

**THE AXES AND THE BODIES –
FEMINIST EPISTEMOLOGIES AND AXIAL CONCEPTS**

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1 Introduction

Over the last few years, my reflections on the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein have coexisted with an ever more detailed and in-depth study in feminist philosophy – due to circumstances, but also due to the ballast of discoveries. At first, I thought I was moving away from my initial concerns and considered my path, if not bifurcated, at least fragmented. Recently, however, I realized that this variation constituted not a thematic detachment, but a qualified deviation, an excursion enriched by the look of plurality and by the call for political responsibility in our philosophical practices. The points of contact are found largely in the epistemological field, as in the methodological one, and a certain meta-philosophical perspective (already present in my previous inquiries) crosses both the diagnostic frameworks and the alternative proposals to the “exclusionary gestures”¹ of the philosophical norm towards a more democratic horizon – one that informs my criteria for moral, political and epistemological consideration. It is within this reflective context that I would like to think about the mutual contributions between hinge epistemology and feminist epistemologies.

Before venturing more specifically into the elaboration of this project, however, it is necessary to make some more clarifications. The first one concerns my attitude towards studies related to “Wittgensteinian philosophy”, which is not intended to be merely exegetical. At this moment, I am not concerned with arguing for an interpretive statement of any kind. While some degree of attention must be devoted to the text itself, my interest is rather the deployment of its lessons for urgent contemporary ends. And the latter bring me to my second observation, as at this moment it is clear, if not blatant, the impossibility of maintaining the illusion, if not the farce, of theoretical innocence, neutrality, and political disengagement of the philosophical discourse, as if what we do with words did not create and maintain the world structured in excluding hierarchies and as if our philosophical concepts had nothing to do with real people living real lives in their real bodies. This essay is thus committed not only to denouncing the biases present in the epistemological and scientific language, as in the philosophical language as a whole, but also to what I called above a *democratic horizon*, taken as constitutive of an *emancipatory project* for the subjects of feminism². Finally, this project does not depart from the incursions into the feminist history of philosophy. It favors a *politics of text, writing*,

Translated by Rafael Araújo Real

¹ The expression is from Scheman (1997), p. 344.

² The “subjects of feminism” are, of course, not just women. After much discussion about it, it is possible that we are moving towards an agreed understanding of this expression as an effectively encompassing expression: the subjects of feminism are the multiple creatures and the multiple layers of life on Earth.

and language³ in considering the concept of ‘philosophy’ from multiple methodological perspectives along with the lessons learned, this time, with a myriad of texts by women philosophers, and – it is important to emphasize – with the meta-philosophical questions arising from the connected field of research in philosophy and literature⁴.

2 Hinge concepts

Some of the discussions developed below have points of convergence with other authors who also work on both Wittgenstein’s studies and feminism. Natalie Alana Ashton is someone who explicitly mentions the possibility of a program aimed at a “feminist hinge epistemology” (2019). In her article, she highlights the similarities between hinge epistemology and feminist epistemologies and argues for a conjunction project that would help to overcome three criticisms she presents to the first one (as regards the criterion of utility that some authors apply mainly to the evaluation of possible responses to skepticism⁵, as to the refusal to further develop the relationship between epistemic and pragmatic domains⁶, and as to a generalized resistance to epistemic relativism on the part of hinge epistemologists⁷). However, she doesn’t go as far as to develop, or even to point out more clearly, the possible directions open to this project and hopes that several of the issues she has pointed out will from now on to be explored (Ashton, 2019, p.09). Naomi Scheman deals as well with epistemology within the scope of feminism and has as her background various “Wittgensteinian” incursions. I think especially in the book *Feminist Interpretations of Wittgenstein*, organized by her (together with Peg O’Connor), and in her 1993 article, “Though This Be Method, Yet there Is Madness in It” (1997 for the edition I use here). In its alternative direction, this article finds in a “robust realism” some other points of contact (or so I see it) with Cora Diamond, Alice Cray, and Raimond Gaita. It is Raimond Gaita, finally, who informs one of the crucial concepts that guide my current endeavor along this epistemological-ethical-political path by insisting on the need to “return the body to the realm of meaning” (Gaita, 2004, p. 98).

It is the way this last sentence is expressed that leads me to think about the mutual contributions between hinge epistemology and feminist epistemologies, since it is not a novelty that the concept of ‘body’, in its various expressions, permeates the claims of feminist epistemologists – ‘situated knowledge’, ‘localized knowledge’, ‘embodied or gendered knowledge’, ‘corporeal vision’, ‘positioning’. But it is not just the question of *situation* that interests me here, but the question of *meaning*. Or rather: the question of how to return the body to the realm of meaning is a demand of feminist epistemologies that can be answered with an approach guided by hinge epistemology. The interest of this epistemological version lies in

³ See Sattler, 2020.

