

# HYPATIA

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## Hypatia

Hypatia (Hy-pay-sha) was an Egyptian woman philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer who lived in Alexandria from her birth in about 370 A.D. until her death in 415. She was the leader of the Neoplatonic School in Alexandria and was famous as an eloquent and inspiring teacher. The journal *Hypatia* is named in honor of this foresister. Her name reminds us that although many of us are the first women philosophers in our schools, we are not, after all, the first in history.

*Hypatia* has its roots in the Society for Women in Philosophy, many of whose members have for years envisioned a regular publication devoted to feminist philosophy. *Hypatia* is the realization of that vision; it is intended to encourage and communicate many different kinds of feminist philosophy.

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# Standpoint Epistemology Without the "Standpoint"?: An Examination of Epistemic Privilege and Epistemic Authority

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*In this paper I argue that the distinction between epistemic privilege and epistemic authority is an important one for feminist epistemologists who are sympathetic to feminist standpoint theory. I argue that, while the first concept is elusive, the second is really the important one for a successful feminist standpoint project.*

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This paper will be a discussion of the related concepts of "epistemic privilege" and "epistemic authority," and it has two different parts: First, I will argue that an important part of a feminist standpoint project should be the demystification of the link between epistemic privilege and epistemic authority. I will then turn to a suggestion for future directions for feminist standpoint theories. I will argue that the project of demystifying the link between epistemic authority and epistemic privilege should lead us to refocus our argument strategies. Demystifying this link should lead us to conclude that we need not expend our feminist energies on trying to reconstruct or argue for a connection between social marginalization and epistemic privilege. We should focus on how epistemic authority is conferred—not through a particular epistemic "position" but by social and political practices and institutions. Instead of trying to reconstruct a workable concept of "standpoint" or appealing to the supposed link between social marginality and epistemically privileged perspectives, we should look to pragmatic or moral arguments to make our case for the inclusion of members of marginalized groups in theory-making. I will begin with a short and rough discussion of attempts to reconstruct feminist standpoint epistemology, move to a discussion of epistemic authority, and conclude with recommendations for future directions for feminist epistemology.

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## FEMINIST STANDPOINT THEORY: VISIONS AND REVISIONS

Sandra Harding has recently attempted to construct a notion of standpoint epistemology that does not fall prey to the problems identified with other versions of the project (Harding, 1993). She draws back from claiming for members of marginalized groups the epistemic privilege that some forms of feminist standpoint theory have attributed to the oppressed. She recognizes that the claim that the oppressed possess unique abilities to produce knowledge is problematic. After all, she points out, "Hegel was not a slave, though he grasped the critical understanding of the relations between master and slave that became available only if he started off his thought from the slave's activities, and . . . Marx, Engels and Lukacs were not proletarians" (1993, 62). Harding wants to argue instead that the experiences of marginalized peoples should "provide the scientific problems and the research agendas—not the solutions—for standpoint theories. Starting off thought from these lives provides fresh and more critical questions about how the social order works than does starting off thought from the unexamined lives of members of dominant groups" (1993, 62 my emphasis). She hopes that this more modest approach to standpoint epistemology avoids the pitfalls of past projects.

Harding has in mind the claim, common to feminist standpoint theories, that the special social or class position of women gives them a special epistemological standpoint which makes possible a view of the world that is more reliable and less distorted than that available either to capitalist or to working-class men. Socialist feminists believe, therefore, that a primary condition for the adequacy of a feminist theory, indeed for the adequacy of any theory, is that it should represent the world from the standpoint of women (Jaggar 1983, 370).

Members of oppressed groups, including all women, have a perspective on the world that is not just different from the perspective available to members of the ruling class, but is also epistemically advantageous. The conclusion usually drawn from this claim is that while theories developed by members of dominant groups will reflect only the interests and values of those groups, theories developed by the oppressed will encompass a broader array of interests and experiences. Theories developed by members of the dominant classes will be shaped by the dominant ideology, based only on the experiences characteristic of life as experienced by members of the dominant group, and will generally overlook the experiences or suffering of the underclasses. The experiences of the dominant group are not, however, equally lost on the oppressed. Their perspective allows them to see not only the lives of the ruling class but also the lives and experiences of the oppressed, and their worldview will be shaped by the interests of the totality in a given historical period (Jaggar 1983, 371). Thus, members of oppressed groups will supposedly produce less-partial accounts of the world than will members of dominant groups.



