jing* as androgynous in similar

⁹² Wang, "Moral Reasoning," 152.

⁹³ Note the contrast with thinkers in the West; for instance Kant claimed, as quoted above, that women are incapable of principles.

⁹⁴ Hall and Ames, "Sexism, with Chinese Characteristics," 77.

terms.”⁹⁵ On a very real political level this androgyny is thus enacted, which can also be found in the *Dao De Jing*, as Raphals mentions.⁹⁶

I believe that one supporting piece of evidence for this androgyny is the central ‘organ’ of sagehood: the heart-mind. By cultivating moral, rational, aesthetic and emotional capacities, the androgynous or non-gendered figure of the sage is operating from within a framework of knowing that is neither typically male nor female. On a personal level the heart-mind is constituted of elements that have often traditionally been ascribed to the female realm of ‘*nei*’ like that of care for the family, or care in general (and therefore the opposite of the heart-mind’s naturally self-centered inclination) and those that would be associated with the realm of male activity, ‘*wai*’, like personal accomplishment and academic or political achievement. These possibilities coexist and come together in the heart-mind, allowing anyone who commits to its cultivation to strengthen their skills and capacities in the realm of ‘*nei*’ and ‘*wai*’ and thereby enter the stage of sagehood in an androgynous way.

While this androgyny remained purely theoretical and out of reach for many women in classical China, it seems to be a powerful element of non-gendered epistemology and an example of the importance of balance between rational and emotional components in the moral cultivation of every human being. What makes the classical Confucian conception of the heart-mind interesting for our project is thus its inclusion of thought and desire alike, and its cultivation combining the training of our rational and our emotional faculties simultaneously. In the heart-mind we find an example of the interplay of rationality and emotion, both in its natural and in its cultivated state. In Wang’s paper we learn that the process of moral cultivation changes the manner in which the heart-mind reasons and that cultivation has a positive influence on its decision-making. The heart-mind “deliberates in light of one’s affect in the sense that it is guided by cultivated affect and issues actions accordingly.”⁹⁷ This effectively shows that, by training our emotions, our decisions improve: they are better than those the naturally self-centered desiring version of the heart-mind could make, but also better than those made by a cold rationality, detached from any emotion or desire, could be. In the heart-mind, I see a confirmation of the importance of including emotion into the sphere of the ‘epistemically valuable’.

In the idea of ritual as a training tool of our emotions, I see another strong argument for this

⁹⁵ Lisa Raphals, *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 262.

⁹⁶ See for example Moeller on the Daoist ruler and androgyny in Hans-Georg Moeller, *The Philosophy of the Daodejing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.

⁹⁷ Wang, “Moral Reasoning,” 147.

project, which aims to contribute to the debate on gender and emotion: Emotion can be valuable and insightful, but it needs to be trained and refined. The argument for including emotions into the realm of serious epistemology does not encourage emotional outbursts as common practice, for instance. In the idea of cultivation we see the need to train, fine-tune and learn about our emotions in order for them to become valuable epistemic and moral assets. From a Western standpoint, in which academic study and rational, theoretical education constitute the main route to human cultivation, this focus on an emotional, practical and aesthetic education is quite novel and seems a fruitful addition to existing practices. Especially placed side by side and of equal worth with the rational and academic type of learning, this way of training one's emotions seems unfamiliar. Its close tie with the heart-mind and its functioning encourages us to include these ideas into our project of non-gendered knowing.

As we have seen, the heart-mind provides a personal 'locus' of non-gendered knowing, thinking, feeling, acting and deciding. It provides us with an account of how within me both emotions and reason need to be trained and honed in order to work ethically. In the next chapter we will flesh out our framework of non-gendered knowing, which features this notion of the heart-mind and its cultivation, and includes certain concepts from feminist naturalist epistemology, which will serve as a ground for this framework.

