



UCSD Science Studies Program

Colloquium Series

presents

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October 5, 2009

4:00 – 6:00pm

Humanities and Social Sciences Bldg. #3027

Reception prior to talk at 3:30 pm in HSS 3005

Agnotology and Error: Privatives and Asymmetry

Abstract

Agnotology as constituted by Proctor and Schiebinger faces two major problems. The first is that it recapitulates the problem that Bloor identified with the vernacular “sociology of error” and its asymmetry. In general, we can generate explanations for false beliefs but summarily exempt validated knowledge from symmetrical analysis. The second problem concerns the complexity of studying privatives, concepts or ideas which are known only in their absence. For example, technically speaking, cold is the description of an absence of thermal energy, not a thing in itself. So, as a privative, is ignorance nuomenon or phenomenon? Or, more to the point, recognizing the work that ignorance does, what does agnotology gain or lose by consideration of issues of symmetry and privatives? This paper is thus an exploration of the concept of agnotology in relation to studying other privatives, such as silence, in the context of a symmetrical approach. It will allow for a more systematic approach to studying the lacunae of knowledge production across disciplinary fields.

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