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### Comments on Anderson

Commentary on Elizabeth Anderson's "Uses of Value Judgments in Science"

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Anderson presents a carefully argued case for the validity of value judgments in empirical processes of inquiry. It has become widely accepted that certain kinds of values govern scientific theory choice—values such as breadth, coherence, parsimony, simplicity, accuracy, and even 'elegance.' These criteria are called values because they operate as ideals or goals as well as constraints that guide the formulation of theory. They are also 'value-like' in leading sometimes to conflicting judgments (as, for example, when the pursuit of accuracy threatens the pursuit of breadth). They have come to be seen as widely used by good scientists over the

centuries, even though their use exceeds empirical argument or evidentiary support.

However, these sorts of values are not the ones that elicit the most controversy or concern when one talks about the role of values in science. The kinds of values that elicit controversy, and the ones that have received much less support in circles of philosophy of science, are feminist values, anti-racist values, progressive values, democratic values, in short, political values. How can political values play a legitimate role in research, beyond the formulation of questions? As Anderson notes, such influential theorists as Clifford Geertz, Susan Haack, and the team of Paul Gross and Norman Levitt have argued that they cannot, without sacrificing the integrity of empirical methods.

Anderson thus takes on two challenging questions in this paper: the first is whether political values have any legitimate role to play in theory choice, and the second is whether feminist political values in particular, as opposed to anti-feminist political values, have a legitimate role.

Not all political values will have positive epistemic effects, she argues. Anderson claims that feminist philosophers of science have not done the work of setting out criteria by which to show which values will have positive epistemic effects, and which will not. One might suggest here that the search for universal criteria is wrongheaded because the utility and validity of any given political value will be related to a particular context of inquiry. How far Anderson would go toward such a contextualism about specific values in regard to specific projects of inquiry is unclear in this paper. What she does argue for is the adoption of a universal criterion that should apply to all political values when we are considering their use in science, and that criterion is whether they are values that are themselves based on empirical argument, in which case they will be held non-dogmatically and will be subject to revision in the light of future experience. The criterion by which we should judge values, then, is not political, but empirical.

The real worry behind the anti-values argument in philosophy of science is the worry about dogmatism, Anderson claims. This is because values are assumed to be without empirical foundation and adopted on impulse or on sentiment. Such values would indeed act as unrevisable and ultimately irrational constraints on theory, but Anderson's counter here is that values need not be held in this way. If feminist values are based on an understanding of biology, of history, and generally of the social world, they can be revised by further experience.

Anderson develops her case in defense of feminist values via a case study on the contentious topic of the effects of divorce on family well-being. She uses an exemplary case of feminist research on this topic to argue that political values played a legitimate role in not only formulating the questions but also articulating the object of inquiry, deciding what types of data to collect, carrying out and analyzing that data collection, and drawing conclusions. She shows that feminist values helpfully informed each step of this process, enhancing the *epistemic* results. And she argues further that, if a set of values can be shown to result in superior research, then those values have a reason in their favor to be used again and to be favored over contrary values. Thus, she argues, feminist values are favorable to anti-feminist values in producing epistemically adequate results.

I want to consider two possible objections to Anderson's arguments, from two opposing positions. One side might contest Anderson by saying she is not conservative enough; another side might contest Anderson by saying she is too conservative. I will develop each of these criticisms.

The first objection would come from those who want to keep science free of political values. From this perspective, someone will no doubt look at Anderson's case study and say, "This is just good science." That is, the values that the Stewart *et al* feminist research team used were not political but properly scientific: they valued comprehensiveness (and thus looked both for both positive and negative effects of

divorce), they valued methodological rigor (and thus wanted a larger sample than psychotherapy clients), and they valued basic intellectual integrity (and thus sought out more data when the evidence came in to support their evaluative preferences, such as when the evidence showed that working full time for divorced mothers was good for their children).

Thus, some might argue that the Stewart team were just good scientists, and the contrasting case Anderson uses – the Wallerstein study – were just comparably worse scientists, and the respective views on feminism held by these researchers are not essential to explain the contrast here. Moreover, one might hypothesize that there could be other comparisons between cases where the good team had the anti-feminist values and the bad team had the feminist values. Therefore, the presence or absence of feminist values is not a relevant criterion: good science is just good science.

