

New Keywords

A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society

Edited by

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 **Blackwell
Publishing**

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BLACKWELL PUBLISHING
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

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First published 2005 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2005

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

New keywords: a revised vocabulary of culture and society / edited by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, Meaghan Morris.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-0-631-22568-3 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-631-22568-4 (hardcover : alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-631-22569-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-631-22569-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. English language—Etymology. 2. English language—Glossaries, vocabularies, etc. 3. Social structure—Terminology. 4. Culture—Terminology. 5. Sociolinguistics. 6. Vocabulary. I. Bennett, Tony. II. Grossberg, Lawrence. III. Morris, Meaghan. IV. Williams, Raymond. Keywords.

PE1580.N49 2005
422—dc22

2004029949

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10.5pt/13pt Bell Gothic
by Kolam Information Services Pvt. Ltd, Pondicherry, India
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom
by T. J. International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

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www.blackwellpublishing.com

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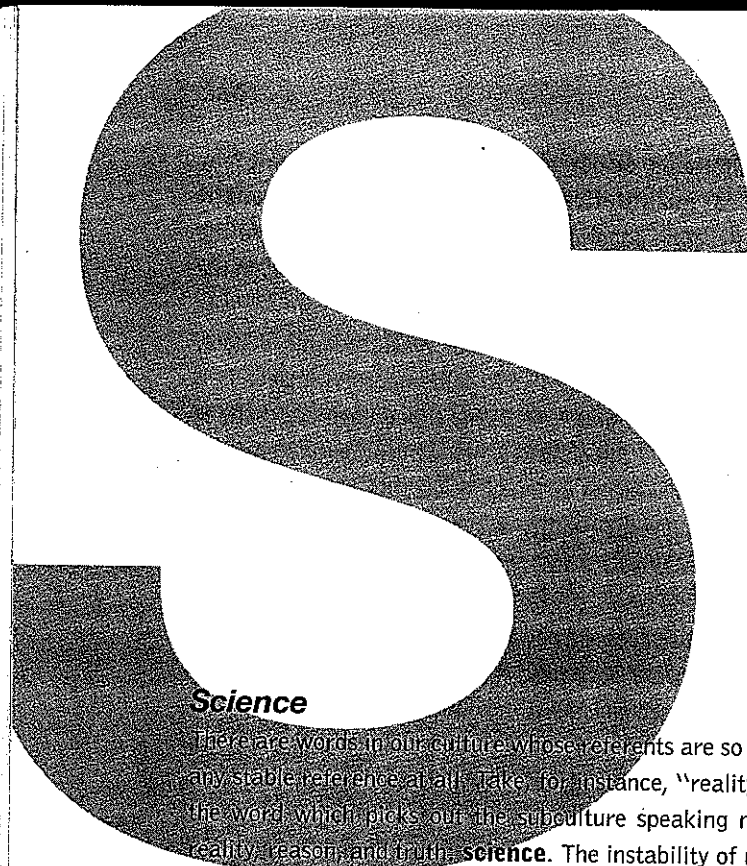
Aesthetics
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Canon
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Class



Science

There are words in our culture whose referents are so highly prized that they have scarcely any stable reference at all. Take, for instance, "reality," "reason," and "truth." And take the word which picks out the subculture speaking most authoritatively in the name of reality, reason, and truth: **science**. The instability of reference flows partly from the ways in which "science" folds together description and prescription. It is generally considered good to be **scientific** and to speak in the name of science, and, for that reason, there are many claimants to the title: **domestic science, nutrition science, management science**. More practices now represent themselves as scientific than ever before.

At the same time, there is a sense in which fewer things are now scientific than ever before. In the early modern period, the *L. scientia* just meant knowledge, usually in the sense of a systematically organized body of knowledge, acquired through a course of study. Francis Bacon's *De augmentis scientiarum* (translated in the C17 as *The advancement of learning*) catalogued "the division of the sciences," which were taken to include history, philosophy, the principles of morals, and theology (traditionally, "the queen of the sciences") (Fisher, 1990). When, in 1660, the newly founded Royal Society of London wished to indicate that they were not much concerned with things like civil history, politics, and dogmatic theology, they described their business not as "science" but as "the improvement of natural knowledge." During the course of the C19 and especially the C20, "science" came overwhelmingly to pick out those practices proceeding by observation and experiment, thus jettisoning history and philosophy and leaving the **social sciences** a courtesy title, with limited credibility in the general culture or among **natural**

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scientists "proper" (Geertz, 2000). Moreover, the global authority of natural scientific method has been increasingly disputed by those human and social "scientists" who reckon that the *Geisteswissenschaften* (or **human sciences**) ought to reject the procedures and goals of the *Naturwissenschaften* (or **natural sciences**).