Harding, by contrast, is clearly uncomfortable with the claim that social marginality confers epistemic privilege, except insofar as those who live their lives outside of the dominant group have experiences that often counter conventional wisdom and the accepted beliefs of the age. She is unwilling to advocate a version of standpoint theory that would claim for the oppressed epistemic privilege in the development of solutions as well as in the setting of research questions. Feminist claims that the oppressed enjoy epistemic privilege with respect both to the context of discovery and the context of justification are often met by incredulity on the part of traditional epistemologists and philosophers of science. We must indeed be crazy, they imply, to think that the oppressed and their situations can have anything significant to say about how scientific problems are solved. Although they may even admit that the oppressed may have something valuable to say about how research questions are posed and the questions that should be pursued, they withdraw from this claim in the arena of justification. The context of justification is thought by many philosophers of science to be immune from illicit value judgments, although the context of discovery can be as irrational as you like.<sup>1</sup> On this reading, any irrationality in the context of discovery is supposed to be irrelevant to the ways in which scientific knowledge is developed. Contrary to this view, feminist philosophers of science, as well as some pragmatists, have argued that the ways in which problems are set is important in how scientific knowledge eventually develops and that a truly liberatory science must not ignore the context of discovery as "irrational" and outside the domain of "real science." Feminist philosophers of science have argued against this claim that problems have been set too often by privileged white men who represent the vast majority of scientists and technocrats.

Harding's project represents a concerted effort to scrutinize the context of discovery and how it relates to the growth of scientific knowledge. Harding points out she does not advocate that socially marginalized peoples be granted the kind of epistemic authority in the context of justification that she advocates for the context of discovery. She sets this issue aside. She assumes either that the context of justification is beyond reproach or that allowing members of marginalized groups to have their input in the setting of problematics will effectively eliminate the dominant values and interests from the context of justification.

Neither of these positions is tenable, however. As Helen Longino (1990) and Anne Fausto-Sterling (1985) have pointed out, the context of justification is just as vulnerable to dominant values and interests as is the context of discovery. The context of justification is the arena in which certain kinds of experiences are taken to be good evidence for a given conclusion, parameters on the kinds of solutions that can be entertained seriously are hammered out, and the kinds of models to be relied upon in evaluating data are established. While Harding's approach is useful, and helps avoid some problems embodied



in appeals made to the epistemic privilege of the marginalized, it takes the bite out of standpoint epistemologies that have claimed epistemic privilege for members of marginalized groups in the production of knowledge *in all its guises*. If we accept Harding's approach, we must surrender some of the strategic power of standpoint theories that claim for the oppressed a measure of epistemic authority in both the context of justification and the context of discovery. If the claim that the socially marginalized enjoy epistemic privilege with respect to the context of justification is troublesome, then the claim that they ought to enjoy epistemic authority in that context also becomes troublesome because epistemic authority is grounded on the assumption of epistemic privilege.

Harding is also trying to avoid other problems with feminist standpoint theories, problems that have been pointed out by theorists within the feminist community. Jaggar in particular notes the problem of identifying "the standpoint of women" (1983). The question of whether all women occupy the same standpoint remains a subject of controversy among feminists; the claim that some women occupy a more epistemically advantageous position than other women remains equally problematic. Nevertheless, Jaggar argues, we can still develop a viable feminist standpoint epistemology if we recognize that such an epistemically privileged standpoint of women is not a given, but instead is attained through social, political, and theoretical struggle. "Only when women are free from domination will they have access to the resources necessary to construct a systematic and fully comprehensive view of the world from the standpoint of women" (Jaggar 1983, 387). The definition of the standpoint of women, then, awaits the revolution. In the *Mean time*<sup>2</sup> on Jaggar's account, women must draw on the epistemically charged experiences of all women.

