

CONTEXTS OF SCIENCE

For a long time, philosophers of science have claimed that the contexts out of which scientific knowledge emerges do not fall into the scope of philosophical study. In recent years, however, several philosophers have begun to pay closer attention to contextual factors. They acknowledge the dependence of concepts and argumentation on contexts and concede that justification hinges upon various features of context rather than on universal epistemic criteria. Epistemological concepts expressing the very understanding of the scientific enterprise, including justification, proof, explanation, method, objectivity, and error, are found to have been shaped in specific historical contexts.

But what exactly does the term “context” mean, how should it be analyzed, and how can the context be linked to concepts and arguments? How significant is the study of context for philosophy of science? These questions are still open. The following three papers examine and clarify aspects of the notion of context. They consider the extent to which the study of contexts is important for philosophy of science. The papers suggest that the context of science cannot be analyzed in an instructive way prior to the study of science itself.

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