⁴ See Sattler, 2020a e 2020b.

⁵ “But epistemic justification isn’t just about radical skepticism. It’s crucial in all areas of life. (...) Hinge epistemologists need to broaden the range of problems that they consider when evaluating for usefulness.” (Ashton, 2019, p. 4).

⁶ “This is especially disappointing as there is even literature on this which references *On Certainty* explicitly. Miriam McCormick’s *Believing Against the Evidence* (2015) provides a comprehensive argument for the conclusion that there is no distinct epistemic domain that can be isolated from moral or pragmatic domains of normativity, and makes brief but explicit mention of *On Certainty*. Anna Boncompagni’s *Wittgenstein and Pragmatism* (2016) is entirely devoted to evaluating *On Certainty* in light of a pragmatist perspective.” (Ashton, 2019, p. 5).

⁷ “I think the best explanation for this is that epistemic relativism is seen as uncontentiously problematic, as evidenced by the fact that none of the hinge epistemologists who do engage with relativism spend much time explaining why they think that it is problematic, instead focusing on resisting what they take to be an objection to their view.” (Ashton, 2019, p. 6).

the possibility of finally dissolving the insistence on the “purely epistemological” character of canonical formulations and definitions and of knowledge-justification assertions⁸ – “dissolution” that contends, first and foremost, the misunderstanding of the question.⁹

With this movement of repositioning the question concerning (not only attribution and legitimation but also) the justification of knowledge, I am taking a step back from the propositions to the concepts, imagining that conceptual hinges do count as the “certain things” [*Gewisses*] that are not put in doubt and that must be firmly in place (OC § 342-343)¹⁰ – whose expressions seem to have been ignored by epistemology, resulting in the perverse effects of the supposed democratic intentions of a Cartesianism (and a skepticism) taken to its ultimate consequences¹¹ – whose propositionality, however, may also be elaborated accordingly.

Therefore, I would like here to talk about *hinge concepts* and, especially, of the *body as hinge*, and to propose their meanings as being detached from doubt, constituting the foundational basis for any epistemological manifestation and essential to that political, democratic and emancipatory horizon.

I think of hinge concepts as those that may answer the question of who the socially situated subject is. We know that situation has to do with the various social, political, economic, and cultural indicators that produce biased concessions of epistemic authority based on a hierarchical concept of rationality. We know that situation defines differently those places of granted legitimacy when it comes to assertions of true and justified belief. And we know that what counts as good reasons for justification is normatively decided in advance in the absence of those who could not decide about anything – obviously because the latter are allocated at lower levels of rationality and legitimacy and, therefore, lacking authority to claim adjustments regarding any of the steps of the epistemic validation process. Only an entrenched philosophical arrogance prevents us from seeing there a problem of circularity entangled in the filigrees of power and allowing us to affirm the neutrality of this situation.¹²

Now, I would like to think that adjustment claims concern not only second-order epistemology since what is indeed at stake is the justification process and the qualifying of reasons as reasons, as offered by the situated subject.¹³ Here, some

⁸ I owe the way of formulating this fundamental problem, as some other points of this essay, to conversations with Kariane Marques. I hope we can keep talking about our common concerns.

⁹ Whereby my reading also to be opposed to that of Danièle Moyal-Sharrock in her claiming the non-epistemic character of hinge propositions. I do not fall back, however – or so I suppose – into the “problem of the foundation of knowledge”, mainly due to the enlargement of the epistemological scope considered here which is not confined to supposedly a-political “standard definitions”. Some other exegetical disagreements manifest themselves implicitly in my text, but it is not my aim to argue about them at this moment.

¹⁰ “OC” abbreviates *On Certainty* as well as “PI” the *Philosophical Investigations*, each followed by the paragraph number. “PPF” refers to *Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment*.

¹¹ Cf. Scheman, 1997, p. 348.

¹² At this point, it does not matter much whether we take this theoretical task as descriptive or normative when we understand that even in descriptive terms, we are dealing with normative intrusions established in absentia (of many people). For a similar point, cf. Scheman, 1995, p. 181.

