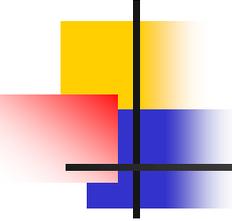


# Knowledge, Value Neutrality and Impartiality

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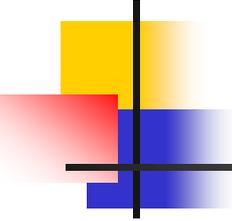
June 25-28, 2010  
XIV IAPh Symposium 2010, Feminism, Science and Values  
The University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada



# Plan of the Paper

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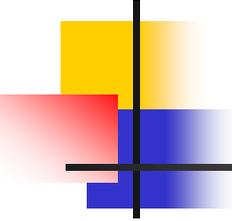
- The 'bias' paradox
- Value-neutrality and Impartiality
- Values and the goals of enquiry
- The case against value-neutrality
- Anderson's case for impartiality
- In Praise of Partiality
- Answering the Paradox
- Standpoint and Empiricism: A Re-assessment



# The 'bias' paradox - I

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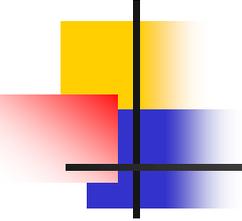
- Several feminists have criticised several scientific theories for their sexist biases (e.g. Longino, 1990)
- But feminists have also generally argued that value-free and impartial theories are impossible (e.g. Harding, 1986).
- This situation seemingly leads to a paradox:
  - if bias is inevitable, then it is pointless to criticise others for being biased (Antony, 1993).
  - If impartiality is impossible, then it is futile to criticise others for being partial. But if impartiality is possible and a good thing, then feminist values cannot play any positive role (Anderson, 2002, 498)



# The 'bias' paradox -II

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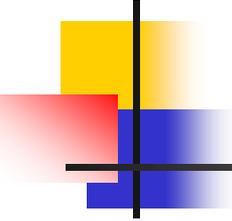
- Some critics of feminist epistemology advocate on feminist grounds support for value free enquiry (Cf. Haack, 1997).
- Others attempt to develop a criterion to determine which values, and in which roles, can *legitimately* play a role in the *justification* of theories (e.g., Antony, 1993 and Anderson, 1995, 20002 and 2004)



# Value Neutrality and Impartiality

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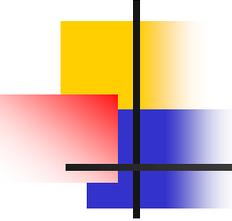
- There are at least senses in which science could be objective (Cf Lacey, 1999 and 2002; Anderson, 2002 and 2004):
  - Value-neutrality: Scientific theories do not imply or presuppose any noncognitive intrinsic value judgements, nor do scientific theories serve any particular non-cognitive values more fully than others (Anderson, 2002, p. 497 and 2004, p. 3)
  - Impartiality: The only grounds for accepting a theory are its relations to the evidence and their manifestations of the cognitive values. These grounds are impartial among rival noncognitive values (Anderson, 2002, p. 497 and 2004, p. 3)



# Values and the goals of enquiry

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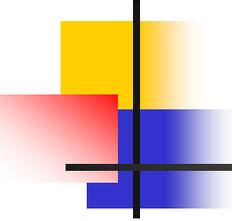
- Value-neutrality and impartiality are themselves evaluative concepts.
- Their value will depend on whether they promote the ends or goals of enquiry.
- The ends or goals of enquiry are:
  - Knowledge or truth (Anderson, 2002, 498)
  - Significance or relevance (Anderson, 2002, 498)
  - Understanding



# The case against value-neutrality

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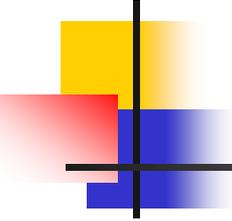
- Value-neutrality undermines the goal of producing *significant* truths, because assessments of significance depend on value-laden judgements.
- Significance is an evaluative matter
- Cognitive values are not enough to determine significance.
- Significance is relative to practical interests, sociopolitical and moral values.



# The legitimate justificatory roles of non-cognitive values

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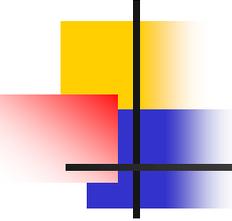
- Three ways in which contextual values matter to theory choice:
  - Values contribute to determining standards of significance and adequacy to be met by theories.
  - Values contribute to the classification of objects and phenomena into kinds.
  - Values contribute to choices of methods since some possibilities can only be explored by the use of some methods rather than others.