CHAPTER 4: BUILDING A NEW FRAMEWORK OF KNOWING

What can feminist naturalized epistemology and Confucian thought learn from each other? How can they complement each other? How can both traditions we have studied serve to develop a new, gender-neutral framework of thinking and knowing? How can they help in the fight to position 'female' ways of knowing in a serious way? How can we break the association of gender with knowledge?

In the introduction to this project we set out to compose a framework of knowing that fulfills four criteria. These criteria are that the framework: a) does not ascribe gender to any way of knowing, b) does not propagate a male-female dichotomy and hierarchy, c) includes all genders in all operations and modes of knowing and is open to be used by all genders, and d) allows for non-toxic, fluid and free manifestations of gender based in epistemological practices. We will thus proceed in this chapter to work through these criteria and use the tools we acquired in the past

chapters to help with the construction of a framework that can fulfill these criteria. To begin with, however, we will recapitulate and expand on the resonances between feminist epistemology and the Confucian heart-mind.

A) Feminist Naturalized Epistemology as a Foundation

As we saw in the second chapter, feminist epistemology and especially naturalized feminist epistemology have made great advances into the territory of diverse knowledge-practices epistemic communities. It has aimed to include a variety of methods and stances for an interdisciplinary approach to knowing. We can base our new framework of knowledge on the naturalized approach to epistemology: the advocacy of many different modes of knowing and the critique of rationality as an isolated and artificially prioritized way to know aligns perfectly with our aspirations.⁹⁸ As we have seen above, naturalized feminist epistemology actively seeks to include non-theoretical modes of engaging with the world. The value that is thereby given to embodiment, subjectivity, emotion, etc. exceeds the treatment of merely theoretical-rational forms of knowing in the traditional account of knowledge by far.⁹⁹ The recognition of emotions, embodiment and subjectivity as valuable to knowing and living in general is at the core of our new framework.

Notable is this recognition of non-rational epistemology inherent in for example Alison Jaggar's thought. She writes: "Emotions are integral to good moral thinking."¹⁰⁰ By excluding our emotions from the realm of moral thinking and decision-making, we would make poorer choices and would neglect a greatly informative source of moral conduct. In scientific and academic work too, the subjectivity inherent in our world-view or certain emotional attachments or interests can influence important decisions we make and this is not necessarily a problem. It becomes problematic only at the point where we lay claim to an objective truth, or one single way to access it, overlooking our own inability to ever be fully objective.

Additionally, as we have seen in chapter 2, feminist naturalist epistemology rejects the idea of a pure realm of reason, arguing instead for a multi-faceted and diverse, lived way of engaging with the world.¹⁰¹ A strong focus on perspective and context comes with this, allowing for the

⁹⁸ Jaggar, "Ethics Naturalized," 457.

⁹⁹ Harding, *The Science Question*, 28.

¹⁰⁰ Jaggar, "Ethics Naturalized," 460.

¹⁰¹ Jaggar, "Ethics Naturalized," 457.

recognition of multiple realities instead of one single truth.¹⁰² I understand this to indicate that if we can access the world through a multitude of methods, this means that there are many ways to attain to knowing, and at the same time many distinct but connected results will be achieved in our conduct.

For the sake of our project, however, while naturalized feminist epistemology guides us in a helpful direction and provides us with a strong grounding, it cannot fully answer many of our questions and especially remains quite focused on the field of science, taking an almost meta-approach to knowledge. Naturalism as a branch of thought (a very diversified one at that) remains most focused on the sciences and their importance in progress and argument.¹⁰³ The critical stance that is added when naturalist epistemology becomes *feminist* is directed towards the structure of knowledge-seeking in the sciences, research in general and institutions that host the collection of knowledge. Unfortunately, due to the limited scope of this thesis, we cannot go into the details of the varied field that is feminist naturalized epistemology more than we have in the brief sections in chapter 2 and here. What we can say, however, is that this naturalized feminist position in epistemology can provide us with the momentum to delve deeper into what embracing non-rational and non-theoretical modes of knowing can mean for a single person. Turning towards the smaller scale of this topic - a single individual and their quest for balanced knowledge regardless of their gender - we will now focus on the lessons we can learn from Confucian thought. Most importantly, of course, we will investigate how the heart-mind can aid our project.

