

Discovering Reality

Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science

During the last decade, feminist research has attempted to add understandings of women and their social activities to what we all thought we knew about nature and social life. However, from the very beginning of this project, it has appeared to be in tension with some of the most fundamental insights of the Second Women's Movement. Only recently has the nature of this tension become clear. Within the theories, concepts, methods and goals of inquiry we inherited from the dominant discourses we have generated an impressive collection of "facts" about women and their lives, cross-culturally and historically - and we can produce many, many more. But these do not, and cannot, add up to more than a partial and distorted understanding of the patterns of women's lives. We cannot understand women and their lives by adding facts about them to bodies of knowledge which take men, their lives, and their beliefs as the human norm. Furthermore, it is now evident that if women's lives cannot be understood within the inherited inquiry frameworks, then neither can men's lives. The attempts to add understandings of women to our knowledge of nature and social life have led to the realization that there is precious little reliable knowledge to which to add them. A more fundamental project now confronts us. We must root out sexist distortions and perversions in epistemology, metaphysics, methodology and the philosophy of science - in the "hard core" of abstract reasoning thought most immune to infiltration by social values.

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