Linguistically, this more restrictive sense of "science" was an artifact of the way English usage developed and changed in recent centuries. Into the C20, and up to the present, the F plural *les sciences* had a greater tendency to acknowledge procedural and conceptual similarities between, say, geology and sociology, as did the Russian singular *nauka* (with its Slavic cognates) and the G *Wissenschaft* (with its Scandinavian and Dutch cognates). Vernacular English once employed "science" in its original inclusive L sense (as in the skeptically proverbial "Much science, much sorrow"), but by the C19 "science" did not usually need the qualifying "natural" to summon up the idea of organized methodical research into the things, phenomena, and capacities belonging to nature as opposed to culture.

How this shift occurred is still little understood. One of the leading aims of influential C17 English experimentalists was the rigorous separation of bodies of knowledge and epistemic items capable of generating certainty from those which were at best probable or at worst conjectural, arbitrary, or ideologically colored. Insofar as the natural sciences were founded on a basis of legitimate fact, with disciplined means for moving from fact to judiciously framed causal account, they were capable of generating a just degree of certainty. By contrast, those intellectual practices which were founded on speculation or metaphysical dictate, and which were buffeted by human passion and interest, were unlikely to yield consensual certainty. The Royal Society protected the quality of its natural knowledge by policing the boundary between it and the potentially divisive "affairs of church and state" (Shapin, 1996). The condition of certainty in natural knowledge was, thus, a publicly advertised methodical separation between knowledge of things and knowledge of morals, between "is" and "ought." It was just very hard to keep human passions and interests at bay when the objects of inquiry were things to do with the human condition, and so the prerequisite for scientific certainty was a degree of moral inconsequentiality. A quality of certainty was, therefore, one means by which the prized designation of "science" might be exclusively attached to methodically proper inquiries into nature. In fact, such an imperative and its boundaries were embraced in C17 England with greater enthusiasm than in France, where René Descartes promised that the outcome of his philosophical method would include a demonstratively certain **science of morals**.

Another distinction, increasingly important through the C19, was the ability of intellectual practices to predict and control their objects. Bacon's dream was to enlist methodically reformed natural knowledge in the expansion of man's, and the state's, dominion, but the argument for the material utility of **theoretical science** was not widely credited until the C19, and was not decisively secured until Hiroshima experienced the power which theoretical physicists were capable of unleashing. As the ultimate patron of organized

Science

inquiry, the state was to pay for those intellectual practices which could demonstrably enhance its power and increase its wealth. There was much residual skepticism to overcome, but, by the mC19, most Western states had begun to accept their role as paymasters for a range of natural sciences, including certain strands of cartography, geology, astronomy, botany, zoology, physiology, chemistry, and physics.

The emergent human sciences made utilitarian claims as well. Governments were promised the delivery of certain, causal knowledge of the springs of human action; knowledge of which lay knowers themselves were unaware, and knowledge whose possession could be used not just to understand but to manipulate human conduct and belief, exactly as if human beings were molecules (Bauman, 1992). Here the promise of methodically guaranteed certainty – on the model of the natural sciences – might index the capacity of the human sciences to predict and control. Such attempts did *not* fail utterly. Many modern governmental and commercial practices powerfully, if imperfectly, predict and manage human conduct through embedded forms of social-science-in-action. Consider, for example, projections of retail expenditures, traffic engineering, the design of kitchen appliances, and the arrangement of goods on supermarket shelves, though the relations between these embedded practices and academic inquiries is problematic. Moreover, the human sciences have the tremendous capacity, occasionally and uncontrollably, to *realize* their concepts, to see them become vernacularized, and thus a constitutive part of the world that expertise seeks to describe and explain. Consider the careers of such concepts as “charisma,” “penis envy,” “being in denial,” and “the grieving process.” But the human sciences have never managed the trick of establishing their unique expertise as sources of such knowledge; these are domains in which the laity do not always defer to academic experts. Accordingly, the flow of cash from government and industry to the different modes of academic inquiry is a vulgar, but surprisingly reliable, index of what is now *officially* accounted a science and what is not.