B) The Heart-Mind as a Personal Locus of Varied Knowing

The Confucian concept of the heart-mind is crucial to our framework as it offers a single locus in which rationality and non-rationality coexist and cooperate. This understanding of rational and non-rational modes of knowing both having a place, sometimes existing in tension, but always co-existing and intermingling, provides us with a very promising element around which to construct our knowledge-framework. As we have seen above, the ideal person that Confucians strive to become through self-cultivation can be understood to be an androgynous person.¹⁰⁴ That this allows us to see the entire endeavor of self-cultivation as theoretically gender-neutral has also been argued

¹⁰² deLapp, "Role Epistemology," 128.

¹⁰³ Jack Ritchie, *Understanding Naturalism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.

¹⁰⁴ See for instance: Hall and Ames, "Sexism, with Chinese Characteristics," 77; Raphals, *Sharing the Light*, 262; Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 154.

for above. I believe we can now take our interpretation of Confucian thought a step further than the androgyny that other scholars see in the Confucian ideal person: I believe we can explicitly read not only the end result of self-cultivation but the heart-mind itself as non-gendered and can understand its cultivation as an epistemological and ethical process without boundaries related to gender. We can see the heart-mind as a powerful locus of the cooperation and intertwinement of reason, emotion, desire, learning, etc. and can centre our framework around it so as to allow all individuals of all genders to make full use of the heart-mind.¹⁰⁵ In its androgyny, and the manner in which it combines the rational and the non-rational, the heart-mind seems to be an extremely good basis upon which to proceed to our ends.

However, the concept of ‘androgyny’, used by Hall and Ames, does not capture the exact meaning of what we are arguing for. The term ‘androgyny’ communicates a bi-gendered reality, both male and female. What I hope to achieve in this project, however, is to go one step further: instead of seeing the heart-mind and the type of knowledge it affords us as androgynous, I would like to see it as *non-gendered*. I have argued above for the importance of breaking the association between gender and knowledge and believe that Confucianism provides us with many of the tools we require to do so. For this dissociation to work, we need to hold on to the openness and indeterminacy of the heart-mind with regards to gender. This is not the same as seeing it as both ‘male’ and ‘female’. While this distinction seems at first only minor and a reading of the heart-mind as androgynous would not defeat the entire project, I do believe the focus on its *non-gendered* nature is more powerful, effective and radical.

Additionally, it is important to note that, if we want to centre our framework around the heart-mind, we need to overcome the practical exclusion of women from the cultivation and perfection of heart-mind in the actual history of the Confucian tradition. Employing a concept from classical China for a framework that aims at guiding today’s society carries the risk of committing an anachronistic move that some readers might take issue with. However, as is the nature of this creative and constructive project, we want to argue that the concept of the heart-mind fits into the philosophical view we are constructing. The fact that we use a concept from millennia ago in a new and creative way should not be understood as the negating of its historical context or its significance within ancient China. We see the concept of the heart-mind as an element of thought that can enrich and broaden our Western understanding of epistemology today. Rationality and non-rationality

¹⁰⁵ Wang, “Moral Reasoning,” 143.

coexist and are not diametrically opposed in any way, and that view of our cognitive and feeling capacities is robustly viable.

We thus want to adopt the concept of the heart-mind but transform it to be truly open to cultivation by everyone. In our new framework, the heart-mind's cultivation takes place with a multitude of techniques and modes of learning and training. Based on Xunzi and Mencius, everyone has the potential to reach sagehood, thus why shouldn't women? As we have seen above, Xunzi speaks of self-cultivation being open to "the people on the streets."¹⁰⁶ In the same way, Mencius believes in the capacity and potential of every human being to cultivate themselves and to nourish their four 'sprouts' in order to reach ideal personhood.¹⁰⁷ Both Xunzi and Mencius thus believe that every single person, no matter their background, can theoretically become a sage. If we take them by their word and interpret their positions creatively, this openness of self-cultivation to everyone can thus also apply to women.

