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Standpoint Epistemologies (Lyles)

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Standpoint Epistemology - A methodological choice that focuses on understanding of the nature of objectivity as being directly related to personal experience and understanding. In a sense, there is no 'view from above' (or what Donna Haraway would describe as the God Trick) to give objectivity. All claims to knowledge have to be situated in the experience and understandings that the person in question exists in. It is a post-modern strategy for pinning down objectivity that can be seen as contingent on social factors. It is perhaps better then to say that that while there is no single standpoint epistemology, there an infinite number of standpoint epistemologies.

This is not meant to recode what what once objectivity as subjectivity, but instead to suggest that objectivity is closer achieved through the incorporation of standpoints in order to demonstrate some of the locations where knowledge is recognized as such. Because of this, Standpoint Epistemologies can be seen as a bridge between modernist and post-modernist scientific inquiry. It is not to say simply that all knowledge is relative to an imaginary 'view from nowhere' (thus, reinserting it into the modernist frame), but that stand points are the result of direct human experiences with the social. *"...one of its central conceptual innovations is to describe and prescribe the practice of taking on the cognitive, technical core of the natural sciences and their philosophies..."* (2004, pg. 26)

Situated Knowledge -

In Donna Haraway's formulation, Standpoint Epistemology is about situated knowledge systems that are intimately related to the person's experience in question. The person's context- Their race, class, gender, etc - provides a base that guides some of their worldview. Claims to objectivity then are tied up in these complex relationships of knowing and experience:

"All Western cultural narratives about objectivity are allegories of the ideologies governing the relations of what we call mind and body, distance and responsibility. Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. It allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see." - (1988, pg. 583)

What standpoint epistemology offers then is a tool that allows the complex system of meaning making and knowledge production, in this case hegemonic masculine science, to be seen by situating the knowledge of subordinate positions as being equally situated as any of the other knowledge systems in question. Once one system of knowing can be understood to be situated in such a way, it suggests a studying up. The use of situated knowledges as a jumping off point for research into the sciences in the post-modern mode carries with it the ability to deconstruct the functioning of the old mode of science by showing simultaneously what it is through studying what, initially, it claims it is not.

"Instruments of vision mediate standpoints; there is no immediate vision from the standpoints of the subjugated. Identity, including self-identity, does not produce science; critical positioning does, that is, objectivity. Only those occupying the positions of the dominators are self-identical, unmarked, disembodied, unmediated, transcendent, born again." (1988, pg. 586)

Politics

"...some philosophers, public controversy over a philosophic project is itself a demerit for the project. Such relevance marks the project as not really philosophic. Philosophy of science issues should not, indeed, cannot be settled in a court of public opinion, according to this view." (2004, pg. 27)

Standpoint Epistemology is criticized as being highly political and thus a problematic concept to deploy in the creation of new knowledge. Sandra Harding offers back that this is not the case, and that different accounts of different interpretations will vary in how well they capture or interpret the standpoints of those being studied and doing the studying. Because of this *"...standpoint theory claims that some kinds of social locations and political struggles advance the growth of knowledge, contrary to the dominant view that politics and local situatedness can only block scientific inquiry..."* (2004, p.26)

However, even that incomplete work shows the problems within the modernist model of objectivity and should be encouraged. Where as the modernist model suggest that the Mertonian norms where the only way scientific knowledge could be formed. Instead, Harding concurs with Haraway in suggesting that knowledge is situated. Only though seeking out and including the standpoints of the 'other' can a closer approximation of objectivity be reached. Where modernist science suggest that science is disinterested, universal and neutral,

"...standpoint theory claims that some kinds of social locations and political struggles advance the growth of knowledge, contrary to the dominant view that politics and local situatedness can only block scientific inquiry... Standpoint theory thus engages with anxieties of our era that one can see articulated in the "culture wars," including their science skirmishes, and in reactions to feminism, to pro-democratic race and ethnic-based projects, and to anti-imperial and anti-colonial projects..." (2004, pg. 26)

References

Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14:3 (1988).
Sandra Harding, "A Socially Relevant Philosophy of Science? Resource's From Standpoint Theory's Controversiality," *Hypatia* 19:1 (2004).

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