



Situatedness, or, Why We Keep Saying Where We're Coming From

David Simpson

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“Let me tell you where I'm coming from . . .”—so begins many a discussion in contemporary U.S. culture. Pressed by an almost compulsive desire to situate ourselves within a definite matrix of reference points (for example, “as a parent of two children” or “as an engineer” or “as a college graduate”) in both scholarly inquiry and everyday parlance, we seem to reject adamantly the idea of a universal human subject. Yet what does this rhetoric of self-affiliation tell us? What is its history? David Simpson’s *Situatedness* casts a critical eye on this currently popular form of identification, suggesting that, far from being a simple turn of phrase, it demarcates a whole structure of thinking.

Simpson traces the rhetorical syndrome through its truly interdisciplinary genealogy. Discussing its roles within the fields of legal theory, social science, fiction, philosophy, and ethics, he argues that the discourse of situatedness consists of a volatile fusion of modesty and aggressiveness. It oscillates, in other words, between accepting complete causal predetermination and advocating personal agency and responsibility. Simpson’s study neither fully rejects nor endorses the present-day language of self-specification. Rather it calls attention to the limitations and opportunities of situatedness—a notion whose ideological slippage it ultimately sees as allowing late-capitalist liberal democracies to function.

Given its wide scope and lively rendering, *Situatedness* will attract a range of scholars in the humanities and legal studies. It will also interest all those for whom the politics of subjectivity pose real problems of authority, identity, and belief.

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