In the framework of non-gendered learning and self-cultivation of the heart-mind we envision, - extending our interpretation of Xunzi and Mencius - anyone can train this way and the community of those who learn, of those who teach and of those who reach sage-hood is a diverse community, not segregated by gender in any way. For this, the accessibility of practices for self-cultivation needs to be present and any means which would otherwise prevent women from developing their heart-mind should be done away with. To this end, Rosenlee suggests a redistribution of gender-based labor, that is classically divided along the lines of '*nei*' and '*wai*' as explained above.¹⁰⁸ If we reconsider the relationship between husband and wife as analogous to a friendship, she suggests, we can transcend any hierarchal gender-based division within a family unit. Once this is achieved, she proposes, "what is left is a more flexible rearrangement of the division of labor within one's household in which a woman can be in charge of all or part of the *wai* and a man all or part of the *nei*, or vice versa, depending on the common goal set in that particular relationship by its participants."¹⁰⁹ Rosenlee's project of the rethinking of Confucianism into a feminist-friendly version of itself, however, entails not only a larger social critique but active measures that are beyond the scope of this project. What we can observe, for now, is that only if non-male individuals are seen as fully-fledged knowers with valuable experiences capable of any sort of knowing, can there be any genuine form of epistemological equality.

¹⁰⁶ Hutton, *Xunzi*, 254.

¹⁰⁷ Ivanhoe and Van Norden, *Readings*, 130.

¹⁰⁸ Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 158.

¹⁰⁹ Rosenlee, *Confucianism and Women*, 158-159.

Furthermore, the heart-mind can broaden the scope and influence of feminist epistemology beyond its focus on the sciences. Cultivating the heart-mind is relevant for everything from the concrete training of the heart-mind, the practice of ritual and the experience of different situations requiring different emotional or rational involvement. And the significance of these broadened spheres would obtain for both men and women. All of these seem to be in harmony with the call for respecting empirical knowledge, raised by the naturalized feminist epistemologist, but they broaden the scope of what constitutes empirical knowledge. For instance, the concrete and lived nature of ritual provides us with knowledge and allows us to experience what we learn in an embodied and involved manner.

There are a few other elements about the heart-mind as a locus of knowing that seem worth mentioning: In the necessity of cultivating the heart-mind's faculties we can find a recognition of the flawed nature of rationality or emotion when treated on their own, or when used without any prior training. This recognition of the imperfection of these faculties is an important step in understanding the necessity for the cultivation of both but also for their cooperation. Next to this imperfection, however, the heart-mind in its natural state contains a certain potential. This potential exists in every person and theoretically allows anyone to lead a morally good and balanced life. This hopeful possibility that is open to all of us is strongly connected to knowing and learning: we need to commit to the process of cultivation and learning to aid our heart-mind in becoming stronger and less torn by selfish desires than it naturally is. Geaney, quoting Xunzi, characterizes this natural state as defined by "the heartmind's love for profit,"¹¹⁰ and its desire for "the greatest extreme of comfort."¹¹¹ She speaks of possible "preoccupations" of the heart-mind in this natural state, which can distort sensory information, as mentioned above.¹¹² There is thus a need to cultivate our heart-mind, whose own desires which govern us and literally 'blind' us. If we succeed in its cultivation, however the heart-mind will govern our life by including rational and emotional faculties in our way of encountering the world.

In the heart-mind we can see the value of a balanced locus of knowing: one mode of knowing is informing the other, which allows us to make better judgments, distinctions and decisions. This connection and cooperation thus includes ways of knowing once seen as typically 'male' or 'female' into one larger whole. We could say that in the heart-mind we can see a coming-together of the separate spheres of 'nei' and 'wai'. In the heart-mind's diverse functions and

¹¹⁰ Geaney, *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 19.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹¹² Geaney, *On the Epistemology of the Senses*, 39-41.

capacities are elements ‘belonging’ to both of these areas - the formerly public ‘male’ domain and the more private ‘female’ can both be found. In this way, knowing order, appropriateness or relations, for instance, are not simply rational operations: they all contain a certain social and aesthetic element which could fall into the traditionally ‘female’ realm, both according to Western or Confucian understanding. The heart-mind, capable of more than the mere grasping of pure facts, also affords us an understanding of the value of interpersonal relationships, different bonds within these and distinct behaviors expected and justified within each. These elements could be seen as typically neither ‘female’ nor ‘male,’ but human, which inform all human conduct.

