

A good statement on the distinctive character of modern science is Richard Rorty's:

The books that change our moral and political convictions include sacred scriptures, philosophical treatises, intellectual and sociopolitical histories, epic poems, novels, political manifestoes, and writings of many other sorts. But scientific treatises have become increasingly irrelevant to this process of change. This is because, ever since Galileo, natural science has won its autonomy and its richly deserved prestige by telling us how things work, rather than, as Aristotle hoped to do, telling us about their intrinsic natures.

Post-Galilean science does not tell us what is really real or really important. It has no metaphysical or moral implications. Instead it enables us to do things that we had not previously been able to do. When it became empirical and experimental, it lost both its metaphysical pretensions and the ability to set new ends for human beings to strive for. It gained the ability to provide new means. Most scientists are content with this trade-off. But every so often a scientist . . . tries to have it both ways, and to suggest that science can provide empirical evidence to show that some ends are preferable to others.

Whereas physics-envy is a neurosis found among those whose disciplines are accused of being soft, philosophy-envy is found among those who pride themselves on the hardness of their disciplines. The latter think that their superior rigor qualifies them to take over the roles previously played by philosophers and other sorts of humanists—roles such as critic of culture, moral guide, guardian of rationality, and prophet of the new utopia ("Philosophy-envy," *Dædalus*, 133, 4 (Fall 2004): 21 f.).

My main question is whether a somewhat different account of the reason for science's having won its autonomy wouldn't be preferable. In any event, I would suggest that what characterized pre-Galilean science, and the reason it had both the metaphysical and the moral implications that post-Galilean science does not have, is that it asked about the meaning of things for us—in Rorty's phrase, "what is really real or [*sic!*] really important"—and only in *this* sense about their "intrinsic natures." This is why in pre-Galilean science there is no effective distinction between "science" and "wisdom." Of course, this difference in no way affects Rorty's main point.

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