

*Conflicting Values of Inquiry: Ideologies of Epistemology in Early Modern Europe.* Tamás Demeter, Kathryn Murphy, and Claus Zittel, eds. Intersections: Interdisciplinary Studies in Early Modern Culture 37. Leiden: Brill, 2015. xviii + 410 pp. \$181.

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The book explores “how certain non-epistemic values had been turned into epistemic ones, how they had an effect on epistemic content, and eventually how they became ideologies of knowledge playing various roles in inquiry and application throughout early modern Europe” (2). In contrast to the philosophical positions that support the neutrality of science, these essays show that the development of scientific knowledge in early modernity is intrinsically connected to ethical-political, religious, and ideological assumptions. Preceded by an elucidating introduction, the book is composed of fifteen essays divided into six parts. In the brilliant opening essay, Peter Dear presents the historical and conceptual horizon of the seventeenth century, in which several ways of understanding and dealing with epistemic themes and their philosophical representations are explained. Taking as reference the studies of Robert Hooke and Thomas Hobbes, especially, Dear shows in a clear way the relations between “the game of natural philosophy” and “our modern games of science” (10).

In the first part, “Devices and Epistemic Values,” Matteo Valleriani analyzes the effective contribution of the experimentation of hydraulic engineers and experts on pneumatics to the establishment of empiricism based on a conception of matter completely distinct from that supported by Aristotelian thinking. Dániel Schmal rebuilds the historical role of camera obscura in the construction of the Cartesian theory on visual perception and the concept of mind. In the second part, “The Epistemology of Testimony,” John Henry retrieves the important contribution of John Sergeant to the epistemological discourse of rising modernity, discussing the concept of truth in the context of the Catholic and Protestant traditions and emphasizing the value of historicity in the collective construction of knowledge, in a completely different perspective from John Locke’s positions. On the other hand, Falk Wunderlich reconstructs David Hume’s discussion about the epistemic value of testimony based on miracle reports and shows how “Hume’s discussion of miracles can contribute to an awareness of the potential weakness of testimony” (125).

The relations between religion and inquiry gain an even greater prominence in the third part of the book. Here Giora Horn inquires how theological unity constitutes one of the central aspects of Kepler’s astronomy, and Tamás Demeter analyzes the conceptual transformation made by Hume in the process of the secularization of epistemology, and shows that natural theology cannot be methodologically taken seriously “as a system cognitively competitive with natural and moral philosophies” (199). János Tanács discusses how historians of mathematics have given minor importance to “the presence and effect of religious and political factors as forces constraining the relevance and significance of the Problem of Parallel” (218) in Protestantism at the second half of the eighteenth century.

In the fourth part, “Values in Controversy,” Gábor Áron Zemplém gives a new interpretation to Newton’s “new theory” about colors and the consequent establishment of a new conception of the scientific method for the inquiries in the field of physical and geometrical optics. Axel Gelfert shows the result of his hermeneutic effort in interpreting the thinking of Thomas Hobbes, approaching theoretical and practical aspects of his philosophy that consider in a special way the instrumentalist conception of reason as the basis of epistemological controversy among geometry, science, and politics. In the fifth part, “The Methods and Epistemic Virtues of a ‘Science of Man,’” Thomas Sturm studies the consequences of the failure in applying natural sciences’ analytical and synthetic methods to the disciplines that inquire into the human, while Eric Schliesser analyzes some central aspects of David Hume’s work and shows the conceptual transformation of the epistemic virtues that form the base of the human project of the “science of man.”

In the sixth and last part, Sorana Corneanu, Ruth Lorand, and Catherine Wilson analyze, respectively, the theoretical contributions of Francis Bacon, Spinoza, and Kant to an understanding of the relations between ethics and epistemology. Holding off a traditional vision that is used to emphasize the pragmatism of Baconian epistemology, Corneanu shows that, by using the concept of charity as an epistemic counterpart of moral and religious virtues, Bacon seeks to use a nonutilitarian ethical-epistemological conception that is guided by the notion of the fruitfulness of knowledge. On the other hand, Lorand inquires into the work of Spinoza and shows that, while monistic metaphysics does not work as a basis of ethics, it contributes a proper image to understanding the cognoscitive process and the construction of an idea of man. And last, Wilson demonstrates that the philosophical project of Immanuel Kant cannot be reduced only to the metaphysical foundation of the new image of the world produced by the Newtonian new physics, once its epistemological interests were especially focused on the refutation of materialistic, naturalistic, and fatalistic positions present in the metaphysical thinking, as in the ethical-political doctrines of the eighteenth century.

Considering the multiplicity of authors and themes, as well as different perspectives of interpretations, this book is indispensable not only for those who want to know the intellectual panorama of the time, but also for those who want to understand the basis of rationality and historicity that constitutes epistemological thinking associated with ethical-moral development at the dawn of modernity.

Luiz C. Bombassaro, *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul*