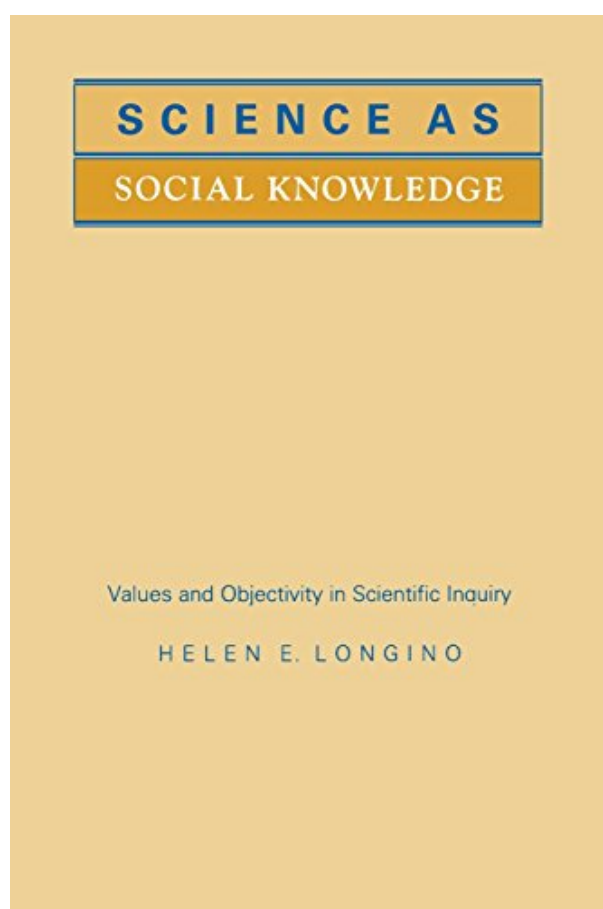


SCIENCE AS SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE: VALUES AND OBJECTIVITY IN SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY BY HELEN E. LONGINO



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Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry

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"Helen Longino has written a timely book that fills a critical gap in the existing literature between philosophy of science and the social studies of science. Her exposition of scientific inquiry as a context-laden process provides the conceptual tools we need to understand how social expectations shape the development of science while at the same time recognizing the dependence of scientific inquiry on its interactions with natural phenomena. This is an important book precisely because there is none other quite like it."--Evelyn Fox Keller, author of Reflections on Gender and Science

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SCIENCE AS SOCIAL KNOWLEDGE: VALUES AND OBJECTIVITY IN SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY BY HELEN E. LONGINO PDF

Conventional wisdom has it that the sciences, properly pursued, constitute a pure, value-free method of obtaining knowledge about the natural world. In light of the social and normative dimensions of many scientific debates, Helen Longino finds that general accounts of scientific methodology cannot support this common belief. Focusing on the notion of evidence, the author argues that a methodology powerful enough to account for theories of any scope and depth is incapable of ruling out the influence of social and cultural values in the very structuring of knowledge. The objectivity of scientific inquiry can nevertheless be maintained, she proposes, by understanding scientific inquiry as a social rather than an individual process. Seeking to open a dialogue between methodologists and social critics of the sciences, Longino develops this concept of "contextual empiricism" in an analysis of research programs that have drawn criticism from feminists. Examining theories of human evolution and of prenatal hormonal determination of "gender-role" behavior, of sex differences in cognition, and of sexual orientation, the author shows how assumptions laden with social values affect the description, presentation, and interpretation of data. In particular, Longino argues that research on the hormonal basis of "sex-differentiated behavior" involves assumptions not only about gender relations but also about human action and agency. She concludes with a discussion of the relation between science, values, and ideology, based on the work of Habermas, Foucault, Keller, and Haraway.

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Great

By natasha Gonsalez

Wonderful timing, quick and professional. I highly recommend anyone this seller. No complaints. Very quick and diligent. I ordered these for my classes and it all worked out for the best. Thank YOU

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

A classic in the field of science and values

By Daniel Hicks

Among philosophers of science -- and not just feminist philosophers of science -- this book is considered one of the classic philosophical studies of the interaction between science, on the one hand, and ethical and political values, on the other. While perhaps a bit daunting for non-academics -- it's written by a professional philosopher for other professional philosophers -- it's extremely worthwhile and highly recommended for people interested in ethical controversies over science, science and public policy, or postmodernism and objectivity. If you're intimidated by highly abstract academic writing, you might ease in with Heather Douglas' *Science, Policy, and the Value-Free Ideal* or Philip Kitcher's *Science in a Democratic Society* (Prometheus Prize). (Full disclosure: Douglas is a friend of mine.) An excellent and very concrete (not theoretical; written by historians) recent book is Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway's *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*.

Longino's book was written just before the height of a major intellectual controversy called the Science Wars. On one side were sociologists, historians, literary theorists, feminists, critical race theorists, postmodernists, and others who challenged the ideas of truth and objectivity and the privileged status of science. On the other side were scientists and philosophers, especially physicists such as Alan Sokal, who tried to defend truth, objectivity, and science. (Sokal committed a famous hoax on the postmodernist journal */Social Text/* in 1996; you can read about it on Wikipedia.)

In my opinion -- and I'm a scholar who works on these issues -- much of what was written during the Science Wars was quite poorly-argued polemics, and were a waste of time when they were written. By contrast, */Science as Social Knowledge/* is extremely well argued, and attempts to synthesize the two basic positions in the controversy. On the one hand, Longino agrees with the sociologists, feminists, etc., that the old idea of objectivity as value-free science cannot stand. Except for the most rarefied of fields, science depends on assumptions that reflect ethical and political values. It is simply impossible for science to be free of values, and an impossible ideal is worse than useless. On the other hand, Longino believes that this does not mean we need to throw out ideas of truth or a version of objectivity, and in this way she agrees with the scientists and philosophers. Objectivity, on her view, is produced by critically examining the reasoning and assumptions made by scientists, from the perspective of all different sets of ethical and political values. For example, up through the 1970s, primatology was loaded with sexist assumptions and methods and (not accidentally) was done primarily by men. After a generation of feminist-identified women entered the field, they were quite critical of this sexism, and primatology became more objective in response. By subjecting the field to critical scrutiny, feminist values made primatology more, not less, objective.

I do not entirely agree with Longino's views, but that does not change the fact that her book is a landmark of the field and is still well worth reading today.

15 of 35 people found the following review helpful.

A Class Review

By A Customer

This was one of the required readings for Rice University's Philosophy of Science Spring 2004 class. The following is a brief account of the book by various members of the 40 person class:

PROs: ~ Chapters one through four and chapter ten

~ The discussion of objectivity as a social process in chapter four.

~ The focus on the differences among the various branches of science: hard sciences (physic & chemistry) vs. moderate sciences (psychology) vs. soft sciences (sociology and anthropology)

CONs: ~ Chapters five through nine

~ The writing style (too philosophical, too much time spent discussing other views as opposed to the authors)

~ Too little said about the hard sciences

~ Pushing feminist agenda

~ Critical discussion on scientific studies unpersuasive

Despite the CONs the professor (a philosophy professor with a specialization in logic) still believes that, in comparison to other books on similar topics, this one does the best job of presenting the material. The class was a little more skeptical and recommends to future readers to focus on chapters one through four and ten and pay little attention to the remainder.

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