This raises another problem, one that Rosemary Hennessy points out. She criticizes standpoint theory's appeal to women's experiences on the grounds that such experiences, socially and historically constructed under conditions of domination and oppression, can not be resources for a liberating epistemology. Feminist standpoint theory has made appeals to "women's experience" and the experiences of other oppressed groups as if those were atheoretical givens rather than constructions. Feminists, furthermore, have assumed more homogeneity among these experiences than is warranted (Hennessy 1993).

Bat-Ami Bar On makes similar criticisms in "Marginality and Epistemic Privilege" (1993). Appeals to the experiences of the oppressed, she claims, harbor tacit assumptions about which of those experiences more authentically express the group's identity. The experiences chosen as more authentic are then valorized as resources for liberation. Furthermore, Bar On claims, most feminist standpoint theories depend on the concept of one central point of power from which different groups are distanced out into a sort of "liberated space" that constitutes the privileged position. Not only is the notion of a



liberated space outside the dominant group questionable, but the notion of one center of power, Bar On points out, does not cohere with our present best insights into how power circulates among different groups rather than being possessed by one group and denied to all others.

With respect to the claim that social marginalization confers epistemic privilege, Bar On's conclusions about how feminists should proceed show how complex the issue is. In conjunction with my discussion of Harding's work, Bar On's conclusions also show the dual aims of feminist standpoint theory: the inclusion of white women and people of color as theorists and a desire to think outside the parameters of the dominant interests and values.<sup>3</sup> Bar On argues that considering the trouble involved in articulating a useful relationship between experience, identity, and social marginalization we ought to give up the notion of epistemic privilege. Yet she herself is reluctant to do so because of the license and authority it gives to the speech of the oppressed:

the claim of epistemic privilege in the realm of sociopolitical theory mostly justifies claims for authority, specifically the authority of members of socially marginalized groups to speak for themselves, which is an authority they do not have if everyone is equally capable of knowing them and their situation. Through this justification they grant themselves the authority to produce their own self-defined descriptions of themselves and the world. And they demand that their voices, voices that have been excluded through the process of social marginalization, be given the respectful attention given to the voices of socioculturally hegemonic experts (1993, 95).

The upshot: Bar On is unwilling to give up the demands for epistemic authority licensed by these claims to epistemic privilege.

Using claims of epistemic privilege to secure the right to speak, however, entangles feminists in what Bar On calls the "sociopolitical liberatory project of legitimizing the voices of the many" (1993, 95), but only insofar as the many can claim the status of Enlightenment rational beings. This pits one feminist project against another one: the "neo-Romantic project" of reclaiming the validity and value of emotion is pitted against the project which aims to interrogate the ways in which those rational beings are constructed in Enlightenment thought. We are forced, then, to rely on Enlightenment conceptions of rationality in order to justify our demands for the inclusion of marginalized voices in theorizing. By doing so, however, we undercut our attempts to interrogate this Enlightenment conception of rationality.



## EPISTEMIC AUTHORITY

Here I would like to call attention to the need to distinguish between epistemic authority and epistemic privilege. Bar On sees the two as linked: claims to epistemic privilege and claims to epistemic authority amount to the same thing. If we give up epistemic privilege then we must give up epistemic authority. This is apparent from the very insightful passage quoted above. Let me cite it again because of its inestimable value for the discussion:

