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Alternative Epistemologies and Experimental Philosophy. Considerations Starting from the Reading of the Doctoral Thesis *Socio-epistemological aspects of contemporary Islamic feminism in Romania and Israel. A contribution to the promotion of experimental philosophy* Developed by Mr. Salem Samih Under the Coordination of the Scientific Adviser Prof. Dr. Hab. Florin Lobont

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Abstract: *Reading the doctoral thesis Socio-epistemological aspects of contemporary Islamic feminism in Romania and Israel. A contribution to the promotion of the experimental philosophy supported by Mr. Salem Samih at the Western University of Timişoara, under the guidance of Prof. Florin Lobonţ, allowed me to reflect on feminist epistemology and how it can be the basis for recovering factual data from sociological research for philosophizing, reinterpreted in a non-objectivist social constructionist manner.*

Keywords: *feminist epistemology; experimental philosophy; factual data.*

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Reading the doctoral thesis *Socio-epistemological aspects of contemporary Islamic feminism in Romania and Israel. A contribution to the promotion of the experimental philosophy* sustained by Mr. Salem Samih at the Western University of Timişoara, under the guidance of Prof. Florin Lobonț (Samih, 2024), allowed me to reflect on feminist epistemology and how it can be the basis of the recovery for philosophizing of factual data from sociological research, reinterpreted in a non-objectivist social constructionist manner.

First of all, I analyzed the doctoral student's claim that his master's thesis falls methodologically in the field of experimental philosophy and that this field is a legitimate one in current philosophy. The specialized works consulted by the undersigned (Knobe & Shaun, 2017; Alexander, 2012; Knobe et al., 2012) state almost in unison that experimental philosophy is an interdisciplinary field, which brings together a problem specific to philosophy - especially morals, ethics or bioethics, but also other themes with an anthropological touch, themes that are questioned through a methodology that takes into account particular investigation techniques specific to cognitive sciences, psychology or sociology.

From this point of view, the work in question uses research tools such as the questionnaire - especially specific to the social sciences - but the interpretation of the questionnaires is mainly analytical and hermeneutic-phenomenological and not statistical, as one might think if it were a work of pure sociology. Of course, several statistical elements are not missing from the work mentioned above, but the interpretation of the data, even those with statistical value, is rather dependent on a philosophical perspective. We cannot fail to notice that the justification for the use of these methodologies by the doctoral student is clumsily made and not very impressive from an epistemological point of view, since many formulation difficulties are otherwise excusable for a non-native speaker of the Romanian language and does not master in its entirety, the philosophical stylistics specific to the Romanian language, the author being a foreign citizen and learning the Romanian language opportunistically, during his doctoral internship.

A second problem raised in the analysis of this thesis was related to feminist epistemology - and if we are really dealing with feminist social epistemology and to what extent this thesis meets the demands of feminist epistemology (Anderson, 1995). Such an epistemology would aim at the fact that studies - especially social ones - should take into account different perspectives under which the same social phenomenon can be seen, depending on the subjectivity of the author of the respective investigation. The feminist perspective draws attention to the fact that feminine sensibility emphasizes the dynamics of oppression highlighted in the analysis of the

studied social phenomenon rather than the specific objectivity of traditional epistemology in the social sciences.

More precisely, feminist epistemology draws attention to the fact that most social research is one-sided from the perspective of reception and active positioning towards the studied phenomenon, most of them being carried out from the perspective of the Caucasian male researcher. Even the research done by female researchers, a tribute to the dominant paradigm in the social sciences, is infused with these male and white cultural sensibilities. However, feminists tell us, that a research work carried out from a feminist interpretative perspective is supposed to be responsive to the gender sensitivities (Apostu, 2023) of both the researcher and the investigated population. Concretely, such an epistemology draws our attention to the fact that the myth of scientific objectivity - at least in the social sciences - is not entirely supported, since the researcher's sensitivities, his ideas, even preconceptions, the result of his own gender, class, ethnic socialization, are transposed even involuntarily into the research results - and it is more honest for a researcher not to claim absolute objectivity, but to express the limits of the research as much as they are aware of the researcher, precisely from this perspective of gender, ethnic, class sensitivities, etc. Of course, the exaggeration of such epistemological perspectives led to *cancel culture* - which, in the end, also means the elimination of the other perspective, perceived as the oppressive perspective throughout time.

