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Why Standpoint Matters

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Standpoint theory is an explicitly political as well as social epistemology. Its central and motivating insight is an inversion thesis: those who are subject to structures of domination that systematically marginalize and oppress them may, in fact, be epistemically privileged in some crucial respects. They may know different things, or know some things better than those who are comparatively privileged (socially, politically), by virtue of what they typically experience and how they understand their experience. Feminist standpoint theorists argue that gender is one dimension of social differentiation that may make such a difference epistemically. Their aim is both to understand how the systematic partiality of authoritative knowledge arises—specifically, its androcentrism and sexism—and to account for the constructive contributions made by those working from marginal standpoints (especially feminist standpoints) in countering this partiality.

In application to scientific knowledge, standpoint theory holds the promise of mediating between the extremes generated by protracted debate over the role of values in science. In this it converges on the interests of a good many philosophers of science who are committed to making sense of the deeply social nature of scientific inquiry without capitulating to the kind of constructivist critique that undercuts any normative claim to epistemic privilege or authority.[1] Moreover, it offers a framework for understanding how, far from compromising epistemic integrity, certain kinds of diversity (cultural, racial, gender) may significantly enrich scientific inquiry, a matter of urgent practical and political as well as philosophical concern. Despite this promise, feminist standpoint theory has been marginal to mainstream philosophical analyses of science—indeed, it has been marginal to science studies, generally—and it has had an uneasy reception among feminist theorists. My aim in this paper is to disentangle what I take

to be the promising core of feminist standpoint theory from this conflicted history of debate and to formulate, in outline, a framework for standpoint analysis of scientific practice that complements some of the most exciting new developments in philosophical science studies.

Contention about Standpoints

Standpoint theory may rank as one of the most controversial theories to have been proposed and debated in the twenty-five-to-thirty-year history of second-wave feminist thinking about knowledge and science. Its advocates as much as its critics disagree vehemently about its parentage, its status as a theory and, crucially, its relevance to current feminist thinking about knowledge. In a special feature on standpoint theory published by *Signs*, Hekman describes standpoint theory as having enjoyed a brief period of influence in the mid-1980s but as having fallen so decisively from favor that, a decade later, it was largely dismissed as a "quaint relic of feminism's less sophisticated past."[2] On her account, standpoint theory was ripe for resuscitation by the late 1990s; it is now being reconstituted by new advocates, revisited by its original proponents, and in Hekman's case (one of the former), heralded as the harbinger of a new feminist paradigm.

Hekman's telling has been sharply contested by those aligned with now canonical examples of standpoint theorizing—Hartsock, Harding, Smith, and Collins, most immediately[3]—but on some dimensions the differences among her critics are as great as between any of them and Hekman. Some ask whether there is any such thing as "standpoint theory": perhaps it is a reification of Harding's field-defining epistemic categories, an unstable (hypothetical) position that mediates between feminist empiricism and oppositional postmodernism.[4] When specific positions and practices are identified as instances of standpoint theory, the question arises of whether it is really an *epistemic* theory rather than a close-to-the ground feminist methodology; to do social science as a standpoint feminist is to approach inquiry from the perspective of insiders rather than impose on them the external categories of professional social science, a managing bureaucracy, ruling elites.[5] Among those who understand standpoint theory to be a theory of knowledge, there is further disagreement about whether it is chiefly descriptive or normative, aimed at the justification of knowledge claims rather than an account of their production. And there is wide recognition that feminist standpoint theory of all these various kinds has undergone substantial change in the fifteen years it has been actively debated. As Hart-

sock observes, "standpoint theories must be recognized as essentially contested" ("Next Century," 93).[6]

As fractious as this recent debate has been, however, there are some things on which everyone agrees: whatever form standpoint theory takes, if it is to be viable it must not imply or assume two distinctive theses with which it is often associated:

First, standpoint theory must not presuppose an *essentialist* definition of the social categories or collectivities in terms of which epistemically relevant standpoints are characterized.

Second, it must not be aligned with a thesis of *automatic epistemic privilege*; standpoint theorists cannot claim that those who occupy particular standpoints (usually subdominant, oppressed, marginal standpoints) automatically know more, or know better, by virtue of their social, political location.

Feminist standpoint theory of the 1970s and 1980s is often assumed to be a theory about the epistemic properties of a distinctively gendered standpoint: that of women in general, or that defined by feminists who theorize the standpoint of women, where this gendered social location is a biological or psychoanalytic given, as close to an "indifferent" natural kind as a putatively social, "interactive" kind can be (to use Hacking's terminology).[7] The claim attributed to this "women's way of knowing" genre of feminist standpoint theory is that, by virtue of their gender identity, women (or those who critically interrogate this identity) have distinctive forms of knowledge that should be valorized.

It is not clear that anyone who has advocated standpoint theory as a theory of knowledge or research practice has endorsed either the essentialist or the automatic privilege thesis. Hartsock and Smith, for example, were appalled to find their explicitly Marxist arguments construed in essentialist terms (Hartsock, "Truth or Justice," *Standpoint Revisited*, 232; Smith 1997); the point of insisting that what we know is structured by the social and material conditions of our lives was to throw into relief the contingent, historical nature of what we count as knowledge and focus attention on the processes by which knowledge is produced. Hartsock is no doubt right that early arguments for standpoint theory have been consistently misread because many of the commentators lack grounding in Marxist theory.[8] I would extend this analysis. The systematic and, in this sense, the perverse nature of the misreadings to which Hartsock responds reflect exactly the thesis her critics deny; their social location (if not consciously articulated standpoint—a distinction to which I will return)

seems to impose the limitations of categories derived from a dominant individualist ideology. Hartsock, Collins, Harding, and Smith all object to a recurrent tendency to reduce the notion of standpoint to the social location of individuals, a move that is inevitable, I suggest, if it is incomprehensible (to critics) that social structures, institutions, or systemically structured roles and relations could be robust enough to shape what epistemic agents can know.[9] On such assumptions, unless the standpoint-specific capacities of knowers are fixed by natural or quasi-natural forces (e.g., biogenetic or psychoanalytic processes), standpoints fragment into myriad individual perspectives, and standpoint theory reduces to the relativism of identity politics.

