Notre Dame HPS Annual Conference
Unity & Disunity in Science: Historical, Philosophical & Theological Perspectives

Call for Papers

From debates in the New Zealand parliament concerning the value of Maori knowledge of nature, to debates about racial and gender bias in medicine, to the recent realization that the work of a Nobel prize winner was consistently rejected for falling outside scientific consensus, it is clear that there are tensions inherent in Western society's commitment to universal reason alongside epistemic diversity Aware of these tensions, many historians of science have sought to recover the stories of non-standard science and to emphasize a diversity of ways of knowing the natural world. Moreover, many philosophers of science have suggested that pluralism within science is not a matter of justice to diverse stakeholders but a generic feature of scientific reasoning. They claim that the pursuit of manifold, perhaps even inconsistent, research programs is the appropriate response to the complexity of target systems and the perspectival limitations of knowing. Scholars in science and religion have even begun to question the validity of "science" as a transhistorical monolithic category suggesting that it consists of a variety of traditions each with its own internal history and rationality. Each of these three strands considers the possibility and, sometimes, inevitability of a more pluralist science, one that progresses along multiple paths rather than insisting on the closing down of alternatives. This conference seeks to bring these strands together to further investigate the historical and conceptual foundations of pluralist science as well as to evaluate its promises and risks in our globalist society.

We are accepting submissions for twenty minute papers and for posters. We welcome contributions from history and philosophy of science, theology and science, science studies, and adjacent disciplines. Abstracts should be approximately 250 words. A limited number of travel bursaries are available.

Possible questions include:
- Is pluralism a permanent part of the scientific endeavor, or is it merely a transitory feature of our current epistemic situation?
- Is pluralism a desired feature of scientific theorizing, or a roadblock to a final, unified science? What risks does pluralism pose, either epistemically or socially?
- Should we value a diversity of perspectives at all? for epistemic or non-epistemic reasons? Instrumentally or for its own sake?

- Do inconsistent models imply some form of epistemic relativism?
- Does a commitment to scientific pluralism imply that nature itself is pluralistic, or merely that different ways of modeling nature represent different aspects of a univocal nature?
- Do different cultural, metaphysical, and religious perspectives result in salient differences in the kinds of scientific knowledge that are possible?
- Is science inherently secular? Is it culturally or metaphysically neutral? What are the implications of proposing a non-secular, culturally situated science?
- How might disunity in science affect the way other disciplines engage with it?
- How should different ways of knowing nature be characterized with respect to one another and with respect to European, empirical science? Do specific cases clarify this relationship?
- Do our methods of historically investigating science by attending to particular cases lead to the conclusion that science is pluralistic or merely assume its pluralism from the start?
- Are there aspects of science that we presume to be universal that are, in fact, culturally situated?
- How prevalent in the history of science is the Semmelweiss reflex, whereby established scientific authorities reject new evidence or knowledge in favor of entrenched norms, beliefs, or practices? Does that prevalence vary by discipline, region, or period? Do specific cases of this reflex (or its absence) teach us something about how prone science is to unification?

Please submit abstracts to [Unity & Disunity Call for Papers](#)

Registration is free, but required. [Register here.](#)