Objectivity in Science

Elements in the Philosophy of Science

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Abstract: Objectivity is a key concept both in how we talk about science in everyday life and in the philosophy of science. This Element explores various ways in which recent philosophers of science have thought about the nature, value and achievability of objectivity. The first section explains the general trend in recent philosophy of science away from a notion of objectivity as a 'view from nowhere' to a focus on the relationship between objectivity and trust. Section 2 discusses the relationship between objectivity and recent arguments attacking the viability or desirability of 'value free' science. Section 3 outlines Longino's influential 'social' account of objectivity, suggesting some worries about drawing too strong a link between epistemic and ethical virtues. Section 4 turns to the value of objectivity, exploring concerns that notions of objectivity are politically problematic, and cautiously advocating in response a view of objectivity in terms of invariance.

Keywords: philosophy of science, objectivity, bias, trust, values in science

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