It has to be said that, in her rebuttals to Hekman and various other critics, Hartsock makes little mention of her early use of psychoanalytic theory (object relations theory) to account for how individuals internalize the power relations constitutive of a sexual division of labor (specifically, reproductive labor) and the associated gender roles.[10] If essentialism lurks anywhere, it is in this component of her original argument, and it is this that has drawn the sharpest criticism.[11] It was the use of object relations theory to develop feminist theories of science and knowledge that Harding challenged in 1986 when she argued that the epistemic orientation attributed to women could not be a stable or universal effect of psychoanalytic processes set in motion by interactions with female caregivers; the characteristics distinctive of women closely parallel those claimed by the advocates of a pan-African world view as typical for men as well as women (*The Science Question*, 167–179, 185). But her critique left standing the central and defining (Marxist) insights of standpoint theory as articulated by Hartsock.[12] Indeed, Harding drew attention to structural characteristics of the power relations that constitute marked categories in opposition to (as exclusions from) whatever is normative in a given context—the oppositions between colonial elites and those subject to colonial domination; between men and women/not-men—and she argued that these have powerful, if contingent, material consequences for the lives of those designated "other" in relation to dominant social groups. It is an empirical question exactly what historical processes created these hierarchically structured relations of inequality, and what material conditions, what sociopolitical structures and symbolic or psychological mechanisms, maintain them in the present. But these are precisely the kinds of robust forces of social differentiation that may well make a difference to what epistemic agents embedded in systemic relations of power are likely to experience and understand. The processes of infantile socialization described by object relations

theory may play an important role but so, too, do the ongoing relations of production and reproduction—the different kinds of wage and sex-affective labor people do throughout their lives—that are at the center of Hartsock's epistemic theory and Smith's sociological practice.[13]

By the early 1990s a number of standpoint theorists and practitioners had explicitly argued that it is this historical and structural reading of standpoint theory that bears further examination; essentialist commitments, if they were ever embraced or immanent, were roundly repudiated.[14] In this case, the variants of standpoint theory that have been live options in the last decade need not be saddled be with a commitment to claims of automatic privilege. Like essentialist readings of standpoint theory, I suspect that attributions of automatic privilege persist not because anyone advocates them, but because they are necessary to counter deep-seated anxieties about what follows if strong normative claims of epistemic authority cannot be sustained. Debates about the viability of standpoint theory often seem to be driven by the assumption that, unless standpoint theorists can provide grounds for a new foundationalism, now rendered in social terms, they risk losing any basis for assessing and justifying knowledge claims; unless standpoints provide special warrant for the knowledge produced by those who occupy them, standpoint theory devolves into a corrosive (now solipsistic) relativism.[15] Hekman protests that, although standpoint theorists routinely claim that "starting research from the reality of women's lives, preferably those who are also oppressed by race and class, will lead to a more objective account of social reality," in the end, these theorists "offer no argument as to why this is the case" ("Truth and Method," 355). Hekman is dissatisfied with Harding's appeal to the epistemic advantage of standpoints that produce less partial, less distorted, "less false" knowledge ("Truth and Method," 353–355; Harding 1991, 185–187), and she rejects out of hand Hartsock's references to standpoints that put us in a position to grasp underlying realities obscured by ideological distortion ("Truth and Method," 346; Hartsock "Historical Materialism," 299). Her objection seems to be that talk of better and worse knowledge can make no sense unless we have a firm grip on notions of truth and objectivity that are robust enough to anchor epistemic justification; standpoint theorists have invoked, but failed to deliver, epistemic foundations.

I believe there is another way of reading the claims central to standpoint theory. Nonfoundationalist, nonessentialist arguments can be given (and have been given) for attributing epistemic advantage to some social locations and standpoints, although they are not likely to be satisfying for those who hanker for the security of ahistorical, translocational founda-

tions. But to get this reading off the ground, a number of key epistemic concepts need to be reframed, and a distinction central to standpoint theory needs reemphasis.

Situated Knowledge vs. Standpoint Theory

First, the distinction. A recurrent theme in responses to Hekman, among others, is an insistence that standpoint theory is concerned, not just with the epistemic effects of *social location,* but with both the effects and the emancipatory potential of *standpoints* that are struggled for, achieved, by epistemic agents who are critically aware of the conditions under which knowledge is produced and authorized.[16] Although the importance of standpoints in this second sense is emphasized in these exchanges, I believe that standpoint theorists should concern themselves with the epistemic effects of (systemically defined) social location as well as with fully formed standpoints.

On the first more minimal sense, the point of departure for standpoint analysis is commitment to some form of a *situated knowledge* thesis:[17] social location systematically shapes and limits what we know, including tacit, experiential knowledge as well as explicit understanding, what we take knowledge to be as well as specific epistemic content.[18] What counts as a "social location" is structurally defined. What individuals experience and understand is shaped by their location in a hierarchically structured system of power relations: by the material conditions of their lives, by the relations of production and reproduction that structure their social interactions, and by the conceptual resources they have to represent and interpret these relations.

Standpoint in the sense that particularly interests standpoint theorists is our differential capacity to develop the kind of a standpoint *on* knowledge production that is a "project" (Weeks, 101), a critical consciousness about the nature of our social location and the difference it makes epistemically. Standpoint theory is itself such a project, carried out both through the kinds of social research that take seriously the understanding of insiders—e.g., feminist research that starts from women's experience and women's lives (Smith 1990; Harding 1991)—and by feminist philosophers who are intent on creating a politically sophisticated, robustly social form of naturalized epistemology and philosophy of science. In either case, what is at stake is the jointly empirical and conceptual question of how power relations inflect knowledge: what systematic limitations are imposed by the social location of different classes or collectivities of knowers, and what po-

tential they have for developing an understanding of this structured epistemic partiality.

On standpoint theory so conceived, it is necessarily an open question what features of location and/or standpoint are relevant to specific epistemic projects. For example, although any location or standpoint that "disappears gender" should be suspect,[19] we cannot assume that gender is uniquely or fundamentally important in structuring our understanding, or that a feminist standpoint will be the key to understanding the power dynamics that shape what we know. The project of developing critical consciousness—a jointly empirical, conceptual, and social-political enterprise—is the only way to answer questions about the epistemic relevance of a standpoint (in either sense) to specific epistemic projects.

But then the normative question reasserts itself: is there any basis for claiming that we should privilege the knowledge produced by those who occupy a particular location or standpoint? Does an analysis of the epistemic effects of social location or achieved standpoint provide a basis for justification or does it reinforce a social constructivism that ultimately gives rise to corrosive relativism? The inversion thesis that underpins most forms of feminist standpoint theory suggests that, when standpoint is taken into account, often the epistemic tables are turned. Those who are economically dispossessed, politically oppressed, socially marginalized and are therefore likely to be discredited as epistemic agents—e.g., as uneducated, uninformed, unreliable—may actually have a capacity, by virtue of their standpoint, to know things that those occupying privileged positions typically do not know, or are invested in not knowing (or, indeed, are invested in systematically ignoring and denying). It is this thesis that Hekman contests when she objects that no argument has been given for attributing greater objectivity to such standpoints.