¹³ Speaking of adjustments, I am also thinking, of course, about the important work of Miranda Fricker (2007). However, without entering properly into the more specific debate of her work, I believe that the way she presents epistemic injustices as arising from or influenced by “non-epistemic elements” in the processes of attribution, acquisition, and exchange of knowledge, does not sufficiently clarify the reason why there is a “distinctively epistemic” character underlying social practices which are supposedly alien to the purity and neutrality of those processes. I would like to think that a feminist hinge epistemology as sketched here may come to help us clarify our epistemic practices in their inescapable moral and political entanglement. Or, put it in another way, I would like to think that the present reflections may come to help us perceive the concomitant epistemic and political character of the elements of our situation (gender, race, class, etc.).

questions may help us to locate this subject somewhere in the world and to embody the situation in some kind of materiality that may in turn escape the purely discursive alternatives such as advocated by radical versions of constructionism – to use Donna Haraway's (1988) way of speaking. Some questions have to do with an anteriority status, which in no way should be understood, however, as “fundamental”, “essential” or “universal” – because none of that would make sense for the proposal of taking the *body as hinge*, as each one of us lives and embodies life and knowledge with one's own particular, subjective and individual body. The questions that have to do with an anteriority status aim precisely, therefore, at understanding situation or location as deeply contextualized. The situation is at the same time structured by the meanings of our inhabiting a world in living flesh – an understanding that allows me to make the necessary connections (morally, above all) with the creatureliness we share with the other inhabitants of the Earth (cf. Sattler, 2019).

This is, then, a way of expressing the question of who the situated subject really is: What is there “prior” to the subject? Well, for the self-conscious subject it seems to be clear that the obvious answer would be “nothing”; after all, he does not find any initial hardcore over which biology, culture, and language are added in the complex processes of individuation while uncovering the layers of subjectivation. This is another way of asking the same question: What is there “prior” to subjectivation? “Nothing” could still be an answer, unless we wish to make use of biological, genetic, or “quasi-medical” terminologies (Gaita, 2004, p.98) to speak about people's cells development or their birth and entry into the world as constituting the exact moment or the matrix of situationality inscriptions. But it would be too naive and misleading to think of anteriority in these terms. Just as it is naive and misleading to imagine that the aforementioned terminologies are themselves devoid of the epistemic and political situation and location – as the religious terminology conceiving life of individuality and personhood with conception; both terminologies are constituted, in this case, as (gender) “technologies”, in the words of Teresa de Lauretis.

There is still a third way of expressing the same question, which seems to me finally to clarify what “anteriority” really means - in methodological and conceptual terms. It should be noted, however, that the very question form elaborates somehow part of the answer I would like to offer to the first two questions, as an alternative to the “nothing” of temporal anteriority and to the lure of empirical priority, as it is about the anteriority and indubitability of the concept itself: What there is prior to the subject and what there is prior to subjectivation, and even what there is prior to knowledge, is the *body*.¹⁴ We do not talk about self-consciousness, subjectivation, individuation, not even about personhood, or epistemic concessions, without the axial presupposition of corporeality. Even the terminological variation of our conversations is a variation that revolves around conceptual hinges that are thus essential to further understandings and visions about reality and life. So, I would like to think that the answers we can offer to this third way of expressing that initial question may come to help us clarify why it is we cannot speak of the “purely epistemological” character of epistemic justification, the question being: What are the meanings that structure a body *as a subject*? It is at this point, it seems to me, that we can begin to talk about returning the body to the realm of meaning

¹⁴ I cannot now establish the possibilities of an intersectional reading between hinge epistemology and phenomenology in the terms of Judith Butler (1988). I believe it is indeed a possible connection, although we should be on guard against the risks of a nihilist “disintegration” and “disassembly” (Haraway, 1988, p. 577-8) when it comes to an acute version of postmodernism. On the alert, that is, regarding the need for us to maintain some “non-discursive substrate” – be it the body, the world, and creatureliness, for example, for Haraway (1988, p. 35) as much as for Gaita, and for a possible feminist hinge epistemology.

and begin to understand what the various technologies of situational inscription operate on.

Raimond Gaita talks about the realm of meaning as structuring morality, as he is interested in a (non-analytic) meta-ethical investigation that would allow us to escape the bridles of normative theories. This is an eminently non-legalistic conceptual search. I share this interest, and I do understand it as epistemologically comprehensive. In this sense, the meanings that structure the body as a subject of knowledge are the same ones that structure it as a living body (the body of morality), a stance that allows us to reject the claims of primacy of epistemology over ethics. It is, in fact, in this epistemological-moral imbrication that the meanings reside on which social, political, and cultural situation are added to qualify the subject. I am thinking here of those contextualized meanings, that might be differently read by different cultures, but that share corporeality as one of those features that make an individual an irreplaceable inhabitant of a (perishable) world, whose vulnerability is crossed by sexuality, bonds, and affections, mortality, and the need to understand otherness. Gaita calls these concepts “shared assumptions” that must be “disciplined by critical concepts” (lucidity, sobriety, truth, responsiveness) in order to prevent “meaning-blindness” and exclusionary biases – those, precisely, that result from the pressures of racial, colonial and gender technologies. I would like to call them “hinge concepts”.