“The claim of epistemic privilege in the realm of sociopolitical theory mostly justifies claims for authority, specifically the authority of members of socially marginalized groups to speak for themselves, which is an authority they do not have if everyone is equally capable of knowing them and their situation. Through this justification they grant themselves the authority to produce their own self-defined descriptions of themselves and the world. And they demand that their voices, voices that have been excluded through the process of social marginalization, be given the respectful attention given to the voices of socioculturally hegemonic experts” (Bar On 1993, 95). It is here that we must intervene, though, and change the direction of the conversation. Enlightenment justifications of epistemic authority have traditionally appealed to the concept of epistemic privilege—the idea that certain “objective” observers are in an epistemically advantageous position. Feminist standpoint epistemology turns this notion of objectivity on its head, but still fails to challenge the presumed connection between epistemic authority and epistemic privilege. I think that by demystifying the connection between these two concepts, we can advance toward resolving the conflict between the socio-liberatory project of authorizing the voices of the many and that of interrogating the Enlightenment constructions of who counts as a rational agent. Furthermore, we might develop a version of standpoint theory that avoids the troublesome attempts to define the connection between social marginalization, a “standpoint” on the world, and epistemic privilege but that still allows epistemic authority for those who have been excluded from the production of knowledge.

In the late twentieth century, epistemic authority is conferred on persons or groups through social, political, and economic practices, as well as through sexist, racist, and classist assumptions about reliability, intelligence, and sincerity. Epistemic authority with respect to a certain issue—say, health care reform—is a mantle sewn out of a number of factors. Having the appropriate educational credentials from a prestigious college or university, for example, puts one a long way toward gaining epistemic authority. An analyst who has made health care reform his (I use the masculine pronoun purposely) life’s vocation and specialty gains top honors; but the Harvard-educated white businessman would not fare badly in a public debate about health care reform, especially if his opponent in such a debate carried less impressive credentials.



As a social and political institution whose ties to economics are very clear, education in the United States and its credentialing processes play an important role in constructing epistemic authority.

The exclusion of large segments of the population from such processes is attested to by empirical data.<sup>4</sup> In a study of students who were high school seniors in 1980, the National Center for Education Statistics found that a student's highest level of education correlated directly with her or his socioeconomic status. By 1986, 61.8 percent of the high school class of 1980 had gone no farther than a high school diploma. Of that group, 74 percent of students who were in the lowest socioeconomic quartile had gone only as far as a high school diploma; 66.7 percent of lower-middle class students had gone as far as a high school diploma and no further; 58.4 percent of students in the high-middle socioeconomic quartile had gone no farther than a high school degree; and 45.7 percent of students classified in the highest socioeconomic quartile had received education only as far as the high school degree. In contrast, 18.2 percent of students who were high school seniors in 1980 had received a bachelor's degree by 1986. The breakdown of this population along socioeconomic quartiles looks like this: 6.6 percent of students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile had been educated as far as the bachelor's degree; 11.1 percent of students in the low-middle quartile had been educated as far as the bachelor's degree; 20.4 percent of students in the high-middle quartile had been educated as far as the bachelor's degree; and 37 percent of students from the top quartile had been educated as far as the bachelor's degree. By 1986, only 0.7 percent of the 1980 high school seniors had received a graduate or professional degree, and the only groups of students with more than a negligible representation in this category are the two top socioeconomic quartiles—high and high-middle. When we turn to an analysis of the populations who were enrolled in undergraduate degree programs, we see yet another marked discrepancy. In 1990, 79.3 percent of undergraduates were White non-Hispanic; 9.7 percent were Black non-Hispanic; 6 percent were Hispanic; 4.2 percent were Asian/ Pacific Islander; 0.8 percent were American Indian or Alaskan Native. Of the total undergraduate population, 44.8 percent were male, and 55.2 percent were female. From this point on, the gap widens tremendously, so that we see, for instance, that the demographics of full-time regular instructional faculty in United States colleges and universities look like this: 89.5 percent are White non-Hispanic, 3.2 percent are Black non-Hispanic, 2.3 percent are Hispanic, 4.2 percent are Asian, 0.7 percent are American Indian or Native Alaskan. 72.7 percent of the faculty is male, and 27.3 percent is female. In the categories of public research institutions, private research institutions, public doctoral institutions, and private doctoral institutions, the percentage of White faculty members is, respectively: 90.4 percent, 85.4 percent, 92 percent, and 91.3 percent. The picture is not much better along the lines of sex/gender. 79.3 percent of faculty at public research institutions