Epistemic Advantage

The term "objectivity" (like truth) is so freighted it might be the better part of wisdom to abandon it. But for present purposes, I propose a reconstruction that may be useful in showing what a standpoint theorist can claim about epistemic privilege without embracing essentialism or an automatic privilege thesis.

As Hekman uses the term, objectivity is a property of knowledge claims. Objectivity is also standardly used to refer to conventionally desirable properties of epistemic agents: that they are neutral and dispassionate with regard to a particular subject of inquiry or research project. And sometimes it is used to refer to properties of the objects of knowledge.[20] Objective facts

and objective reality are contrasted with ephemeral, subjective constructs; they constitute the "really real", as Lloyd puts it (1996), a broad category of things that exist and that have the properties they have independent of us; presumably Hacking's "indifferent" kinds are at the core of this category of objects of knowledge (1999, 104–106). As a property of knowledge claims, objectivity seems to designate a loosely defined family of epistemic virtues that we expect will be maximized, in some combination, by the claims we authorize as knowledge. Standard lists, from authors as diverse as Kuhn, Longino (1990), Dupré, and Ereshefsky, include, most prominently, a requirement of empirical adequacy that can be construed in at least two ways: as fidelity to a rich body of localized evidence (empirical depth), or as a capacity to "travel" (Haraway) such that the claims in question can be extended to a range of domains or applications (empirical breadth).[21] In addition, requirements of internal coherence, inferential robustness, and consistency with well-established collateral bodies of knowledge, as well as explanatory power and a number of other pragmatic and aesthetic virtues, may be taken as marks of objectivity collectively or individually.

Standpoint theory poses a challenge to any assumption that the neutrality of epistemic agents, objectivity in the second sense, is either a necessary or a sufficient condition for realizing objectivity in the first sense, in the knowledge claims they produce. Under some conditions, for some purposes, observer neutrality—disengagement, strategic affective distance from a subject—may be an advantage in learning crucial facts or grasping the causal dynamics necessary for understanding a subject. But at the same time, considerable epistemic advantage may accrue to those who approach inquiry from an interested standpoint, even a standpoint of overtly political engagement. The recent history of feminist contributions to the social and life sciences illustrates how such a standpoint may fruitfully raise standards of empirical adequacy for hitherto unexamined presuppositions, expand the range of hypotheses under consideration in ways that ultimately improve explanatory power, and open up new lines of inquiry.[22]

Likewise, there is no reason to assume that the qualities of empirical adequacy, consistency, explanatory probity, and the rest cannot be realized, in some combination, in the investigation of objects of knowledge that are not "really real," for example, in the study of social phenomena that are interactive. Certainly, objectivity in these cases may be sharply domain-limited; empirically adequate knowledge about an interactive social kind that transforms itself in the course of investigation will not travel very far, but it is no less objective for all that.

This last points to a key feature of the epistemic virtues that figure on any list of objectivity-making properties: they cannot be simultaneously

maximized.[23] For example, the commitment to maximize empirical adequacy in understanding a rapidly transmuting interactive kind requires a trade-off of empirical depth against empirical breadth. Similarly, explanatory power often requires a compromise of localized empirical adequacy,[24] as does any form of idealization.[25] The interpretation of these requirements is open-ended; they are evolving standards of practice. The determination of how one virtue should be weighed against others is, likewise, a matter of ongoing negotiation, which can only be settled by reference to the requirements of a specific epistemic project or problem. None of the virtues I have identified as constitutive of objectivity in the first sense are context- or practice-independent; they are all virtues we maximize for specific purposes. That said, the list I cite consists of epistemic virtues that have proven useful in a very wide range of enterprises—virtually any in which success turns on understanding accurately and in detail what is actually the case in the world in which we act and interact.

If the objectivity Hekman has in mind were understood in this sense—as designating a family of epistemic virtues that should be maximized (in some combination) in the claims we authorize as knowledge—there would be no incongruity in claiming that contingently, with respect to particular epistemic projects, some social locations and standpoints confer epistemic advantage. In particular, some *standpoints* (as opposed to *locations*) have the especially salient advantage that they put the critically conscious knower in a position to grasp the effects of power relations on their own understanding and that of others.[26] The justification that an appeal to standpoint (or location) confers is, then, just that of a nuanced, well-grounded (naturalized) account of how reliable particular kinds of knowledge are likely to be, given the social conditions of their production;[27] it consists of an empirically grounded assessment of the limitations of particular kinds of knowers, of how likely they are to be partial, and how likely it is that the knowledge they produce will fail to maximize salient epistemic virtues.[28]

The Advantages of an Insider-Outsider Standpoint: A Framework for Analysis

Consider the kinds of epistemic advantage that may accrue to a particular type of standpoint invoked by quite diverse advocates of standpoint theory: that of a race, class, and gender disadvantaged "insider-outsider" who has no choice, given her social location, but to negotiate the world of the privileged, a knower who must understand accurately and in detail the tacit knowledge that constitutes a dominant, normative world view at the same

time as she is grounded in a community whose marginal status generates a fundamentally different understanding of how the world works. Collins draws on the wisdom of black women domestics to illustrate what such an insider-outsider knows, and there are antecedents in the sociological literature as well as a number of parallel discussions in feminist contexts.[29] But one of the most compelling accounts of "what housecleaners know,"[30] one that affirms and extends Collins's central points, is a fictional account: Barbara Neely's murder mystery, *Blanche on the Lam*.[31] Blanche, on Neely's telling, clearly occupies a standpoint, not just a social location; she is sharp-tongued and incisive in her analysis of the conditions for survival that require her to know more, to know better, and to know more quickly, than those she works for. Consider the epistemic advantages of Blanche's standpoint that emerge with particular clarity in Neely's novel.

