Grounded Theory and Pragmatism: The Curious Case of Anselm Strauss

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Abstract

Sir Arthur CONAN DOYLE's stories featuring Sherlock Holmes are justly famous the world over. In The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes (1993) one story entitled Silver Blaze contains an exchange between Holmes and a Scotland Yard detective as follows:

Gregory (Scotland Yard detective): "Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"
Holmes: "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."
Gregory: "The dog did nothing in the night-time."
Holmes: "That was the curious incident."

In similar fashion I wish to draw attention to the curious case of Anselm STRAUSS: There is already a good deal of work pointing to the continuities between the Grounded Theory Method (GTM) and the Pragmatism of John DEWEY and Charles PEIRCE. This has usually focused on Anselm STRAUSS with his Chicago-influenced Pragmatist background, although STRAUSS himself never articulated the way in which Pragmatism informed or could be brought to bear on the method as it evolved from the 1960s onwards.

This paper argues that many of the contentious issues surrounding GTM can be resolved if they are understood against the context of some of the core tenets of Pragmatism, particularly the ways in which some of the more recent Pragmatists such as Richard RORTY have brought them back as a focus of attention. In so doing is raises the question of why, given his intellectual background and formation, Anselm STRAUSS did so little to bring Pragmatist ideas into GTM in its later embodiments and extended statements. That is the "curious incident" to which specific attention is drawn at several points in what follows; it remains a perplexing one, with perhaps no convincing solution, unlike the Sherlock Holmes mystery alluded to above.

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Pragmatism; grounded theory; Anselm Strauss; Richard Rorty; John Dewey

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