are male, compared to 80.5 percent of the faculty at private research institutions, 74.5 percent at public doctoral institutions, and 77.3 percent at private doctoral institutions. In 1989-90, of the 4,168 Ph.D.'s awarded at U.S. institutions in the physical sciences, 2,080 of them were awarded to White non-Hispanic men. White women received 512. Black non-Hispanic men received 18 of those 4,168 Ph. D's; Black non-Hispanic women received 10. Hispanic men received 61 of those 4,168 Ph.D.'s, Hispanic women received 17. 123 Asian or Pacific Islander men received Ph.D.'s in the physical sciences, while 34 Asian or Pacific Islander women received the degree. 5 Ph.D.'s in the physical sciences were awarded to Native men. There were none awarded to Native women.<sup>5</sup> The picture that we get from these statistics is one of seriously lopsided inequality. It is that of an education system in which one's level of education will, to a dramatic degree, be influenced by one's socioeconomic status and one's race. One of the other remarkable aspects of this picture is that, while women outnumber men in their enrollment in bachelor's degree programs, as one attends to the ascending educational hierarchy, we become more and more scarce. The picture we have, then, is one of an educational hierarchy built on socioeconomic privilege that becomes whiter and more thoroughly male as levels of education increase.

In addition to education, certain assumptions about people based on their perceived class, race, or gender play an equally important role in constructing epistemic authority. While a thoroughly nuanced account of the complexities of epistemic authority and its relation to these categories is not possible within the scope of this paper, it is generally the case that people who are perceived to be non-European, female, or lower than middle class generally do not enjoy epistemic authority of any degree.<sup>6</sup> This is true not only in the realm of public policy; it is often true with respect to the interpretation of social conditions and personal experience. People who appear to be white, male, upper middle or middle class, and well educated generally carry more epistemic authority on their shirtsleeves. While those of us who are not upper-middle-class white men may be epistemic authorities in some circumstances (with respect to our children, for example), our authority is usually trumped by "experts"—who are often upper-middle-class white men. Many women find that in telling the story of their own experiences, their interpretations are given less credibility than those offered by husbands, doctors, or other authorities. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman gives an account of such a situation, and that story has its twentieth century parallels. My female students tell similar stories: justifiable anger and indignation dismissed as "ragging out"; criticisms of the social structure pooh-poohed as "feminist indoctrination." My own experience of this lack of epistemic authority occurred during my pregnancy and after the birth of my daughter. While I was pregnant, my husband periodically explained away my complaints and anxiety about what I considered an unequal distribution of household work as "pregnancy hormones." Many



women tell similar stories about encounters with psychologists, counselors, and other doctors in which their very real pain and frustration is either dismissed or explained away biologically or chemically.<sup>7</sup>

This points to a basic difference between epistemic authority and epistemic privilege. Epistemic authority is conferred in a social context, as a result of other people's judgment of our sincerity, reliability, trustworthiness, and "objectivity." Such judgments are usually explained by an appeal to epistemic privilege: certain people are in a better position to "see" the world than are other people. Notice, though, that the attribution of epistemic privilege is secondary, and it is private, not public. Epistemic authority is conferred through practices, and the Enlightenment story claims that those practices have their legitimating grounds in epistemic privilege. One is supposed to have epistemic privilege (and thus legitimate epistemic authority) because of one's knowledge situation. Those who can "see" the world better, so the account goes, are the people who ought to be creating theory and making the important decisions. In the traditional modernist account, those who are in a better position to "see" are objective observers—people who rely on no authority other than experience. These are people who can view the world without being distracted from the truth by religious dogma, emotional involvement, or superstition. Thus, a tall and sturdy wall must be vigilantly maintained between "values" and "facts" to ensure the integrity of the truth. While this was and still is the preaching of the Enlightenment, the practice was (and still is) rather different.

