

Science and Values

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In a knowledge society – whether already existent or as yet to come – the relation between science and society remains a major topic. The paper deals with this subject – under the rubrics of value-free or value-laden science, of different meanings or aspects of science, including science as a form of life, and of ethics and credibility in science and scholarship.

As to the question whether science is value-laden or not, it will be argued that science is never value-free, disconnected from all normativity, also and especially as an expression of rationality. It always follows certain values and even presents them as constitutive of its own concept. What is meant here is the validity and effect of scientific standards of rationality or criteria of rationality like intersubjectivity, testability, reproducibility and conceptual clarity. These standards or criteria are the expression of a setting of norms which may also be formulated as values. In dealing with different meanings or aspects of science one can speak of the science-theoretical meaning (science as a particular form of knowledge formation), the social-theoretical meaning (science as an institution), and its ethical meaning (science as an idea). This idea is ethical (or moral, or value-laden) because it concerns the guiding orientation of the scientific subject (in which furthermore all claims to autonomy in scientific matters are founded). Here we speak of ethics of (in) science and of credibility in science and scholarship in particular. Values are the result of evaluations, and their theory is (philosophical) ethics. In dealing with science, three kinds of problems will be distinguished: ethical problems which arise when scientific results are applied in the non-scientific world, ethical problems arising within the sciences itself, when investigating the nature of things, and ethical problems where they are related to illusion and deceit. Here, the question concerning the ethics and the ethos of science and the scientist is not merely a question concerning the future of science, but also one concerning the future of contemporary society which sees itself as knowledge society.