Against this sort of view, Anderson wants to argue that we can draw lessons from her case study that would favor feminist over non-feminist values, because the feminist values of the Stewart *et al* team were relevant to the outcome of their study. In order to show this, Anderson needs to address why the feminist values she identifies in her case study are not simply good empirical procedures. I believe she could make such an argument, but to do so she needs to define what feminist values are. In the case study she is using, feminist values are evident in the researcher's respect for what the women have to say about their situation. Such respect does not have to take women's self-understanding as always correct, but it should extend as much respect to their knowledge of themselves, of their own needs, and of their children's needs as is accorded to researchers who are operating on much less information. The researchers also used the guiding premise that women may have legitimate needs that extend beyond their role as mothers, so that a study of divorce should look at effects on all parties independently as well as interdependently. Moreover, the motivation to go beyond psychotherapy clients may hinge on

the feminist idea that divorce and separation is not necessarily a cause of trauma and heartache in women's lives, but could be experienced in some cases as a relief, even a liberation.

Thus, Anderson could argue against this imagined objection that the non-political values such as accuracy and comprehensiveness were not the only values operating on the Stewart team's decisions, nor would they be sufficient in themselves to determine *how* the pursuit of comprehensiveness or rigor is carried out. And anti-feminists who assume that women have no legitimate needs beyond their families and cannot find happiness outside of relationships would end up ignoring some of the relevant data on divorce, as the Wallerstein study did. An empirical study of the effects of divorce is arguably served better by feminist than anti-feminist values, because it requires feminist values to include women's self-understandings, assume the legitimacy of their independent needs, and not assume that marriage is always a better condition than divorce for women's psychological states. It may also require feminist values to see that children are not necessarily better off being raised by a subordinated, disempowered mother, and that such an experience may well lead to psychological difficulties in their own future adulthood.

Now let me consider another possible objection to Anderson's argument, coming from another side altogether. By only legitimating political values that are empirically testable and in fact tested, one might worry that Anderson is really just a simple empiricist after all. In other words, values are playing no independent role in research if all that she allows in are revisable empirical generalizations (for example, women sometimes flourish outside of relationships; or, authoritarian family structures are not always best). Are these values at all, or is it merely that the Stewart team's research was informed by more adequate knowledge generally?

I want to differentiate this objection from the objection above that the Stewart team was just using "good science." That objection held that the feminist claims about women or families were inessential to the research process; all that was essential was that the team pursued the values of comprehensiveness, rigor, integrity, and so on. Here, the objection I am considering is not that the feminist values were irrelevant, but that they are not, properly speaking, values.

To the extent that the political values Anderson legitimates are empirically grounded, revisable claims, it does seem odd to call them values. Values would determine one's attitude to whether women had a right to happiness outside of family obligations. But the project of inquiry the Stewart team pursued concerned simply the question of what the effects of divorce are, a descriptive project. An anti-feminist might still accept the Stewart data, but argue that, because women's interests should be subservient to others, much of their data is irrelevant anyway. An anti-feminist's concern would be restricted to the well-being of the children and the father. Here, then, seems to be a real value conflict. Anderson's formulation of values as empirically grounded, revisable generalizations would not be able to solve this kind of stalemate. Rather, the conflict between the feminist and anti-feminist values I just described is a conflict that motivates the conflict that Anderson describes, but is not one that her analysis can address.

On the one hand, I am drawn by Anderson's common sense argument that feminist values are empirically grounded in what we know to be true, not simply based in sentiment or impulse. Feminism is based in a set of beliefs about women's capacities, it is true. On the other hand, these beliefs about women's capacities are actually compatible with at least some forms of anti-feminism, as when arguments are made that women's subordination in the family is necessary for our species (or culture) to survive, no matter what women want or are capable of. So the empirical facts about women's capacities are not sufficient to establish the claim that women

therefore deserve equal rights to autonomy, nor are they sufficient to persuade researchers to base their research methods on feminist values.

Thus, I would argue that, although feminism is based in a set of empirically revisable beliefs, that does not exhaust the meaning and implications of feminist values. What we know to be the case about women today will surely be revised; what we want for women, in broad strokes, will not be. What empirical facts could revise the commitment to take into account women's own subjective point of view, to accord women autonomy and self-determination, to value their needs and interests and desires and rights to bodily integrity at least as highly as we value all others? For that kind of claim, we need a value commitment that is not revisable. Call me a sentimentalist if you like.