Another particularly interesting aspect lies in the major challenge inherent in overcoming natural selfishness: in the heart-mind and its potential to be cultivated lies a wish for us to be ‘better people’. We ought to be magnanimous, selfless, and fight our instincts of self-preservation from ruling us. This hope for looking beyond the individual can only be realized with training and is the objective of the process of cultivation. It is very interesting that the heart-mind requires such a long and laborious process in its cultivation, which requires the knower to invest. In this way, Confucian thinkers, specifically those of the early Warring States period, acknowledge that we are not perfect from the start, but that knowing, judging, and deciding requires practice, fine-tuning and learning.¹¹³ It also communicates that the state of a balanced heart-mind is not natural. In its natural state the heart-mind gets ‘pulled’ by selfish desires preventing us from being good persons. It is only after a long process of emotional, intellectual and cultural labor that we can reach a state of benevolence, altruism and well-roundedness.

Once cultivated, our heart-mind will enable us to make good moral decisions, another very important function of the heart-mind. As mentioned above, making distinctions and ordering sensory input is one of the heart-mind’s main activities. It is very important to note that this organizing and judging applies very much to moral content: the heart-mind decides what is right and what is wrong and helps us make informed decisions based on these categories. Mencius, for instance, calls the heart-mind “the heart of right and wrong” for this reason.¹¹⁴ In its natural state, the desire for personal comfort and benefit will guide our moral decisions and we will choose selfishly in most moments. It is through cultivation that we learn to make more well-rounded and less selfish moral decisions.¹¹⁵ That these decisions are guided both by rational as well as emotional

¹¹³ Later, other Confucian thinkers disagreed on this. For this project we will focus on earlier thinkers Confucius, Xunzi and Mencius and their view of the heart-mind.

¹¹⁴ Lisa Raphals, *Knowing Words: Wisdom and Cunning in the Classical Traditions of China and Greece* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), 35.

¹¹⁵ Raphals, *Knowing Words*, 40.

factors, when well cultivated, enables us to balance human instincts, and ideals, concerns for our own personal safety, benevolence and other factors that might influence a decision. For our project is is very important to realize that a cultivated heart-mind not only enables us to be multi-faceted epistemic agents, but also to be *moral* agents, capable of balancing emotion and rationality, in moments of decision or ethical dilemma. The moral component of the heart-mind, cooperation of epistemic and moral operations, and the tension between moral education and personal agency in a Confucian framework would merit a far more detailed discussion, certainly offering intriguing challenges, which would constitute a fascinating follow-up project. For the sake of this project, however, we won't pursue the topic much further, as our focus lies on the non-gendered epistemic dimension of the heart-mind, more than anything.

To sum up, we can note that the ability to be steadfast in both rational and non-rational capacities and to let them inform each other is an achievement. When both rational and non-rational qualities are strong and cultivated, we can let their interplay and cooperation unfold. This will open doors that each faculty on its own, no matter how refined, would not have been able to unlock. In their coexistence and mingling lies a particularly creative and well-rounded approach to the world.

C) An Undivided Knowledge-Framework

The result of this project is thus a new framework of knowledge built on the foundation of naturalized feminist epistemology and the Confucian concept of the heart-mind, which envisions a cooperation of rational and non-rational modes of engaging with the world on a personal level and consciously moving away from associating a gender with any of these inclinations or practices.