Blanche is a fill-in domestic for a rich white family in North Carolina whose help is on leave while they sojourn in their summer house. A murder has been committed, but you do not learn exactly who has died until late in the plot. So the story unfolds as Blanche learns the peculiarities and history and finally the murderous secrets of the family that temporarily employs her. At one point, she reflects on the "ass-kissing" behavior of a long-time family retainer: "If it's for real, it's pitiful" (*On the Lam*, 52), she says, but then observes that "a black man in America couldn't live to get that old by being a fool" (*On the Lam*, 60). Performing epistemic incompetence goes with the territory: "This is how we've survived in this country all this time, by knowing when to act like we believe what we've been told and when to act like we know what we know" (*On the Lam*, 73). In particular, conforming to expectations of epistemic *in*authority serves a purpose. As Collins observes, "Afro-American women have long been privy to some of the most intimate secrets of white society" (1991, 35),[32] at least in part because they are treated as epistemic incompetents. Neely, through Blanche, describes in detail how this works. Because Blanche is presumed stupid, and anyway of no account, she is largely invisible to the family she works for.[33] Time and again she gleans information that is critically important to her survival (literally and figuratively) from conversations conducted in her presence as if she were a piece of furniture, from messes she cleans up, garbage she disposes of, errands she is sent on: "As far as the Graces of the world were concerned, hired hands didn't think, weren't curious, or observant, or capable of drawing even the most obvious conclusions" (*On the Lam*, 185).

This asymmetry of recognition puts Blanche in the way of empirical evidence to which few members of the white community, not even the immediate family, would have access. But when puzzles arise that Blanche cannot resolve in terms of what she learns by observing the family directly,

she mobilizes an extended network of other insider-outsiders whose experience has much in common with her's.[34] She contacts Miz Minnie:

> Because she knew the black community, Miz Minnie also had plenty of information about the white one. Blanche wondered if people who hired domestic help had any idea how much their employees learned about them while fixing their meals, making their beds, and emptying their trash. (*On the Lam*, 115)

She learns a wealth of detail about the history of the family she's working for. She learns about its money problems and domestic disputes, its jealousies, eccentricities, legal tangles, and, most important, its position in the white elite; who its members can count on as allies and where the lines of long-standing feuds have been drawn. This collateral knowledge is critical to Blanche's understanding of the situation in which she finds herself; it provides key resources for interpreting fragments of observed behavior as evidence of underlying motivation and encompassing social relations, for checking the robustness of local patterns she has already discerned, and testing the hypotheses she is forming to explain them.

But beyond gathering and cross-checking a wide range of empirical evidence, Blanche has much to say about the uses of evidence made possible (and necessary) by her standpoint that illustrates another dimension of the epistemic advantage that may accrue to insider-outsiders. At a number of junctures Blanche comments on the necessity for a woman in her position to develop a subtle and sophisticated set of inferential heuristics to do with the kinds of motivations that might inform the actions of her white employers. She details psychological profiles that characterize those who occupy positions of power and privilege, sometimes making clear how sharply they contrast with those that are typical for members of her own community.[35] "As a person whose living depended on her ability to read character" (*On the Lam*, 184), she clearly recognizes that this critical understanding is essential; she must be able to discern patterns in the behavior she observes, and to construct and assess explanatory hypotheses about the underlying causes of this behavior, at lightning speed and with unerring accuracy.

As Narayan develops this point, not only do the oppressed "have epistemic privilege when it comes to immediate knowledge of everyday life under oppression" (36), their experience fosters an inferential acuity with respect to the dynamics of oppression that those living lives of relative privilege do not have to develop. Insider-outsiders are alert to "all the details of the ways in which their oppression . . . affects the major and minor

details of their social and psychic lives" (36); they grasp subtle manifestations of power dynamics and they make connections between the contexts in which these operate that the privileged have no reason to notice or, indeed, have good reason not to notice. In short, it is an advantage and a liability of subdominance that you may have to develop sharply honed skills of pattern detection and an expansive repertoire of robust explanatory models to survive as an insider-outsider.

It is important to recognize, however, that this epistemic advantage is neither automatic nor all encompassing. While an insider-outsider like Blanche may have particular advantage in understanding the dynamics of oppression close up, and may be especially likely to recognize the simultaneity of oppressions operating along multiple lines of difference,[36] a condition of oppression is very often unequal access to key epistemic resources: certain kinds of information; the analytic skills acquired through formal education; a range of theoretical and explanatory tools. Narayan observes that, because oppression is "partly constituted by the oppressed being denied access to education and hence to the means of theory production (which would include detailed knowledge of the history of their oppression, conceptual tools with which to analyze its mechanisms etc.)," it is to be expected that "the oppressed may not have a detailed causal/structural analysis of how their specific form of oppression originated, how it has been maintained and of all the systemic purposes it serves" (36). In short, recognizing that the oppressed have epistemic privilege in some areas "need not imply that [they] have a clearer or better knowledge of the causes of their oppression" (35–36). Factory workers in the Maquiladoras District will have intimate knowledge of how work disciplines are manipulated to extract maximum profit, but they may not have access to the background knowledge and information necessary to understand the international movement of capital responsible for bringing a factory to their district from West Virginia, or for moving it to a tariff-free trade zone in Indonesia or Thailand.

A final dimension of the epistemic advantage that accrues to Blanche, and any who use the resources of a location like hers to develop the political-epistemic *standpoint* of an insider-outsider, is the critical dissociation she has from the authoritative forms of knowledge that are born of and that serve (that legitimate, rationalize) positions of privilege. Blanche has no investment in maintaining the world view that her employers take for granted; she is suspicious of the presumptions of epistemic authority that underpin their confidence in what they think they know, and it is this that puts her in a position to outmaneuver them as they attempt to cover up the

murder they have committed.[37] By virtue of having to know how the world looks from more than one point of view, an insider-outsider like Blanche has at hand a set of comparisons that throws into relief the assumptions that underpin, and confound, a dominant world view. As Collins describes the standpoint of an academic insider-outsider, the dissonance between what she knows as a black woman and what she has learned as a sociologist—the assumptions that "traditional sociologists see as normal"—throws into relief the situated nature and the partiality of what has typically been privileged as authoritative knowledge (1991, 49, 51).

What Collins draws attention to here is the capacity of standpoint theory to account for the contributions that insider-outsiders have made to various forms of systematic empirical research. Standpoint theory has the resources to explain how it is that, far from automatically compromising the knowledge produced by a research enterprise, objectivity may be substantially improved by certain kinds of nonneutrality on the part of practitioners. To extend the example cited earlier, it is the political commitment that feminists bring to diverse fields that motivates them to focus attention on lines of evidence others have not sought out or thought important; to discern patterns others have ignored; to question androcentric or sexist framework assumptions that have gone unnoticed and unchallenged; and, sometimes, to significantly reframe the research agenda of their discipline in light of different questions, or an expanded repertoire of explanatory hypotheses.

