

Consensus, Dissensus, and Democracy: What is at Stake in Feminist Science Studies?

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Abstract

If feminists argue for the irreducibility of the social dimensions of science, then they ought to embrace the idea that feminist and non-feminist scientists are not in collaboration, but in fact defend different interests. Instead, however, contemporary feminist science studies literature argues that feminist research improves particular, existing scientific enterprises, both epistemically (truer claims) and politically (more democratic methodologies and applications). I argue that the concepts of empirical success and democracy at work in this literature from Longino (1994) and Harding (1996), to Longino (2002), Gilbert and Rader (2001), and Keller (2001) are not sufficiently critical, and fail to do justice to the truly revolutionary work done by feminist scientists. I offer the beginnings of an epistemology of dissensus (as opposed to consensus), using the work of Haraway (1978), Lyotard (1984), and Ziarek (2001). How would such an epistemology relate to feminist discussions of the possibility of democratic, responsible knowledge?

Keywords: gender, democracy, consensus, dissensus, feminism, postmodernism, modernity, Lyotard, Haraway, Longino, Popper, primatology, universal history

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