To achieve this framework, two steps need to be taken. These steps are based on problems identified in chapter 2 of this thesis: The first is the dissociation of knowledge and knowledge-practices with gender. We made this step into the first criterion for our framework above (“a) does not ascribe gender to any way of knowing”). The second is the end of the treatment of rationality as superior to non-rational modes of knowing in both academic and lived contexts, which constitutes our criterion b. We will now take a separate look at both of these and will test whether our new framework accomplishes both steps, thereby fulfilling both criteria. It is however hard to say, which step needs to be taken first as both influence each other and build on the other, but we will start with the dissociation of gender and knowledge.

The first step we need to take is one away from the association of gender with knowledge and knowledge-practices. As we have argued above in more detail, the link between gender and

knowledge is firmly established in our society, based on an existing hierarchy between modes of knowing and a hierarchy between genders. This link, however, leads to a rigidity in the intersection of knowledge and gender that is harmful both to the authenticity of knowers, the fully-informed quality of their knowledge-claims, and to the diversity and representativeness of the knowledge produced. The need to transcend this association is thus apparent. Can our knowledge-framework do away with this association?

I believe that the concept of the heart-mind, central to our account, can indeed steer us clear from gendered knowledge. The non-gendered character of knowledge in Confucian thought allows for the heart-mind to be a locus of knowing that is neither male nor female. While, as noted above, the spheres of activity for men and women in Confucian society were traditionally quite separate, the representation of the heart-mind itself, however, does not entail such a separation, exhibiting different functions of engaging with the world that are not gendered or separated along the lines of a male-female dichotomy.

As we have also seen above, however, the practical reality of cultivating one's heart-mind was less freely accessible than it was in theory. We thus have to differentiate between the theoretical un-gendered nature of the heart-mind and the practical limitations for women's self-cultivation in traditional Confucianism. Holding on to the theory, the non-gendered nature of the heart-mind can provide us with a basis necessary to fulfill the criterion (criterion a) we set up: with the heart-mind's non-gendered nature we can take the step towards a framework of knowledge without connections to or associations with gender.

The second step we want to take is that away from the presumed superiority of rationality. Through a move towards the inclusion of non-rational modes of knowing, we arrive at a version of epistemology that can accommodate a wider variety of knowers, realities and subjectivities. This is also a move away from the idealization of a singular objective truth to be obtained by rational means alone. This allows for a more serious understanding and inclusion of subjective, personal or embodied ways of knowing, making the field of knowledge true to the complex textures of human existence: If knowledge is more personal and less removed, this allows knowers to use their own subjective experiences as a source of knowing, instead of having to make a conscious effort to be objective and impersonal. These changes all seem desirable for naturalized epistemology.

Seeing the ways, in which a variety of knowledge practices are actively sought after and included in the project of naturalized feminist epistemology, we can confidently lean on the work done in this branch of thought while constructing our own framework. In my interpretation of

naturalized feminist epistemology, the principles of this view endorse a lack of hierarchy between different knowledge-practices. It is through the commitment to “a modest empiricism and to rational inquiry,” as Anderson puts it, that this branch of thought wants to bring about a more diverse community of knowers.¹¹⁶ Side-by-side, empiricism and rational operations are thus utilized, in this way developing theory alongside real-world evidence. Jaggar gives the example of naturalized ethics, which would include the fields of “psychology, economics, and the social sciences,” for the development of ideals, rules and principles, thus merging abstract and concrete, theoretical and applied.¹¹⁷ This merging and interweaving of different disciplines and fields, blurring boundaries between the abstract-rational and the concrete-empirical sciences constitutes an important element in our knowledge-framework. In addition, the combination and coexistence of rational and non-rational modes of knowing inherent in the portrayal of the Confucian heart-mind promises us a new way of structuring knowing. Knowing appropriate conduct in the Confucian framework also requires highly contextualized experience and judgement, not the only comprehension of fixed principles. No longer will there be a rigid division of and an absolute hierarchy between rational and non-rational. Criterion b is thus fulfilled.