In his study of early modern England Steven Shapin argues that the relations in which we have and hold our knowledge have a moral character, and the word I use to indicate that moral relation is trust . . . our knowledge of what the world is like draws on our knowledge about other people—what they are like as sources of testimony, whether and under what circumstances they may be trusted. Accordingly, the making of knowledge in general takes place on a moral field and mobilizes particular appreciations of the virtues and characteristics of types of people. (Shapin 1994, xxv-xxvi)

Shapin points out that in seventeenth-century England, certain social, political, and economic circumstances, coupled with certain social practices came together to produce a concept of "gentlemanly truthfulness." Gentlemen were taken to be more honorable and therefore more honest. In addition, Shapin claims "it was assumed (without evident obligation to give justification) that all gentlemen not categorized as pertinently handicapped or defective were competent sensory agents. That which was available to be experienced, and thus reported upon, in the natural and social worlds was in fact registered by their senses and experienced in a manner deemed normal



within the relevant community" (1994, 75). This assumption about perceptual competence, however, did not extend to all "normal" people of other classes, and certainly not without qualification. Shapin notes that a long tradition of associating bloodlines with intelligence and competence flowed from Aristotle and still prevailed in Tudor and Stuart courtesy literature. Shapin uses this quote from Romei's *Courtiers Academie* (1598) to illustrate:

Human beings [are] by nature "of diverse temperatures . . . and in their minds different effects and affects are discovered. From whence it proceedeth in reason that some are esteemed to noble race, and others of ignoble; some ingenious, others stupid; some prevail with force of mind, and are truly worthy to command, and others be as it were lumpish sturdy, with whom servitude better befiteth." (1994, 75-76 spelling standardized)

The "lumpish sturdy" were the common people, given to making cognitive errors and believing "fortune-tellers, jugglers, and geomancers." Indeed, not only were normal gentlemen assumed to be perceptually competent while not all "normal" members of other social groups were likewise credited, but the perceptual reports of gentlemen were taken as definitive of perceptual competence. In addition, gentlemen's trustworthiness was assumed to be guaranteed by three other presuppositions: 1) Because they had to maintain their reputation, gentlemen could not be found out in lies, 2) The Christian gentleman, "enjoying the divine donatives, stood in a special relationship with God, 3) and . . . the constitution of legitimate gentility proceeded through religious belief and observance" (Shapin 1994, 81, 83). Gentlemen were disinterested observers as a result of their economic, political, and social independence (Shapin 1994, 81).

Similarly, the "lumpish sturdy" were unreliable as truth-tellers or perceptual agents because of their social, economic, and political circumstances. Dependence on the will of others rendered one suspect. First, it was evidence that one was by nature servile and therefore relatively incompetent; and second, dependence imposed constraints that gave one less freedom to tell the truth in all circumstances. Such dependence was characteristic of servants, commoners, the mercantile class, and, more equivocally, women of the gentle class.

While such "outward signs" of nobility of character and intelligence as maleness, Christianity, and membership in the gentle class were serving as the basis for granting epistemic authority, the rhetoric of Enlightenment science was emphasizing the need to base empirical knowledge not on authority but solely on direct experience. Shapin shows convincingly that even in this most hallowed of Enlightenment spheres, epistemic authority was a function of one's perceived "gentlemanliness." As it still is in the late twentieth century, epistemic authority was a function of social, political, and economic factors even though, according to the official story, epistemic authority was the



function of a quasi-metaphysical epistemic privilege. Indeed, as feminist epistemologists have been pointing out for some time, the kind of epistemic independence that was assumed to be a necessary precondition for a truly empirical science was just not possible and should have been abandoned along with the other remnants of epistemological individualism characteristic of modernist approaches to epistemology.<sup>8</sup> Not only was such epistemological independence impossible in principle, it was not practiced in early modern England.

