
Editorial: On Evidence and Knowledge

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The recent publication and subsequent withdrawal of an incendiary blog in *Huffington Post SA* because of a lack of verification of its author or statistical claims in the blog,¹ underscores an issue relevant to scholarship in general and to Old Testament Studies in particular: the construction of valid arguments and the use of evidence for these constructions as well as the eagerness to publish material in line with a particular ideology.

In the 1990's these issues were squarely put on the table by Martin Bernal with his publication in 1987 of *Black Athena. The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization (The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985, Volume 1)*. Bernal's major premise was the importance of the socio-political location of the interpreter that plays a role in the reading of a text. Attached to that was his view that European scholars stood within particular socio-political locations of imperialism and colonialism when they constructed the history of the ancient Eastern Mediterranean. In other words, there is a particular coloniality of knowledge still at work in their renditions.

The book generated quite a discussion, resulting in an anthology in 1996 called *Black Athena Revisited* (edited by Mary Lefkowitz and Guy MacLean Rogers) and a book by Lefkowitz in 1998 *Not out of Africa. How "Afrocentrism" became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*. Her main point of criticism was the issue of evidence, or rather, the lack of it as well as a denial that race or anti-Semitism have influenced her thinking about the cultural debt Greece had towards Egypt. In the ensuing debate it seemed that reasoned argument was favoured over personal experience.

But evidence does not speak for itself. It requires a ventriloquist, someone who can interpret and draw relations and links. Not only is the object of historical study contextualised, but the subject doing the contextualisation needs to be contextualised. Failure to recognise the subject too is constituted in and through history results into reductionism, the reduction of knowledge and values into isolatable and manipulable portions:

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¹ A blog with the title *Could it be time to deny white men the franchise* was written under a pseudonym and taken down 24 hours later. See Pieter du Toit, Ferial Haffajee and Pontsho Mabena, "Revealed: Here is Shelley Garland ... and why he did it," *The Huffington Post SA* 19 April 2017. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/2017/04/19/revealed-here-is-shelley-garland-and-why-he-did-it_a_22046533/.

Since on a reductionist model one can know a whole through its (uniform, manipulable) parts, these parts are alienated from the whole and objectified. Correspondingly, the knowledge that is produced is lacking in context, and objectivity is construed as “context-free abstraction.” ... As a dominant worldview reductionism functions to narrow one’s perspective, barring from view many salient features of the world; it is pattern of thought based on closure. Thus, reductionism is a pattern of thought and practice that serves as an enabling background condition for willful ignorance about vulnerability. Indeed, reductionist practices are commonly ones that pursue invulnerability.²

Invulnerability constitutes control and full mastery that constructs a self-reliant, autonomous, invincible master subject, unaffected by vulnerability—one dare not be affected by what is unsettling, such as questions with regard to complicity to various ills in society. Invulnerability is based on a refusal to acknowledge or a willful ignorance about one’s share in history and how that history shaped the present: “It is a rejection of particularly difficult elements of one’s facticity in favor of facile transcendence.”³

The challenge to any reader of *Old Testament Essays* would be to see what are the good reasons an author might have for writing a specific article. These good reasons are produced within a particular historical and socio-cultural framework and answers the following question: What kind of warrants does an author provide for accepting the advice fostered in his or her text, or, what kind of authority or justification does an author provide to a reader to accept his or her argument?

The logic of good reasons renders an author as well as the critical reader vulnerable. Vulnerability dispels shored up prejudices that form the basis of invulnerability, opening up within the reader a recognition of what he or she does not know or is prevented from knowing. Vulnerability becomes the condition of knowledge: being affected by others, one knows.⁴

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² Erinn Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability. A Feminist Analysis of Social Life and Practice* (Routledge Studies in Ethics and Moral Theory 26. London: Routledge, 2016), 81.

³ Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability*, 88.

⁴ Gilson, *The Ethics of Vulnerability*, 98.