

From Linda Martin Alcoff, "On Judging Epistemic Credibility: Is Social Identity Relevant?", *Philosophic Exchange*, Vol. 29 (1999), No. 1.

On the other hand, feminist philosophy continues to be regularly derided in the profession as inappropriately political in setting its philosophical goals. But this criticism is itself based in a political opposition to feminism rather than in a philosophical argument informed by the history of philosophy.

In a recent work on the history of epistemology, Mary and Jim Tiles provide a useful correction to the revisionist histories of modern epistemology which forget its open political motivations.¹ One will find here that in Silber's grouping of feminists, Marxists, and postmodernists also has to be included such figures as Kant, Locke, Russell, and the Vienna Circle, who unashamedly declared and defended the political motivations of their work. Locke's attack on innate ideas in the seventeenth century was motivated by the concern to stem a religious development known as Enthusiasm, which actually gave women a voice in public spaces on the basis of their claim to spiritual insight. And Kant argued that his critique of reason was necessary in order to defeat a dogmatism that he defined as based in "a conception of objective knowledge as knowledge of objects that exist independently of human beings."² Kant believed that such a dogmatism would commit the human species to a Hobbesian state of nature, that is, an incessant state of war, in which "assertions and claims" can only be established "through war." He argued that transcendental idealism, in linking knowledge of objects with practices of human reason, affords rational procedures of disputation the *epistemic* ability to decide the truth. Kant then goes on to defend the revolutionaries' demands for free speech on the grounds that a public agreement achieved through open discussion is a

¹ Mary Tiles and Jim Tiles, *An Introduction to Historical Epistemology: The Authority of Knowledge*, 1993.

“criterion by which we distinguish knowledge from belief.” In the midst of philosophical argument Kant thus takes an interested stand in the ongoing cultural and political revolutionary ferment of his era, and even offered these political considerations as providing reasons in favor of a certain epistemic account. This must surely discredit the claim that philosophies that wear their politics on their sleeve are by that act discredited.

The Tiles show this case in more detail than I can recount here, and in regard to other leading modernist philosophers alongside Kant. Most recently, Russell and the members of the Vienna Circle unashamedly explained that their emphasis on logic and empirical verifiability was motivated by a desire to defeat fascism. They put forth logical positivism as a means to discredit totalitarian ideologies that were based in emotive appeals to empirically unsupportable claims about racial superiority and the destinies of specific cultures.

Somehow, later in this century these political agendas were erased from the official histories taught to graduate students, and we now have a generation of philosophers who believe philosophy to be properly apolitical, which is one of the reasons for feminist philosophy’s disapprobation.