Focusing on epistemic authority rather than on epistemic privilege makes explicit the connection between knowledge production, social and political practices, and the ethical considerations that influence our judgment of a speaker's *ethos*.<sup>9</sup> In *The Nature and Limits of Authority* Richard DeGeorge defines authority generally as a relationship in which "someone or something (X) . . . stands in some relation to someone else (Y) as superior stands to inferior with respect to some realm, field, or domain" (1985, 14). De facto epistemic authority is a special case of this. Someone (X) is a de facto epistemic authority to someone else (Y), DeGeorge argues, when Y believes what X says simply because X says it. The reasons that Y has for putting so much faith in X's claims are a function of the kinds of beliefs that Y has about X.<sup>10</sup>

Needless to say, these beliefs can be influenced by a culture that puts almost unlimited faith in "experts," as well as a social and political legacy of racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. Our ranking of who gets to count as a de facto epistemic authority is only tangentially related to our beliefs about the epistemic privilege that is supposed to reside in a particular situatedness. It has much more to do with our judgment of someone's character and intelligence. If we do not have firsthand knowledge about how reliable, sincere, and honest a person is, we must go on "outward signs." In a culture in which the authors of information are often anonymous, as in late-twentieth-century America, we are unable to judge on a case by case basis, and we often must settle for believing in the integrity of "objective processes" that are self-policing. So far, these processes have failed to live up to our faith in them. Studies of racist and sexist projects in sociobiology have confirmed that "objective" processes do not ensure that unacknowledged racism or sexism shared by all the researchers involved in a project will be screened out.<sup>11</sup>

Let me return to my suggestions for future directions for feminist standpoint epistemology. Rather than trying to reconstruct the concept of an epistemically advantageous standpoint, those of us who believe the aims of a feminist standpoint theory are valuable need to concentrate on demystifying the process by which epistemic authority is actually conferred. That means unmasking the Enlightenment claim that epistemic authority derives from an epistemically privileged standpoint or position, rather than buying into it. I have tried to do this thus far, but clearly more empirical and philosophical studies are called for. We must acknowledge that moral and epistemic discourses are *not*



easily disentangled; that the moral order and the cognitive order of society are not two distinct aspects of society, but are rather intimately intertwined and perhaps even one and the same thing. We must also, as traditional feminist standpoint theory has argued, look critically at who does the theorizing.

Refocusing the issue of epistemic authority can help relieve some of the tension Bar On identifies between the Enlightenment project of authorizing the voices of socially marginalized groups and the neo-Romantic project of interrogating the reason-versus-emotion dichotomy that inhibits critically examining the dominant construction of rational agents. By disentangling epistemic authority from epistemic privilege we can argue for the socio-liberatory project without presuming the truth of the Enlightenment story about rational agents and epistemic privilege. By showing how epistemic privilege is constructed through social and political practices, we leave open the possibility of interrogating the Enlightenment concept of "rational beings" while still arguing for the inclusion of the voices of the many in our theorizing.

From within this opening, we can then refocus the discussion about theorizing by asking: Whom should we trust to develop what we consider our best beliefs? And why? Thus, I think that we feminists who find much to be gained from some version of standpoint epistemology need to begin to formulate those arguments. To set that project in motion, I offer a picture of how such arguments might go.

Patricia Hill Collins has argued that "epistemological choices about who to trust, what to believe, and why something is true are not benign academic issues. Instead, these concerns tap the fundamental question of which versions of truth will prevail and shape thought and action" (Collins, 1991, 203). So it seems that one way of repositioning the issue of epistemic authority is through the issue of trust. One element of being considered a trustworthy agent of knowledge seems to be accountability. That is, for those of us who have little faith in "objective" methods that are supposed to screen out sexist and racist presuppositions, the problem of who becomes accountable for the theories they produce seems of utmost concern. The present scientific practice gains much of its rhetorical strength from this supposed "objectivity"—the assumption that it remains aloof from interest, emotion, and politics. This picture of science is necessary for the dispersion of accountability in science. On this traditional view of science, science cannot be held accountable for its products because of the supposed distinction between "pure science" or "knowledge for knowledge's sake" and "applied science." Another crucial step in the project, then, is to attack the barricade built between these two different aspects of science and argue for accountability in both.

We also need, however, a rough story about the kinds of epistemic virtues we want in our researchers. Rather than wanting those who do not care at all about the outcome of research, we might argue, we want people who care passionately and who recognize the impact of the effects of knowledge produc-



tion on human lives. We also want people who listen sensitively and sincerely to other and divergent perspectives and who can try to work creatively with the disruption that differences can create. Thus, we want our researchers to exemplify virtues usually considered political or ethical.