# Value neutrality is not a value

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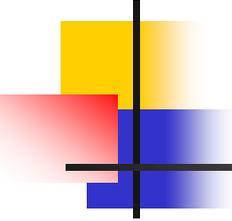
- One aim of enquiry is the production of knowledge which is significant or relevant
- What makes an item of knowledge significant or relevant is often relative to one's contextual values or interests.
- Therefore, contextual values are among the determinants of which theories should be accepted as containing significant knowledge.
- Therefore, value neutrality is not an ideal or a value to be adopted in enquiry.



# Anderson's case for impartiality

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- A provisional view:
  - The only grounds for accepting a theory as true are those permitted by the value of impartiality.
  - Contextual values contribute to determining the choice of the most significant theory among those which are legitimately accepted as true.
- Impartiality does not require value neutrality.

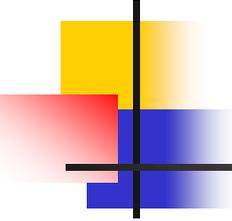


# Problems for the provisional view

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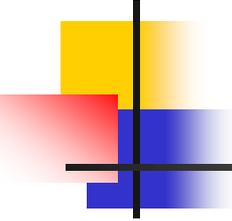
- Undermining the provisional view:
  - The theory itself can include concepts which are evaluative (e.g., employed; pathogenic; dominant).
  - The evidence itself can include facts which are the result of social intervention.
  - The ranking of cognitive values and their distinction from non-cognitive ones is itself an evaluative matter which depends on socio-political values
- Evidence for a theory is NOT independent of contextual values
  - How data are classified can be value-dependent
  - Whether some data exist can depend on value driven social intervention
  - Which cognitive values matter most can be driven by contextual values
  - How telling some data is, depends on which alternatives should be considered (and that is a value driven matter of significance)

# Is impartiality a value? Which value?



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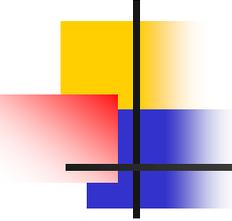
- The problems with the provisional view lead Anderson to revise impartiality.
- Revision 1: the grounds adduced to justify a theory should be based on standards that transcend the competing interests of advocates of rival views (Anderson, 1995).
  - No further than original view
  - A problematic moral reading (moral impartiality is the only legitimate value)
- Revision 2: '*Given* the same background assumptions, and accepting the conceptual frameworks of all hypotheses for the sake of argument, all rational inquirers will agree on the *direction* of support a given body of new evidence offers to rival hypotheses, regardless of the value judgements they accept' (Anderson, 2002, 514).
  - A very weak definition which is of no use in theory choice



# In praise of partiality-I

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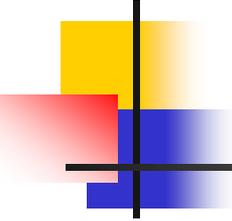
- But why think impartiality is a value?
  - Assumed that value judgments do not stand in evidential connections with factual judgements.
    - Clearly false as we know from the Frege-Geach problem for expressivism.
  - Assumed that value judgments are never rationally held (or are all on a par) and in particular that final ends are never rationally chosen.
    - Values are not on a par. It is still a matter of debate whether final ends can be rationally chosen.
- If these assumptions are rejected, then there is no reason why values could not be included among the evidence for accepting a theory.
- This is not accepting propaganda- values too like the rest of the evidence should be subjected to scrutiny.



# In praise of partiality-II

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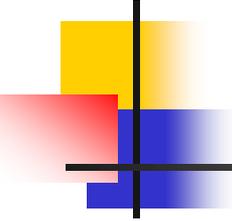
- What sort of scrutiny?
  - Values must be viable: they must not presuppose factual claims that are incompatible with properly accepted theories.
  - Values must be epistemically fruitful: they support theories which manifest cognitive values to a high degree
  - Values must be rationally defensible on moral grounds
- It does not mean that the same values should be rationally held by everybody (what is intrinsically valuable for a person may depend on their circumstances.)



# Answering the Paradox

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- The use of contextual values in the justification of theory is legitimate iff:
  - The values themselves are justified on grounds which are independent of the theory they support.
  - The values are viable and epistemically fruitful.
- Local epistemology: which intrinsic values are rationally held might depend on circumstances that vary from person to person



# Standpoint and Empiricism: A Re-assessment

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- The standpoint of the oppressed is epistemically privileged.
- The values which are rationally held by those whose circumstances are oppressive are more likely to be both viable and fruitful.