D) Inclusivity and Responsibility in Knowledge

What we would like to see as the result of our project is a knowledge-framework that *includes*. Be it modes of knowing and engaging with the world, genders and gender-expressions or members of various epistemic communities, this framework aims to create diverse knowledge at a personal level, thereby preparing the ground for more systemic change. These two realms - the personal and the systemic/institutional - are of course connected. As we have mentioned above, epistemic equality and a framework of knowing that enables and includes members of all genders to engage with the world in distinct ways involves both spheres. In order for the epistemic community to change, we need to include modes of knowing into what ‘counts’ as ‘real’ knowledge. For that, personal involvement and a shift in value is required on a personal level. Every individual should experience the wealth of rational and non-rational knowing when balanced, thereby understanding the value of all of these modes of knowing and the power that lies in their combination. This understanding is accompanied by a breaking down of barriers constructed through education,

¹¹⁶ Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology,” 460.

¹¹⁷ Jaggar, “Ethics Naturalized,” 457.

upbringing, workplace-organization, and the traditionally patriarchal family. This is why the combination of feminist naturalized epistemology, targeting institutional epistemic rigidity, and the heart-mind, concerned with a personal balancing of epistemic tools, provides a very strong framework that potentially allows us to change the ways we value knowledge.

An important point for our project is that of diversity within the community of knowers: Alison Jaggar writes about this by claiming that “Some Western feminist philosophers may have assumed in the past that “we” referred to “all women” and that “our” best practices of moral inquiry were those defined culturally as “feminine,” but women and the culturally feminine are so diverse that this assumption is clearly untenable.”¹¹⁸ As we discussed in more detail above, the risk of essentializing what ‘women’ or members of any gender are, can be avoided by including not only one type of ‘female knowledge’ but instead including women, men, non-binary individuals, etc. as valuable and valued members of the epistemic community. Jaggar points to the importance of such a diverse community of knowers when she writes: “Like all those who employ naturalized approaches, practitioners of feminist moral naturalism must know who “we” are and must have at least some idea of what are “our” best practices of inquiry. [...] Specifically, as critics of much conventional morality, feminists cannot assume that the best available practices of moral inquiry are identical with those that are socially dominant.”¹¹⁹ She claims that a dominant mode of engaging with the world is never the only one in existence, making it crucial to look beyond the *status quo*. A white woman from an industrialized and educated background might thus employ different modes of knowing from a woman from a rural area in a non-Western country who never went to school and, instead of mathematics and the ABCs, learned different things requiring different skills in different ways.

I believe that our framework of knowing allows such a diversity to exist and that it entails a necessity to ‘look beyond,’ with regards to the limits of one’s gender, the borders of one’s country, the fringes of one’s field of study or the demarcations of one’s society. What matters, as noted in criterion c, is that inclusivity, diversity and a multi-faceted nature are at the core of this approach; and while it is perhaps utopian to think that, based on this framework alone, everyone will be tolerant and accepting of diversity all over the globe from here on out, I firmly believe that changing the way we think of what makes knowledge valid can be a first important step. As it relates to many other fields, transcending limits of a traditional gendered framework of knowing can enable us to cross many other borders next. Therefore our framework fulfills criterion c,

¹¹⁸ Jaggar, “Ethics Naturalized,” 464.

¹¹⁹ Jaggar, “Ethics Naturalized,” 464.

demanding the inclusion of and accessibility for “all genders in all operations and modes of knowing.”

As stated above, this ‘looking beyond’ is not merely a possibility; I believe it to be a necessity. With knowing in a balanced manner comes a certain epistemic labor: I see a responsibility on the part of the knower to tackle different sides, different modes of knowing. One cannot and should not lean back and be comfortable with an exclusively rational approach, nor should one trust only embodied, subjective knowledge. As well-rounded individuals we ought to strive to find a balance within ourselves at all times, and, as the Confucian notion of the heart-mind suggests, employ feeling, observation, deliberation, judgement and moral approval and disapproval to all issues.