I could elaborate this differently by saying that the meanings that structure a body *as a* subject are the meanings assigned by our unquestioned responses to bodies *as* bodies – and not as exploitable things or resources.¹⁵ Responses that have to do with the attitude of the human mind (OC § 89), and which depend on the assumption or conformation (OC § 343-344) on which or from which we can effectively ask meaningful questions or develop epistemological answers. These answers should be interested not only in understanding ‘knowledge’, but also in understanding how definitions of ‘knowledge’ may constitute policies of exclusion and extermination. That is why the feminist stance that informs the present reflection on hinge epistemology asserts a commitment that is above all political. Things could not be otherwise, given the clarity of feminist epistemologies’ denunciation; they agree on the fact that the subject of canonical (rational) knowledge is himself built on a determined and qualified body from privileged technologies of supposed superiority and superlative morality. In spite of himself, he is a body as well. The question is to understand what makes him a body whose presence and discourse performs a reputed universal omnipresence and normative institution, to the point that we were able to realize only recently that his disembodied characterization is not innocent, but a political coup of control and domain. Beyond the (social, political, and economic) layers of the hegemonic institution (whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, eurocentricity), however, what structures even *this* subject as a body is his inescapable and unquestioned contextual and experiential bodily dependence. Power and privilege are themselves ready-made gestures given as responses to the surface of corporeality. For even the possibility of power and privilege regarding the claim of rational supremacy is dependent on a kind of experience facilitated by the location of a body. Indeed, the reasons offered for epistemic justification when expressed by a body that is black

¹⁵ Which is the consequence of semantic or meaning-blindness: “The things they readily attribute to those whom they believe they could not wrong as we wrong one another are exactly the things that constitute the raw materials for most theories about the nature of morality and of its authority over us” (Gaita, 2004, p. 87). Significantly, these consequences seem to be interchangeable between ethical and scientific discourses in the constitution of an irretrievable difference between subject and object of knowledge, the latter “reduced to resource for instrumentalist projects of destructive Western societies, or they can be seen as masks for interests, usually dominating interests” (Haraway, 1988, p. 591).

are undermined because of the location of the reasons on this body, but not because of the reasons themselves.

This is to emphasize the inescapable links between epistemology and politics so that we can turn our attention to what really determines our knowledge assertions and to the meanings that structure the body *as* a subject. Now, these meanings are constructed from our immediate, safe, and obvious attitudes and reactions, as they are immediately experienced as embodied reactions. They are expressed in unsuspected ways by means of a language that shows us as inhabitants of the same shared world. They do not find in skepticism – and not even in exacerbated forms of rationalism – a commonplace of communication.

Raimond Gaita insists on how the living body (human and non-human) is essential for the constitution of our concepts, “including our concepts of belief and knowledge” (Gaita, 2004, p. 36), and on how this formation emerges from our “unhesitating interactions” (idem, p. 31) with others, with other people in their bodies, and from our constituent reactions in response to the living world, no, he says, also mentioning Peter Winch in *Trying to Make Sense*, as a “consequence of ascribing states of consciousness to others”, but as a *condition* (ibidem). Here, I would like to argue that this condition can be understood and developed from two related points found in Wittgenstein which would allow us to think about how our beliefs assumed to be true and justified are determined by reasons that are always structured on hinge concepts such as *body*, *surface*, and *experience*.

It is indeed a symptom of the epistemological biases deeply embedded in rationalist dogmas that so little attention has been paid to the question of corporeality in Wittgenstein. It is a very telling example of how we can be captured by the witchery of a language and by unilateral philosophical goals. After all, we only find in philosophical research what we allow ourselves to look for.¹⁶ Interestingly or, again, symptomatically, some of the research that take the materiality of the body as relevant are carried out by women philosophers, especially in areas related to ethics and meta-ethics (Cora Diamond, Alice Crary, and again Naomi Scheman and Peg O'Connor). Furthermore, the presumption of epistemological primacy seems to contribute to the neglect of some of the observations about “what has been prepared” in language (PI §257) so that we can speak of the grammar of our words, and of several observations that, in this sense, have been prepared in the language of *Philosophical Investigations* for the subsequent development of hinge epistemology.