By demystifying the connection between epistemic authority and epistemic privilege, we can push the question of why those of us who are socially marginalized have no say in the kinds of projects pursued, the kinds of evidence taken to be good evidence, and the kinds of evidence taken to disconfirm a given theory. We can focus on the political practices that justify and uphold this exclusion, and on the kinds of political changes necessary for including those voices. But as long as the story of epistemic privilege is allowed pride of place in discussing who ought to be included, the real story of economic privilege, race privilege, and sex/gender privilege that determine who will count as one of the potential members in the dialogue and who will be heard remains hidden from view.

This means, in the final analysis, that we cease to argue that social marginalization confers epistemic privilege and, *by virtue of that privilege*, the marginalized ought to be included in science. We instead turn to the argument that, because the socially marginalized bear as much if not more of the effects of scientific research, our voices ought to be included because it is *right* to include us, or that certain kinds of political changes are made possible by including us. So far, the exclusion has been the function of classism, racism, and sexism, the mechanisms of which influence not only access to credentialing institutions, but also constructions of epistemic authority. Furthermore, we may argue, the terms of the debate about who should be included in setting problematics and devising solutions is rigged against marginalized groups by the unexamined and mystifying concept of epistemic privilege.

Sandra Harding tells us that a good way to advance democracy is to follow the Deweyan suggestion that those who will bear the consequences of a decision should have a proportionate share in making that decision. Perhaps we should focus on that claim rather than trying to reconstruct a notion of a privileged epistemic standpoint.

#### NOTES

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1. See, for example, Lakatos's (1990) discussion of Carnap. Lakatos concludes that, for Carnapians and other logical empiricists, the context of discovery cannot be



formalized and as a result "it has therefore been branded a largely 'irrational' process; only its completed (and 'formalized') product can be judged rationally. But these 'irrational' processes are a matter for history or psychology; there is *no such thing as 'scientific' logic of discovery*" (Lakatos 1990, 137).

2. A very useful and expressive term I acknowledge as Marilyn Thie's.

3. I am indebted to comments by Sandra Harding, who made this clear to me.

4. All of the statistics cited here are drawn from *The Digest of Education Statistics 1992*.

5. The remainder were awarded to "non-nationals" or to people for whom demographic information was unavailable.

6. There has been a great deal of work on the issue of "ethos"—a speaker's perceived virtue—in the field of communication studies, and related work has been done in the field of social psychology. See, for instance, McArthur and Resko (1975). In this study, McArthur and Resko found that, overall, with regard to their credentials and their behavior, women in American television advertisements were portrayed as less knowledgeable than men—even about products used primarily by women. In a more recent study of British radio advertisements, Adrian Furnham and Sandra Schofield found that men gave more persuasive arguments than women did, giving scientific arguments 60 percent of the time as opposed to women, who gave scientific arguments only 10 percent of the time (Furnham and Schofield, 1986). In studies of British television ads the results are remarkably similar, except that, in television advertisements, women gave fewer arguments. In fact, often they did not speak at all. See here Livingstone and Green (1986). The empirical studies that do such an analysis by looking at race or class are scarce—a fact that is telling in and of itself. The anecdotal evidence, however, is substantial.

7. For a very good discussion of the forms that such "silencing" can take, see Geller and Harris (1994). Many of the women who tell their stories tell of being locked up in insane asylums for such things as holding unpopular religious views or disagreeing with popular norms of decorum or femininity.

8. Some good examples of studies stressing the insupportability of the notion of the isolated and totally independent subject in modernist epistemology include Code (1993); Nelson (1990, 1993).

9. For many rhetorical theorists ethos is connected with a speaker's perceived virtue, I am using it here to encompass both this notion and the notion of source reliability.

10. It is important to note here that "X" and "Y" need not stand simply for individuals, but may be extended to apply to groups. See Gaventa (1980).

11. See, for instance, Longino (1990); Bleier (1983); Fausto-Sterling (1985).

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