The *official* reference of “science” promises some definitional stability and coherence. Suppose one just says that science is what is done in the departments of a **science faculty**; that it is what the US National Science Foundation, and the science bits of the Research Councils UK, fund; that it is what’s found in the pages of *Science* magazine; and what’s taught in science classrooms. This “institutional” or “sociological” sensibility highlights the sense in which one can rightly say that the modern “we” live in a **scientific culture** while acknowledging the fact that a very significant proportion of that culture’s inhabitants have little idea of what **scientists** do and know.

But just because the “official” or “sociological” definition of science sets aside its prescriptive aspect, few intellectuals have been content to leave matters there. Efforts to demarcate science from lesser forms of culture, and to make science available as a pattern to be emulated, have traditionally involved the specification of its supposedly unique conceptual content and, especially, its uniquely effective method. Yet, for all the confidence with which various versions of **the scientific method** have been propounded over

the past several centuries, there is what that method is (Rorty, 1991; Talk about “the scientific method” science. In the early to mC20 mark the bases of that unity, but, since 1962, the flourishing of a variety of more relaxed and naturalistic methods (Shweder, 2001). Disunity theorists common by invertebrate zoology, of particle physics, which are *not* the human sciences coherently either the natural sciences themselves either? Yet, for all the localized accounts the nature of science, the outbreak of **science wars** of the 1990s testify special, even sacred in its integrity identity of science is to challenge and that is one reason why the substantial consensus about what

Steven Shapin

See: *EMPIRICAL, KNOWLEDGE*

Self

The notion of **self** is one of the speak effortlessly of the different language where we **confide in good long look at ourselves. self-empowerment**, coming from umns, and a multitude of **self-h** direction, a powerful stream of impersonal or unconscious force indispensability and non-existence

Things were not always thus. inner source of conscience and Greeks invested the individual being conduits for supra-human fortune directly into human a “self” referred not to an inner

the past several centuries, there has never been anything approaching consensus about what that method is (Rorty, 1991; Shapin, 2001).

Talk about "the scientific method" is predicated upon some version of the "unity" of science. In the early to mC20 many philosophers embraced a moral mission to formalize the bases of that unity, but, since T. S. Kuhn's (1970) *Structure of scientific revolutions* in 1962, the flourishing of a variety of "disunity" theories indexes the local appearance of a more relaxed and naturalistic mood (Cartwright, 1999; Dupré, 1993; Schaffer, 1997; Shweder, 2001). Disunity theorists doubt that there are any methodical procedures held in common by invertebrate zoology, seismology, microbial genetics, and any of the varieties of particle physics, which are *not* to be found in non-scientific forms of culture. How can the human sciences coherently either embrace or reject "the natural science model" when the natural sciences themselves display such conceptual and methodological heterogeneity? Yet, for all the localized academic fashionability of naturalism and pluralism about the nature of science, the outraged reactions to these tendencies which surfaced in the **science wars** of the 1990s testify to the remaining power of the idea of science as integral, special, even sacred in its integrity (Shapin, 2001). To dispute the coherent and distinct identity of science is to challenge its unique and coherent value as a normative resource, and that is one reason why the idea of a unitary science persists in the absence of any substantial consensus about what such a thing might be.

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See: *EMPIRICAL, KNOWLEDGE, OBJECTIVITY, THEORY.*

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Self

The notion of **self** is one of the most ubiquitous in the lexicon of the modern West. We speak effortlessly of the difference between our **true self** and our **ordinary selves**, in a language where we **confide in ourselves**, experience **self-doubt**, and sometimes take a **good long look at ourselves**. We hear daily discussions of **self-esteem**, **self-talk**, and **self-empowerment**, coming from psychologists, counselors, talk-show hosts, advice columns, and a multitude of **self-help** books, videos, and on-line guides. Yet, in the opposite direction, a powerful stream of theory insists that **the self** is only the surface effect of impersonal or unconscious forces. The notion of self is now precariously poised between indispensability and non-existence.

Things were not always thus. Not all cultures have posited a self in the sense of a single inner source of conscience and consciousness dedicated to self-reflection. The Homeric Greeks invested the individual with multiple sources of thought and action, some of them being conduits for supra-human forces and gods transmitting the vagaries of fate and fortune directly into human agency and judgment (Dodds, 1973). In medieval English, "self" referred not to an inner personal identity but to the generic idea of sameness, whose