Some of these epistemic advantages may accrue to those who occupy the social location of insider-outsiders even if this does not incline them to develop critical self-consciousness about the epistemic implications of their social location. Consider the rapidly expanding body of research on the "archaeology of gender" that has taken shape in the last decade. It is largely due to women who have focused attention on a range of neglected questions about women and gender, but nearly half of those who attended the first "Archaeology of Gender" conference in 1989 disavow any affiliation with feminism.[38] While the dearth of contact with feminist literature in other fields has certainly limited the scope of their work, those working in the "gender genre"[39] have challenged androcentric and sexist assumptions in virtually all active fields of archaeological research, and they have successfully introduced questions about women and gender to the research agenda of the field as a whole.[40] My thesis is that the location of these practitioners as women in a strongly masculinist discipline has mitigated against their development of a feminist standpoint at the same time as it has created for them a decisive rupture, in the sociological sense. Their very

presence in the field—specifically, their collective presence, as members of the first cohorts of archaeologists in which the representation of women exceeded 20 percent (Wylie 1997, 95–96)—disrupts the conventional assumptions about gender roles that underpin not only the institutionalized practice of archaeology but also its conceptual framework. This dissonance has sensitized some practitioners (mainly, but not only, women) to questions about gender inequality and gender ideology that were never considered so long as gender schemas remained unchallenged.[41] And in some cases, it has induced those working on questions about women and gender to develop a feminist standpoint.[42]

In short, contra Hekman, arguments have been given for ascribing contingent epistemic advantage to (some) subdominant standpoints. These are arguments that demonstrate that objectivity can sometimes be improved, and partiality reduced, when inquiry is approached from these standpoints, not in an abstract sense measured against an absolute, ahistorical, transcontextual standard, but with reference to one or another subset of the more homely virtues I have identified as constitutive of objectivity. When it comes to solving the complex puzzle posed in Blanche on the Lam, Blanche is a better knower than (most) members of the family she serves, the elite white community of which they are a part, and the authorities who investigate the murder, because she is in a position, by virtue of her social location and her insider-outsider standpoint, to get more and better evidence, to discern motivations more accurately, to make connections between causal factors more quickly, and to test and cross-test a wider range of explanatory hypotheses than virtually anyone else in Neely's story. Blanche's knowledge deserves to be treated as authoritative, with respect to the epistemic project she engages, because she maximizes empirical adequacy (of the localized-depth variety), establishes consistency with a wide range of collateral knowledge, and develops an explanatory account of particular critical probity.

Conclusion

Although Blanche's investigations are fictional and her epistemic project is local and pragmatic, the central points I have made about the salience of standpoints can be readily extended to research in the social sciences and well beyond. Wherever structures of social differentiation make a systematic difference to the kinds of work people do, the social relations they enter, their relative power in these relations, and their self-understanding, it may be relevant to ask what epistemic effects a (collectively defined) social loca-

tion may have. And whenever commonalities of location and experience give rise to critical (oppositional) consciousness about the effects of social location, it may be possible to identify a distinctive standpoint to which strategic epistemic advantage accrues, particularly in grasping the partiality of a dominant way of thinking, bringing a new angle of vision to bear on old questions and raising new questions for empirical investigation.

Extended to philosophical science studies, standpoint theory complements the social naturalism and pragmatism evident in the proposals for reframing post-positivist philosophy of science suggested by an increasingly broad spectrum of philosophers of science. Advocates of standpoint theory in the sense outlined here are centrally concerned to understand science as a collective enterprise shaped by the kinds of factors identified by Solomon (2001). They share Longino's commitment to move beyond the rational-social dichotomy that has so deeply structured divergent traditions of science studies (2002), a commitment that, as Rouse and Hacking have argued, directs attention to the practice (rather than the products) of science as it unfolds in socially and politically structured fields of engagement.[43] And they share Kitcher's appreciation of both the need and the potential for reframing ideals of objectivity so that scientific success can be understood in explicitly normative, pragmatic terms (2001). Most important, standpoint theorists recognize that questions about what standpoints make an epistemic difference and what difference they make cannot be settled in the abstract, in advance; they require the second-order application of our best research tools to the business of knowledge production itself. And this is necessarily a problem-specific and open-ended process.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. I have in mind four recent monographs that, in quite different ways, make this mediation their central objective: Joseph Rouse, *Engaging Science: How to Un-*

derstand Its Practices Philosophically (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996); Helen Longino, *The Fate of Knowledge* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002); Philip Kitcher, *Science, Truth and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Miriam Solomon, *Social Empiricism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).

2. Susan Hekman, "Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited," *Signs* 22(2) (1997): 341; hereafter cited in text as "Truth and Method."

3. Collins, Hartsock, Harding, and Smith all published responses that appeared with Hekman's article. Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "Comments On Hekman's 'Truth and Method': Truth or Justice?" *Signs* 22.2 (1997): 367–74; hereafter cited in text as "Truth or Justice." Patricia Hill Collins, "Comment on Hekman's 'Truth and Method': Where's the Power?" *Signs* 22(2) (1997): 375–81. Sandra Harding, "Comment on Hekman's 'Truth and Method': Whose Standpoint Needs the Regimes of Truth and Reality?" *Signs* 22(2) (1997): 382–91. Dorothy Smith, "Comments On Hekman's 'Truth and Method'," *Signs* 22(2) (1997): 392–8.

   In addition, in the same year, Sally J. Kenney and Helen Kinsella edited a special issue of *Women and Politics* 18(3) (1997) on feminist standpoint theory, subsequently published as *Politics and Feminist Standpoint Theories* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1997); hereafter cited in text as *Politics*. For an assessment of the debate generated by standpoint theory see especially Kenney, "Introduction," in Kenny and Kinsella (eds.), *Politics*, 1–6; Katherine Welton, "Nancy Hartsock's Standpoint Theory: From Content to 'Concrete Multiplicity'," in Kenny and Kinsella (eds.), *Politics*, 7–24; Nancy J. Hirschmann, "Feminist Standpoint as Postmodern Strategy," in Kenny and Kinsella (eds.), *Politics*, 73–92; and Hartsock's response, "Standpoint Theories for the Next Century," in Kenny and Kinsella (eds.), *Politics*, 93–102; hereafter cited in text as "Next Century." See also Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint Revisited," in *The Feminist Standpoint Revisited and Other Essays* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998), 227–48; hereafter cited in text as *Standpoint Revisited*. The focus of these discussions is Hartsock's early formulation of feminist standpoint theory: Nancy C. M. Hartsock, "The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism," in S. Harding and M. B. Hintikka, eds., *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives On Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy of Science* (Boston: Reidel, 1983), 293–5; hereafter cited in the text as "Historical Materialism."

4. Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 24–29; hereafter cited in text as *The Science Question*. See also Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking From Women's Lives* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), ch. 5.

5. Dorothy E. Smith, "Women's Perspective as a Radical Critique of Sociology," *Sociological Inquiry* 44 (1974): 7–14; "A Sociology for Women," in J. Sherman and E. T. Beck, eds., *The Prism of Sex: Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 137–87. Reprinted in Dorothy Smith, *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

6. Welton notes an important shift in emphasis in Hartsock's own characterization of standpoint theory that involves a move "from outlining the substantive

content and difference of the feminist perspective, based upon the shared character of women's experience, to a more formal understanding of the functioning of a standpoint, without emphasis on the actual content of this perspective" (1997, 7). This point is also made by Hirschmann although she notes a persistent emphasis in Hartsock's writing on the "notion of standpoint as a methodology" (1997, 76) and on commonalities in "the process of developing a standpoint," rather than in the content of the standpoints that emerge from this process, that predates "Historical Materialism." Hartsock herself enumerates a number of issues that have drawn critical attention and require further analysis by standpoint theorists of "the next century": analysis of the status of experience, especially the notion of collective experience; reassessment of the factors (in addition to labor) that are constitutive of the experience distinctive for different groups of people; development of a more detailed account of "how experience becomes mediated and transformed into a standpoint" ("Next Century," 95).

7. Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 100–124.

8. Hartsock makes this point in *Standpoint Revisited* (229, 233) with reference to the Marxist-derived account of standpoint theory that she presented in "Historical Materialism." See also Hirschmann's assessment of various ways in which critics of essentialist and universalizing tendencies are unfair to Hartsock's early formulation of standpoint theory (1997, 74–5).

9. See, in particular, Hartsock's discussion of this point. She objects that even sympathetic commentators continue to give the individual (individual perspectives, subjectivity) too much prominence in their formulations of standpoint theory and calls for a clearer recognition of "the importance of epistemological collectivity in the production of standpoint analyses" ("Next Century," 94).

10. In the Marxist-feminist analysis that Hartsock developed in "Historical Materialism," the role of psychoanalytic theory was to supply an account of the distinctive content of a *feminist* standpoint that might be derived from the shared (gender-specific) experience of women. Object relations theory loses its centrality as Hartsock responds to critiques of these universalizing claims and moves away from a concern with content to the emphasis on similarities in the processes by which feminist standpoints take shape—the shift outlined by Welton (1979). Welton, Hirschmann, and other contributors to Kenney and Kinsella (1997) describe these processes as essentially social and political; commonalities in experience become the basis for forming a collective identity and associated standpoint which, in turn, allows for the discursive constitution of experience as salient for understanding the world in standpoint-distinctive ways. Experience does not figure in this account as the autonomous foundation for a distinctive standpoint, but neither is it entirely a discursive construct as some postmodern critics have suggested. Hirschmann argues, in this connection, that "while experience exists in discourse, discourse is not the totality of experience"; the possibility of reinterpreting experience, in the process of formulating a standpoint, suggests that "there must be something in experience that escapes, or is even prior to, language" (1997, 84). By extension, O'Leary ar-

gues that experience rather than identity should be treated as primary in the formation of a standpoint; it is the essentially interpretive process of articulating commonalities in experience that underpins the formation of collective identity; Catherine M. O'Leary, "Counteridentification or Counterhegemony? Transforming Feminist Standpoint Theory," in *Politics and Feminist Standpoint Theories*, ed. Sally J. Kenney and Helen Kinsella (New York: Haworth Press, 1997), 65.

11. There are intriguing parallels here with the use Keller made of object relations theory in her early discussions of the gendered character of scientific practice and with the hostile reactions she drew. Evelyn Fox Keller, "Gender and Science," *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* 1.3 (1978): 409–33; "A World of Difference," in *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 158–79. For an assessment sympathetic to Keller's project see Jane Roland Martin, "Science in a Different Style," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 25(2) (1988):129–40.

12. This is an argument I have made in more detail in a review essay, "The Philosophy of Ambivalence: Sandra Harding on 'The Science Question in Feminism,'" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume 13 (1987): 59–73.

13. See, for example, Smith 1990; Hartsock's discussion in "Historical Materialism" (286–90), and in "Next Century" (95).

14. For a review of these developments, see Helen E. Longino, "Feminist Standpoint Theory and the Problems of Knowledge," *Signs* 19(1) (1993): 201–12.

15. See, for example, O'Leary's discussion of the threat of relativism that arises from a "logic of fragmentation" that many have assumed to be inherent in standpoint theory (1997, 57); and Hirschmann's discussion of "universalist" critiques of standpoint theory (1997, 77).

16. This is a point Hartsock emphasizes in her earliest discussions of standpoint theory: "a standpoint is not simply an interested position (interpreted as bias) but is interested in the sense of being engaged" ("Historical Materialism," 285). She reaffirms this point in "New Century," where she emphasizes that the formation of a standpoint is a matter of developing an "oppositional consciousness . . . which takes nothing of the dominant culture as self-evidently true" (96–97) and in "Truth or Justice" where, quoting Weeks, she argues that "a standpoint is a project, not an inheritance; it is achieved, not given" (370). Kathi Weeks, "Subject for a Feminist Standpoint," in Saree Makdisi, Cesare Casarino, and Rebecca E. Karle, eds., *Marxism Beyond Marxism* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 89–118. This view of standpoints as a (collective) achievement is also central to the sympathetic commentaries assembled by Kenney and Kinsella (*Politics*). See especially O'Leary, Hirschmann, and Catherine Hundleby, "Where Standpoint Stands Now," in *Politics and Feminist Standpoint Theories*, ed. Sally J. Kenney and Helen Kinsella (New York: Haworth Press, 1997), 41.

17. Miriam Solomon offers an especially useful account of various ways in which such a thesis may be construed; "Situatedness and Specificity" (manuscript in possession of the author, 1997).

