

Review of: "Straightening the 'Value-Laden Turn': Minimising the Influence of Values in Science"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This is a very interesting article that presents a position that goes against most of the current literature on science and values and does so on the basis of thorough consideration of the different positions and nuances therein. I think that the authors presents a series of compelling reasons that can support their work, and I have one general remark and a more specific point for the author's consideration .

The author starts the paper with this points, to which they often come back during the paper: the fact that there's a value-laden ideal (VLI) that is supported by most philosophers in the literature. I would like to push the author to say something more on this, as I am not completely sure that this is an ideal in the same sense that the value-free ideal (VFI) is an ideal. To me, the VFI is indeed an ideal in the sense that it posits a normative constrain on scientific research: scientists should abstain from applying non-epistemic/non-scientific values (to be quick and simplistic).

The main point and question that I'd like to suggest to the author is whether the same normative constrain is present in the VLI – to me this isn't quite clear and I would say that things might different depending on the positions of specific authors or the specific values under consideration. Some philosophers will say that indeed non epistemic values should be applied in scientific research (for instance inclusivity, pluralism, etc.), but in the case of other values things might be different. At the same time, the way I would read much of the work in the literature is actually in the direction of making a descriptive point – showing that non epistemic values play an irreducible role in scientific research, at least in some cases and at a certain level, and thus presenting the need to manage and deal with this.

To me this remains the most significant point that can be used against the VFI – as much as it might be great not to have non-epistemic values influence scientific research, this is not possible, and therefore we have to manage non-epistemic values. I think that the author could say something more on this and how this distinction between normative and descriptive claims about the role of non-epistemic values related to their view of the literature as presenting an ideal. In the current state of the paper, I think this is a bit implicit and I am not quite convinced that we can talk about positions such as Douglas' as presenting a normative view of the role of non-epistemic values. As the author themselves say at some point in the paper, whilst discussing Douglas, in her view non-epistemic values "are necessary, inevitable for its practice, in other words that it is impossible to do science without recourse to non-epistemic values". In which ways is this a normative position? Does the model presented by the author deal with this inevitable and necessary character of values?

A related if minor and more specific point concerns the author's discussion of the IARC standards of carcinogenicity,

which they say is based on epistemic values only. I do wonder if the author could say something more about this, as I wasn't quite clear how the decision about levels of carcinogenicity could completely avoid non-epistemic considerations. For instance, at some point the author mentions that "the IARC insists that its categories are based on scientific values, such as absence of chance, bias, or confounding, quality, consistency, statistical precision". What does the author mean by quality here? As substantial work in philosophy of medicine has shown, even considerations of quality of evidence are based on epistemic as well as non-epistemic considerations on what counts and should be ranked as high-quality evidence (see e.g. work by Saana Jukola on this). I wonder if here the IARC is indeed stating a normative position, in terms of setting up an ideal of what should guide research and decisions on categories, but the descriptive claim about the irreducible role of non-epistemic values remains and thus I wonder what the author's model could do in this case.