“Thinking,” says Wittgenstein, “is not an incorporeal process which lends life and sense to speaking, and which it would be possible to detach from speaking” (PI §339), but not just from speaking, but from acting as a whole. What, after all, allows us to distinguish what a living body is, animated by action and expression, from “a thing”? Now, it is our attitude, our attitude presupposed in our behaviors and responses and reactions to the *living bodies*: “Our attitude to what is alive and to what is dead is not the same. All our reactions are different” (PI § 284). But not because the body “possesses” a soul that animates it. This language is still equivocal and dualistic, and when he says that “the human body is the best picture of the human soul” (PPF §25), it is to the picture of *the living body* that Wittgenstein refers to one who “behaves like a human being” (PI § 283) and manifests his pains and his human behavior, which we are able to recognize because we recognize a soul: “my attitude towards him is an attitude towards a soul. I am not of the *opinion* that he

¹⁶A diagnosis that is not exclusive to philosophy, of course. See Evelyn Fox Keller for questions related to biological sciences: “These egalitarian references are not rhetoric – they are based on an account that is now strongly supported by a rich panoply of mechanisms that researchers have identified in recent years – one might say, that researchers have found because they went looking for them” (Keller, 2004, p. 8).

has a soul” (PPF §22). Precisely because there is no place to have opinions here, as there is no place to trust or distrust in automaton’s animation or in children’s fiction about talking furniture and sentient stones, because no “expression of doubt” about the ways of reading, seeing, interpreting and recognizing a human soul, a *living body*, has place in this language game (PI § 288). We could thus speak of a *grammar of the living body*, in the context of which we construct our concepts related to sensations, as those related to belief and knowledge as well. So, we could then say, with Wittgenstein, that just as it is not the body that feels pain, but the living body (“is the sufferer”, PI §286), so it is not the incorporeal soul that thinks, believes, and doubts, but the “soul which some body *has*” (PI §283; modified translation – the German reads “*Seele*”, and even if it could also mean “mind”, “soul” copes better at this moment with my point), or: the subject *as* a body.

The epistemological “anteriority” does not reside, therefore, in the supposedly “purely epistemological” concepts that constitute the canonical definition of knowledge, but in the living body as an undoubted expression of subjectivation and knowledge. Without the body as hinge, as a record of all the propositional inscriptions that unfold into action and attitude, as well as into judgments and claims, we do not have an anchor point for the “*acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language game” of justification. (OC §204)¹⁷. And if we cannot effectively provide a reason for or against a decision concerning the truth or falsity of a proposition about certain beliefs (OC §200), it may be due to our mixing language games up when trying to understand the ways of construction of our concepts and epistemic assertions – skepticism being, in this sense, undeniably a symptom of wasted philosophical confusion, as it is the dogmatic need for inviolability of certainty. After all, what are the good reasons that support my “true belief”? “I act with *complete* certainty,” says Wittgenstein, “but this certainty is my own” (OC § 174). There is no justification for this belief. Or rather, at this point the question of justification is based on the (epistemologically and conceptually prior) condition of corporeality and of our unquestioned and unhesitating attitudes and reactions that allow us to *act* “surely, acting without any doubt” (OC §196).

None of this needs to be understood in the sense of foundationalist claims, although we could call the concepts that I named as hinge concepts as foundational concepts as well, but only because they are structural or structuring, especially if we take the meaning of hinge or ‘fulcrum’ seriously as a point of anchorage for the propositional, systematic frameworks, of the grammar of belief and knowledge – and morality – as belonging to the *grammar of the living body*. In this grammar, our speeches, actions, reactions, and attitudes compose a system of propositions that support each other (OC §142) where the body works as a crossroads¹⁸ (OC § 225) it manifests not only our mutual human conformations and mutual comprehensive communication, as well as the possibility of understanding the changes brought, displaced or imposed on the field of meaning. We can think of some propositions that involve the nature of our vulnerability and of our interdependence as relevant examples to the grammar of the living body, and of situational inscriptions as those acquiring new or old meanings according to the transformations that taken place in our practices and ways of living life. Let’s think about how the vulnerability of living old bodies carries with it a constructed view, contextualized by culture, that is sometimes expressed by means of a compassionate language, and sometimes by means of an excluding one. Think of how the importance attributed to

¹⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the centrality of human action and agreements in *On Certainty*, see Antonio Ianni Segatto (2012).

¹⁸ I would like to read Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2019) crossroads and borders into these crossroads and hinges, but also Wittgenstein’s hinges into Anzaldúa’s body boundaries. I have been trying some philosophical-literary undertakings about both of them that may be further developed in this direction.

interdependence is modified by linguistic practices informed by feminist readings of what it means to bodily depend on other bodies. The grammar of the living body is thus liable to adjustments and change because our system of images and propositions (the *totality* of our judgments (OC § 140)) is open to change and to the critical scrutiny of those concepts that are responsive to our experiences and apt to an ethical and political guiding of our practices¹⁹ – after all, if things were not like that, we could not or it wouldn't make sense to participate in investigative games in science and philosophy. In this sense, the fixity of the body or its character as a socially situated subject (the subject *as* body), is not that of immutability, above all in terms of meaning (and this is precisely what it is about), but it is that of “shared assumptions” around which our judgments about the world, and about the construction of knowledge itself, revolve. This is how, says Wittgenstein, the fixed is also feasibility of movement:

OC § 152 – I do not explicitly learn the propositions that stand fast for me. I can *discover* them subsequently like the axis around which a body rotates. This axis is not fixed in the sense that anything holds it fast, but the movement around it determines its immobility.