18. In discussions in which standpoint theory is treated as a resource for developing a response to normative issues (e.g., in feminist philosophy of law) or elab-

orating a "poststructuralist" research program (e.g., in communication or so-
cial work), standpoint in this first sense—as social location—is often empha-
sized: Amy Ihlan, "The 'Dilemma of Difference' and Feminist Standpoint The-
ory," *APA Newsletter on Feminism and Philosophy* 94(2) (1995): 58–63; Mary E.
Swigonski, "Feminist Standpoint Theory and the Questions of Social Work Re-
search," *Affilia* 8(2) (1993): 171–83; Julia T. Wood, "Gender and Moral Voice:
Moving from Woman's Nature to Standpoint Epistemology," *Women's Studies
in Communication* 15(1) (1992): 1–24. Here standpoints are characterized as
gendered subject positions (Wood, 12); "a social position" from which "certain
features of reality come into prominence and other aspects of reality are ob-
scured . . . one can see some things more clearly than others" (Swigonski, 172);
or a recognition that "knowledge is perspectival . . . necessarily shaped by . . .
personal perspective [which is] in turn . . . shaped by the particulars of individ-
uals' life experiences, their relationships with others, and their historical situa-
tions" (Ihlan, 59–60). See also Bat-Ami Bar On's characterization of standpoint
theory as, in the first instance, a form of social perspectivalism, "gender is a
constitutive element of experience" and "some perspectives are more revealing
than others"; "Marginality and Epistemic Privilege," in Linda Alcoff and Eliza-
beth Potter, eds., *Feminist Epistemologies* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 83. And
Sismondo's assessment that "feminist standpoint theory, and standpoint the-
ory generally, makes the claim that there are social positions from which privi-
leged perspectives on knowledge can be obtained"; "The Scientific Domains of
Feminist Standpoints," *Perspectives on Science* 3(1) (1995): 49.

    Respondents to Hekman object that such formulations obscure the power
dynamics that constitute standpoints as a *collective* achievement, reducing
them to the idiosyncratic perspectives of individuals and abandoning the polit-
ical dimension of standpoint analysis. While an analysis of the epistemic effects
of social location by no means exhausts what standpoint theory has to offer it
does have valuable insights to offer, and it need not reduce to the apolitical ap-
praisal of the limitations and capabilities of individual epistemic agents.

19. Helen E. Longino, "In Search of Feminist Epistemology," *Monist* 77 (1994):
481.
20. For an elaboration of these distinctions, see Elisabeth A. Lloyd, "Objectivity
and the Double Standard for Feminist Epistemologies," *Synthese* 104 (1996):
351–81.
21. Helen E. Longino, *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scien-
tific Inquiry* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1990); Thomas S.
Kuhn, "Objectivity, Values, and Theory Choice," in *The Essential Tension*
(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977); John Dupré, *The Disorder of
Things: Metaphysical Foundations of the Disunity of Science* (Cambridge, Mass.:
Harvard University Press, 1993). Marc Ereshefsky, "Critical Notice: John
Dupré, *The Disorder of Things*," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 25(1) (1995):
143–58; Donna J. Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in
Feminist and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and
Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 183–202.
22. This argument is made with reference to a number of research fields in two re-
cent publications: Londa Schiebinger, *Has Feminism Changed Science?* (Cam-

bridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Angela N. H. Creager, Elizabeth
Lunbeck, and Londa Schiebinger (eds.), *Science, Technology, Medicine: The Dif-
ference Feminism Has Made* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
23. This is a point Longino makes with respect to a related but different list of epis-
temic virtues (1994, 479). I have proposed a refinement and extension of
Longino's list in "Doing Philosophy as a Feminist: Longino on the Search for a
Feminist Epistemology," *Philosophical Topics* 23(2) (1995): 345–358.
24. The tension between explanatory power and empirical adequacy is especially
clear when explanation is conceived in unificationist terms. Although Kitcher
has significantly modified his position (2001), his response to worries about
the trade-offs that his earlier account may require is instructive; Philip Kitcher,
"Explanatory Unification and the Causal Structure of the World," in *Scientific
Explanation*, Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, Volume XIII, ed.
P. Kitcher and W. C. Salmon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,
1989), 410–508. I give an analysis of these tensions in "Unification and Conver-
gence in Archaeological Explanation: The Agricultural 'Wave of Advance' and
the Origins of Indo-European Languages," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*
34 (1995): 1–30.
25. Nancy Cartwright, *How the Laws of Physics Lie* (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 1984); "Capacities and Abstractions," in *Scientific Explanation*, Min-
nesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science Volume XIII, ed. Philip Kitcher and
Wesley C. Salmon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 349–56;
William C. Wimsatt, "False Models As Means to Truer Theories," in *Neutral
Models in Biology*, ed. M. H. Nitecki and A. Hoffman (Oxford: Oxford Univer-
sity Press, 1987), 23–55. See also Kitcher's proposal of "significance graphs"
that capture the evolving contextual interests responsible for shaping specific
trade-offs between epistemic virtues such as generality, precision, and accuracy
(2001, 78–80).
26. This is a point Hartsock emphasizes in response to Hekman and other recent
critics. She observes that one key measure of epistemic advantage is the degree
to which a particular standpoint puts one in a position to "grasp the interaction
among the various determinants that constitute one's social location" (*Stand-
point Revisited*, 237–8).
27. I take it that this is the form of epistemic advantage Harding claims for criti-
cally self-conscious standpoints under the rubric of "strong objectivity," *contra*
Hekman's foundationalist interpretation (Harding 1991). See also Sandra
Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: 'What Is Strong Objectivity'?,"
in Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter, eds., *Feminist Epistemologies* (New York:
Routledge, 1993), 49–82.
28. This proposal to treat claims to epistemic privilege as contingent and relative to
independent epistemic virtues raises a question that has been debated since
Harding characterized standpoint theory as an unstable mediation between
feminist empiricism and feminist postmodernism: that of whether, on such a
construal, standpoint theory does not collapse into a form of social empiricism
(*The Science Question*, 136–62). Hundleby addresses this issue in response to
reductive arguments presented by several prominent feminist empiricists; I en-
dorse her recommendation that standpoint theory should be seen as comple-

mentary to sophisticated feminist empiricism rather than as a sharply distinct, competing position (1977, 25, 33).

29. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990); "Learning from the Outsider Within," in Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith A. Cook, eds., *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* (Bloomington Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1991), 35–9.