Here gender and the lack of prescriptiveness becomes especially important. No matter which gender, a knower ought to confront themselves with the varied natures of knowing and ought to understand knowing as the multi-faceted process it is. The prescriptive nature of the traditional framework of knowledge is overcome in our new framework, but it comes with a required effort: As nobody can rely on their gender to be reason enough to employ one mode of knowing or another, in theory, everyone ought to engage with the world in different manners now. Of course this might not be practically possible in all contexts, but that is not what we claim in any way. What we claim is that shutting a woman’s or a man’s emotion down and dismissing them from what is considered epistemically valuable ends with this framework. Teaching rational engagement only to boys and emotional engagement to girls or considering rationality out of reach for anyone based on their gender, and seeing this as disqualifying them as knowers ends. This framework can be the beginning of a new way of knowing: It can lay the groundwork for a different way to approach the connection of knowledge and gender. This new way can potentially lead away from toxic gender-roles, with their specific forms of rigidity and normativity: It can allow us to freely express who we are and authentically engage with the world. In this new epistemology a freedom of gender expression is possible, which fulfills the last criterion d, which was posited for our project.

As indicated above, the possibility and freedom afforded to us by the heart-mind and a grounding in naturalized feminist epistemology cannot be acquired without effort. An epistemic labor lies in this openness, which a traditional framework of knowing has largely spared us. This labor consists in the active confrontation and engagement with modes of knowing that lie outside of one’s comfort zone, habit and most importantly outside of what society teaches to be appropriate for a member of our gender. As knowers in a non-gendered epistemological framework we ought to commit to the work that is required, the possible transition and familiarization we need to undergo

in order to reach and fully embrace this new framework. It will require work, not simply because it goes far beyond what we might be used to, what we have been taught so far. It also requires a constant shift of perspectives, an immersion in the multiplicity of methods and approaches. This can certainly lead to some confusion or overwhelm us at first. We will have to learn to navigate, filter and truly use this system to our advantage. Accepting its internal diversity and the diversity it can inspire within the community of knowers, will be a crucial first step, however. That this balancing act will not be simple is yet another thing we can learn from the heart-mind: its natural tendencies and inclinations need to be refined and trained rigorously before working together in harmony. It is thus completely normal and to be expected if this new framework poses a challenge to us at first. It is meant to challenge us. After training ourselves and refining the way we know, however, we will be more balanced and versatile epistemic agents and will be able to foster change in our society. By knowing in a non-gendered way, it is my hope, we can contribute to the dissociation of gender from other categories, values or norms.

In this project, we have explored different elements that have helped us with the construction of a non-gendered framework of knowing. Observing that in the West, the dominant male gender has been associated with the most cherished mental activity that is rationality and that women have been associated with all the 'leftovers' like emotion, intuition, embodiment, desire, leading to a cementing of gender-hierarchies in the domain of epistemology, we set out to break free from gendered and thereby hierarchical knowledge. In feminist naturalized epistemology we found a branch of epistemology sensitive to and critical of gender-bias in the world of knowing and the sciences. The wish for a diverse community of knowers making use of a variety of knowledge-practices, be they empirical or theoretical, purely rational or including non-rational ways of engaging with the world - this wish became the foundation of our knowledge-framework.

On a personal and applied level we found that the Confucian concept of the heart-mind can offer a very concrete instance of non-gendered epistemology: combining rational and emotional capacities, both of which have to be trained and cultivated for personal improvement, the heart-mind provides us with a great instance of diversified, non-hierarchical and thereby gender-free knowing. Our framework is thus centered around a creative and de-contextualized version of the Confucian heart-mind, one that allows for and encourages also the practical and not purely theoretical self-cultivation of members of all genders in order to make use of their rational and

emotional capacities and live life in accordance with both. In this framework, no gendering remains: Everyone can make use of all faculties and is encouraged, perhaps even required, to do so. Gender as a determining factor with regards to epistemic practices and expectations no longer exists: as knowers of any gender we ought to train and cultivate the multiplicity of epistemic faculties at our disposal and should learn that in their cooperation and balance lies a well-rounded and free world of knowing.

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