This means that although a foundational – structuring – concept of our epistemological-linguistic – and moral – practices, the body is a *hinge*, an axis, and not irreducible sediment.

All this is read on the surface of corporeality and on the surface of our language – against, once again, the metaphysical or essentialist uses of foundationalism. The surface (though not superficial and not ideal to the point of becoming slippery (PI §107)) has to do here with all those assumptions inferred from the immediate physiognomy of, again, our speeches, actions, reactions, and attitudes, the “forms of the living body's expressiveness”, as Gaita says (2004, p.30), that manifest the “attitudes of the human mind” and that form “the basis of action, and therefore, naturally, of thought” (OC § 411). What is shown on the surface of our bodily experience and what is shown on the surface of our ways of speaking and judging “in conformity with mankind” (OC § 156) is what characterizes this concept as well as a structuring axis for our understanding the epistemic meanings of our beliefs. Truth and justification cannot have anything to do solely with mental states if mental states are conceived as disembodied and detached from this surface of experiences. And justification cannot, therefore, be a purely epistemological concept, because all our good reasons are offered from the point of anchorage of human beings that move *like* bodies in the world whose actions (reactions, attitudes, and speech) derive first of all from unquestioned experiences about what it means to be alive. In other words, *surface* and *experience* are hinge concepts connected to corporeality because they constitute shared anchor points from which we assign epistemic meanings to our expressions of belief and knowledge. Or again: surface and experience compose the grammar of the living body the nature of which excludes from the scope of considerations the purport of certain doubts, including doubts about epistemic experiences themselves. Of course, the fixity of these axial

¹⁹ See Dall'Agnol (2012) for a similar argument in the context of moral certainties which are not to be taken from the point of view of foundationalism. See also § 63-65 of *On Certainty*: “§ 63 – If we imagine the facts otherwise than as they are, certain language-games lose some of their importance, while others become important. And in this way there is an alteration – a gradual one – in the use of the vocabulary of a language. § 64 – Compare the meaning of a word with the 'function' of an official. And 'different meanings' with 'different functions.' § 65 – When language-games change, then there is a change in concepts, and with the concepts the meanings of words change.”

concepts is not, again, that of the irreducible sediment; it should instead to be seen as compositive of the set of structures and frameworks that make human expression and communication possible. On the other hand, it is also not based “in my stupidity or credulity (OC §235)” or, still, in the supposedly non-epistemic character of what is lived “subjectively” (supposedly, that is, devoid of the objectivity of the “evidence”). It is actually about the common embodied terrain or the common “background” (OC §461) of our epistemic games the fact that our communication is established from the indubitability of our own epistemic experiences, manifested on the surface of our language. It is this very background that enables understanding and disagreement and even semantic and epistemic corrections of judgements and actions (and not only those of skeptical quality but also those irresponsible judgments²⁰ about the (in)humanity of otherness). “Our not doubting them all,” says Wittgenstein, “is simply our manner of judging and therefore of acting” (OC §232). Invalidation of epistemic authority seem often, therefore, to be just cases of unadmitted political privilege carried out on the assumption of guiding ethereal rational subjectivity. For Wittgenstein, at this point, unreasonableness does not seem to be a symptom only of superfluous skepticism, but also of an extreme rationalism.²¹

Thus, I would like to think that we can get rid of both the latter epistemological strands and the foundationalist proposal by proceeding in the way of returning the body to the realm of meaning, taking it as a hinge epistemic condition for our knowledge assertions, for the determination of our beliefs assumed as true and justified by reasons that are always structured in the context of a grammar of the living body. *Body*, *surface*, and *experience* may count as constituting this grammar for us to be finally able to characterize the subject’s *situation* in a contextualized way. *Situation* is contextual but nonetheless comprehensibly given, by means of language and its semantic web, as positioning human (and non-human) creatures as inhabitants of the world “in the midst of things”. It is with corporeality that the subject of knowledge assumes something as true because it is on the surface of the body and on the surface of the language about belief and knowledge that the meaning of our actions, reactions, and attitudes towards ours own as well as towards others’ experiential manifestations develop and unfold. The experience of corporeality is the common ground of any epistemic communication, including or above all that of the offering of justifications and reasons in the processes of knowledge construction, mutually delimited and corrected in the scope of *this* language-game. A process of knowledge construction that is mutually delimited and corrected also by a criterion of objectivity that is itself built on the shared framework of epistemological-political-moral hinge concepts that is opposite to any claim of primacy attributed to the “purity” of our epistemological language. The horizon of this understanding is political because epistemic demands are all political, especially when supposedly and *per impossibile* claimed as a-political. It is from the understanding of material of corporeality as epistemically axial that we can develop or unfold the understanding of situation as inscribed on its unquestioned surface – inscriptions that are the effects of gender, sexual, racial, colonial terminologies and technologies. And it is from this path of returning the body to the realm of meaning and realizing its salience for first-order claims of knowledge that we can proceed to other corrections and adjustments on semantic blindness, responsibility, authority, and epistemic injustice.