Prominent among the sociological antecedents to feminist discussions of standpoint theory is a deeply conflicted analysis of Merton's, which turns on a consideration of the epistemic advantages afforded sociologists by race diversity; Robert K. Merton, "Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge," *American Journal of Sociology* 78(1) (1972): 13. Collins cites this discussion as well as Simmel's account of what sociological insights "strangers" may have to offer, and Mannheim's characterization of "marginal intellectuals" (1991, 36): Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1954 [1936]); George Simmel, "The Sociological Significance of the 'Stranger,'" in Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess, eds., *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 322–27. For examples of how insider-outsiders may operate as researchers, see Freire's account of the research practice required to institute effective literacy programs and examples of participatory action research: Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy for the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1982 [1970]); Elizabeth McLean Petras and Douglas V. Porpora, "Participatory Research: Three Models and an Analysis," *The American Sociologist* 23(1) (1993):107–26.

A number of feminists have discussed the epistemic implications of insider-outsider standpoints. In the analysis that follows I draw chiefly on Uma Narayan, "Working Together Across Difference: Some Considerations on Emotions and Political Practice," *Hypatia* 3(2) (1988): 31–48. See also the difference theorists discussed by O'Leary (1997) and Hartsock ("Next Century"), and Chela Sandoval, "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," *Genders* 10 (1991): 1–24.

30. Louise Rafkin, "What Housecleaners Know," *UTNE Reader* (March–April 1995): 39–40.

31. Barbara Neely, *Blanche on the Lam* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992); hereafter cited in text as *On the Lam*. Other mysteries by Barbara Neely are relevant in this connection as well, especially *Blanche Passes Go* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001).

32. As Blanche puts this point: "a family couldn't have domestic help and secrets," (*On the Lam*, 95).

33. In *Blanche on the Lam* Neely draws a series of parallels between Blanche's invisibility and that which characterizes the experience of Mumsfield, a Down's syndrome adult who is a cousin of the main protagonists:

> He went on to mimic some of his fellow churchgoers, including the less than kind comments they made about others among them—comments made right in front of him, because his condition made him as invisible as her color and

> profession made her. . . . All us invisibles are probably sensitive [about being presumed not to understand]. (103)

Neely revisits this point in *Blanche Passes Go*, circumscribing the significance of these common features of experience in a way that reinforces the points made by O'Leary, Hirschmann, and Hartsock about the complexity of the relationship between commonalities of experience and a consciously articulated, collective standpoint (1997).

> Because of his Down's syndrome, much of the world treated him the same way it treated her. So he knew what it meant to be invisible, to be assumed to be the dummy in the room, to be laughed at because of parts of himself over which he had no control. This gave them something in common. But she didn't think mutual mistreatment was a basis for friendship. (62)

34. It is an important feature of Neely's later novel, *Blanche Passes Go*, that a number of those she turns to in the black community—neighbors and acquaintances who work for the wealthy white families Blanche investigates—make it clear that they do not share her critical standpoint (87, 152).

35. For example, "Blanche had seen it so many times before it no longer amazed her—people too rich to worry about being fired from their jobs or evicted from their homes who seemed to seek the threat of total disaster that poor people sought to avoid" (*On the Lam*, 117).

36. An insider-outsider like Blanche may be less likely than race- and class-privileged feminists, for example, to assume that any one dimension of difference is fundamental or essential. This point is discussed at some length by Collins (1991) and is eloquently argued by the Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," in Alison M. Jaggar and Paula S. Rothenberg, eds., *Feminist Frameworks* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: McGraw-Hill, 1984), 202–9.

37. As Hartsock observes, this critical distance underpins a complex analysis: "It is worth remembering that the vision of the ruling groups structures the material relations in which all parties are forced to participate and, therefore, cannot be dismissed as simply false," ("*Next Century*," 96).

38. Alison Wylie, "The Engendering of Archaeology: Refiguring Feminist Science Studies," *Osiris* 12 (1997): 80–99.

39. This is the term Conkey and Gero use to refer to this growing tradition of non-feminist archaeological research on questions about women and gender (1997); Margaret W. Conkey and Joan M. Gero, "Gender and Feminism in Archaeology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 411–37.

40. I develop this argument in more detail in "Doing Social Science as a Feminist: The Engendering of Archaeology," in *Science, Technology, Medicine: The Difference Feminism Has Made*, ed. Angela N. H. Creager, Elizabeth Lunbeck, and Londa Schiebinger (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 23–45.

41. I use the term gender schemas in the sense elaborated by Virginia Valian, *Why So Slow? The Advancement of Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999).

42. This has had the effect not only of opening up a range of new lines of research but of mobilizing interest in a number of practical and political questions about how the gender structures evident in archaeology are created and main-

tained. A particular focus for these discussions has been the organization of ar-
chaeological labor in various contexts, employment and reward structures, and
typical patterns of recruitment and training in archaeology. See, for example,
contributions to the section "Gender and Practice" in *Gender and Archaeology*,
ed. Rita P. Wright (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996),
199–280; and contributions to Margaret C. Nelson, Sarah M. Nelson, and Ali-
son Wylie (eds.), *Equity Issues for Women in Archaeology*, Archaeological Papers
of the American Anthropological Association, No. 5 (Washington, D.C.: Amer-
ican Anthropological Association, 1994).

45. For example, Ian Hacking, "The Self-Vindication of the Laboratory Sciences,"
in *Science as Practice and Culture*, ed. Andrew Pickering (Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 1992), 29–64.

A World of Sciences

Sandra Harding

The Information Society and Indigenous Knowledge Movements

During the last four decades, expanded globalization has been accompa-
nied by increased interests in cultural identity. Indeed, social theorists see
the latter as an expectable response to the increased homogenization and
universalization of cultural forms created by the globalization of econo-
mies, politics, and of culture itself.

Both tendencies have generated distinctive interests in scientific and
technological knowledge and practices. On the one hand, the base of the
global economy has shifted from industrial manufacture to the production
and management of information. Witness the way money speeds around
the world with the tap of a computer key, leaving changed patterns of labor
and leisure in its wake, bringing down some governments and stabilizing
others, and making some groups immensely wealthy (for sometimes only a
very short time) and others yet further impoverished. It becomes more and
more difficult to see Western modern sciences as only Western; they do in-
deed seem to be truly international. Yet at the same time, paradoxically, it
has also become more difficult to see their direction as independent of
powerful social and political interests and desires.

On the other hand, a global movement has begun to establish intellec-
tual property rights for indigenous knowledge; indigenous knowledge
ministries have been established in at least several countries; the United
Nations and other organizations have sponsored indigenous knowledge
conferences around the world; and the World Wide Web permits an ongo-
ing global networking and exchange of information about the past, pres-
ent, and possible futures of indigenous knowledge systems. (For example,