From this point of view, we ask ourselves: does the present thesis fit into this epistemological perspective? The answer is yes, despite the language limitations we discussed earlier. The thesis proposes feminist epistemology as the context of the interpretation of the collected empirical data and based on which one philosophizes. The doctoral student expresses, as such, from the very first pages of the research, that he is a follower of the dissociation from the perspective of the male gender of the white race, which interprets from an ideologically infused perspective - and, as such, experimental philosophy - probably due to its novelty and of openness to the empirical - can become a research tool for social phenomena related to contemporary Islamic feminism in Romania and Israel. We consider that this perspective, rather philosophical than coming from the social sciences, but with a leaning towards the empirical, allows the researcher to treat such social phenomena through the "interpretive grid" transparent to feminist sensitivities that are born in a culture of oppression - as it is the case of some traditional Islamic communities, but which is not foreign to other cultures either, such as the Romanian or the Israeli one.

This does not mean that the work does not have an ideological component, but rather that this philosophical-ideological component can be subordinated to the *liberation philosophy* (Dussel, 1985) current which seeks to give voice to the emancipation movements to argue first theoretically-pragmatically and, finally, ideologically. This is not new in philosophy, the approach being encountered starting from the contractual theories of modern philosophy to the ghost of communism that haunted Engels' Europe and which he proposes as the ideology of the oppressed classes. This philosophy of liberation represents a current in social philosophy that ideologically feeds the reforming or revolutionary movements. Feminist ideology can represent an ideological-pragmatic foundation for reforming movements in the Islamic space aimed at female emancipation and women's access to education, to civil and political rights, just as the feminist movement in the 20th century led to obtaining civil rights and political for women, to their cultural and social-educational emancipation, to the promotion of gender equality and to the concept first theorized at the philosophical level and then applied in socio-political practice, of positive discrimination.

We consider that the work "sins" in some places through an excess of empiricism and perhaps an insufficient theorization of empirical data, even for work in the field of social sciences, much less for one in the field of philosophy, even if we are talking about empirical philosophy - that is, that philosophy that calls the field data in the argumentation of the philosophical intuition. The passage of the paper left room for questions such as: To what extent does the author of the paper consider that a series of specific elements of quantitative sociological research and tribute to an objectivist paradigm - such as the "operationalization of concepts" - fall within a feminist epistemology, which by definition is it non-objectivist? A second question could be: Considering the same non-objectivist epistemological dimension - such as the feminist one, which theoretically starts from the assumption that the individual experience of each subject is different and, as such, the researcher must rather understand the existential position of the subject and not necessarily the reality of the social phenomenon itself - how exactly did the author of the work introduce the idea of pre-testing the tools if the meaning the phenomenon has and implicitly the tools with which it is researched is totally dependent on the social context and by the particularity of the oppression to which the subject was subjected?

Although we could not extract a definitive answer to these questions from the content of the paper, we assume that a transition between the objectivist and the feminist epistemology - subjectivist in its nature - is

actually being considered a transition that is not carried out in the space of social sciences but in that of philosophy, more precisely experimental philosophy.

Although philosophical intuitions are brought as arguments by the author in support of the philosophical legitimacy of empirical philosophy, they are ultimately the preferred field on which empiricism is applied, respectively the collected data refer to such intuitions with philosophical value, especially from the axiological or ethical sphere and not to social facts, as in the case of the social sciences proper, part of the questions formulated in the two questionnaires rather target concrete aspects related to the dynamics of the professional career of some emigrants in Romania, for example, and the perception of their professional integration and they do not necessarily have an axiological or ethical component aimed at exactly such intuitions that are the object of experimental philosophy. However, most of the questions in the questionnaires have a strong axiological component regarding the intuitions of the respondents on the phenomenon of globalization or the destiny of the Islamic woman in other cultural contexts than those of the country of origin, thus making the instruments as a whole to be considered specific to experimental philosophy.

Being an exercise in philosophizing, the paper does not use representative samples - for example, the 16 Muslim women surveyed in Timişoara do not represent such a representative sample, even if the number of Muslim women in Timişoara is not particularly large. However, philosophical intuition can have as its starting point the answers of a limited quantitative sample, but analyzed punctually and not statistically, since the validation of some hypotheses is not the epistemological foundation of experimental philosophy, but rather the intuition that appears in the mind of the social philosopher when he interrogates the individual social reality and not collective.

We welcome Salem Samih's work, which is one of the few, perhaps even among the first works of this kind in our country, that juxtapose experimental philosophy with the social-feminist one. Although the work could undergo improvements, with a view to a possible future publication in the form of a volume, which would remove, for example, some methodological clumsiness, especially in the application of tools specific to sociology, or by removing some language clumsiness - which although explainable by the status of the author of a non-native speaker of the Romanian language, nevertheless impacts the reception of the philosophical and social content of the work.

The work is also salutary as it deals with a brave theme - that of Islamic feminism - thus contributing to the effort of communication between the Western and Islamic worlds and mutual understanding of the two cultural universes seemingly irreparably disjointed for some.

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