²⁰ According to Haraway’s way of expressing accountability to which I will refer below again.

²¹ Something that seems to be clear in this paragraph: OC § 475: “I want to regard man here as an animal; as a primitive being to which one grants instinct but not ratiocination. As a creature in a primitive state. Any logic good enough for a primitive means of communication needs no apology from us. Language did not emerge from some kind of ratiocination.”

3 The body as hinge – inclusion, democracy, and a livable world

Taking the body as hinge allows us to perceive the sum of moral, social, and political meanings that structure assertions of knowledge justification and produce epistemic grants. Beyond this initial diagnostic framework, however, it is from the body as hinge that we can derive critical guiding concepts – not to use ‘criteria’, which always sound exclusionary – concerning claims of legitimate knowledge; for the most part, legitimacy has rationality as a prerogative; it is about rationality’s narrow conceptualization that critical guiding concepts may come to help us review the supposed epistemic and solipsistic quality of a-human autonomous capacities in light of a now embodied knowledge orientated towards interrelationality. In light, therefore, of a broader concept of rationality²² as well as “a broader view of knowledge” which practices are, as the body as hinge suggests, understood in their relations of epistemic dependence, always intersected with political considerations and tonalities of power, authority and privilege like any other social relations (see also Scheman, 1995, p. 182).

So, at this moment, I would like to forward the continuity of this path open to a feminist hinge epistemology, by suggesting points of contact and mutual guidance and mutual procedures of correction in service of our considerations about what counts or not as knowledge, as objectivity, authority, truth, and justification. The evaluative horizon must be one of democratic and inclusive disposition, not as mere concession, however, but as justice – and justice as love and as embodied and shared generosity, but not as law, norm or judgment, or ideality²³. This means to say that the critical guiding concepts of our epistemological production actions must be *epistemic-political concepts*. And we should think about these concepts from a stance or an attitude that is not bewitched by the powers of (supposed) crystalline purity of our philosophical language. As the 'body' is a hinge concept, this last requirement would not even make sense.

I think of epistemic-political concepts such as those related to our “shared assumptions” that appear on the surface of our language and on the surface of our interrelational actions and reactions – the sexuality of the living body, vulnerability, and the bonds that make us mutually dependent on each other, for example. But I also think of some guiding concepts that would allow us to talk about epistemic responsibility *as* political responsibility: ‘responsiveness’, ‘visibility’, ‘dialogue’ and, again, ‘justice’.

At this point, I would like to illustrate and suggest a possible direction for the construction of this conceptual web and the grammar of the living body with two examples that I consider to be connected; they may give rise to alternative answers to the question of what counts as knowledge and authority (and perhaps as justification as well) in view, precisely, of the accountability for the assertions of the situated subjects and their located knowledge.

The concepts of lived experience or experiential material knowledge taken as wisdom, the concepts of connection and dialogue, of individual uniqueness, and engaging emotions or personal expressiveness are all components of an ethics of care and at the same time epistemological premises of a black feminist thought in Patricia Hill Collins. Such premises culminate in an ethical-epistemology of

²² Wittgenstein’s use of reason in *On Certainty* may come to help think about a systemic meaning of ‘reason’, that may be contextualized by the axiomatic frameworks of our images of the world. This task remains to be done yet, however.

²³ Not even in terms of an epistemic justice which correctness is an “ideal epistemic situation” in Miranda Fricker’s expression.

“personal accountability”. As I see it, this expression echoes Donna Haraway’s denouncing the philosophical language of universal-normative nature (white-cis-male-heteronormative language, we could say) as informing and shaping our images of the world and the way we see reality from assumed objective and neutral criteria that are only, in fact, criteria of objectification. This is the meaning of her poignant question: “With whose blood were my eyes crafted?” (Haraway, 1988, p.585). With whose blood were my concepts crafted? – we could also ask. Or again: Am I accountable, but not just responsible, for my own claims of knowledge, authority, and justification? “Not only must individuals,” says Hill Collins, “develop their knowledge claims through dialogue and present them in a style proving their concern for their ideas, but people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims” (Collins, 2000, p. 265). When, in our reflective procedures, do we dedicate ourselves to think about the responsibility engendered by the words we express with language? How many times, on the contrary, we do excuse the exclusionary uses of concepts by the canonically instituted authority, detaching voice, speech, and historical time? For Collins, however, the knowledge validation process does not dispense with the simultaneity of the individual’s character, values, and ethics, as well as with the connection between emotion, ethics, and reason. She brings an illustrative example of what might be involved in knowledge assertions under academic scrutiny which I would like to consider here in its political significance and as a methodological image of the conceptual scope suitable for a feminist hinge epistemology where body, surface and experience count as indispensable epistemic elements for enouncing and legitimizing attributions of authority:

During one class discussion I asked the students to evaluate a prominent Black male scholar’s analysis of Black feminism. Instead of removing the scholar from his context in order to dissect the rationality of his thesis, my students demanded facts about the author’s personal biography. They were especially interested in specific details of his life, such as his relationships with Black women, his marital status, and his social class background. By requesting data on dimensions of his personal life routinely excluded in positivist approaches to knowledge validation, they invoked lived experience as a criterion of meaning. They used this information to assess whether he really cared about his topic and drew on this ethic of caring in advancing their knowledge claims about his work. Furthermore, they refused to evaluate the rationality of his written ideas without some indication of his personal credibility as an ethical human being. The entire exchange could only have occurred as a dialogue among members of a group that had established a solid enough community to employ an alternative epistemology in assessing knowledge claims. (Collins, 2000, p. 265-6).

All this is of the uttermost importance for this specific community due also to the repeated epistemic injustices suffered by them as a group or as individuals, and due to the gaps in what Haraway calls the “power to signify” reality when it comes to the monopoly of words by the dominant power. If Fricker’s concept of hermeneutical injustice can explain part of epistemic marginalization, it still leaves unanswered to whom the power belongs to provide the hermeneutic and semantic resources that should communicate and express particular experiences if it takes the supposed neutrality of first-order epistemology for granted or if it takes the “specifically epistemic” aspect of the subject of knowledge as a knower for granted, who should achieve knowledge despite the summing up of “non-epistemic” aspects and situations. So, what Hill Collins and Haraway insist on showing, and what I am myself proposing here, is that situationally resides immediately in the claims and reasons offered by knowledge assertions. The recognition of this situational

pluriversality – to use María Lugones’ expression – against the normative hegemony of universalism, and against the alleged specificity of epistemic concepts as epistemic concepts, is a crucial part of a political struggle for language, which in the case of the black communities mentioned by Hill Collins is also a political struggle for survival – and the power to signify comes as power to survive: “The poetry and stories of U.S. women of color are repeatedly about writing, about access to the power to signify” (Haraway, 1985, p.55). This power, says Collins, cannot be – because it is not – that of privileged neutrality, which supposes and guarantees unquestioned whiteness, but it is the power conquered by political struggles for life: “Living life as Black women requires wisdom because knowledge about the dynamics of intersecting oppressions has been essential to U.S. Black women’s survival.” (Collins, 2000, p. 257). How could it be different for an ethical-epistemology aiming for personal accountability? But how could it be *overall* different?

Another way of posing the question of accountability against the normative hegemony of universalism, its intent of totalizing objectivity and its emptied subjectivity is by appealing to corporeal location or to the embodiment of any and all “vision” – or, we could say, of any and all perspective of enunciation as contextualized and anchored in the world, being responsive to the bodies’ surface. How could it be different? The “transcendence of all limits and responsibility” (Haraway, 1988, p. 582) is a corollary of totalizing visions: to see everything from everywhere and nowhere – as a trick of God – either in the form of an exacerbated relativism or in the form of a single disciplinary vision, this “unmarked category whose power depends on systematic narrowing and obscuring” (Haraway, 1988, p.584). Haraway calls for an attitude opposed to unmarked, non-situated, disembodied categories, to the “various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims”. Knowledge postulates that cannot be located and that cannot, therefore, offer answers or even be open to communication or criticism: “Irresponsible means unable to be called into account” (Haraway, 1988, p.583).

Haraway and Collins have similar requests. In neither case, though, is it a purely individual endeavor, because both the aim to be achieved and the process of reiterated critical evaluation should be taken as available to mutual scrutiny by means of public political and epistemic concepts. Haraway is thinking about of a set of connections “called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology.” (Haraway, 1988, p.584). It is within this context that we are called to account for our actions, values and words, but only because we finally understand ourselves as bodies responding to other bodies. This is a call for responsiveness and responsibility and its epistemological horizon is at the same time a political one. It pursues those epistemic democratic values and shared corporeal meanings that may turn the world more livable for all of us: “We need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life” (Haraway, 1988, p.580).

That is ultimately what this is all about. I believe that a feminist hinge epistemology enterprise has much to contribute to an emancipatory project aiming for a more livable world for all the creatures that share this corporeal inhabiting with us – humans, and non-humans alike.

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