



Real Science: What it Is and What it Means

By John Ziman

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Scientists and 'anti-scientists' alike need a more realistic image of science. The traditional mode of research, academic science, is not just a 'method': it is a distinctive culture, whose members win esteem and employment by making public their findings. Fierce competition for credibility is strictly regulated by established practices such as peer review. Highly specialized international communities of independent experts form spontaneously and generate the type of knowledge we call 'scientific' - systematic, theoretical, empirically-tested, quantitative, and so on. Ziman shows that these familiar 'philosophical' features of scientific knowledge are inseparable from the ordinary cognitive capabilities and peculiar social relationships of its producers. This wide-angled close-up of the natural and human sciences recognizes their unique value, whilst revealing the limits of their rationality, reliability, and universal applicability. It also shows how, for better or worse, the new 'post-academic' research culture of teamwork, accountability, etc. is changing these supposedly eternal philosophical characteristics.

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Review

"For anyone wanting a detailed, realistic, well-rounded view of science, Ziman's Real Science is your book."

Nature

"Any scientist interested in establishing a more constructive dialogue with the science and technology studies community would be well-advised to read this work." Physics Today

About the Author

John Ziman is well known internationally for his many scholarly and popular books on condensed-matter physics and on science, technology and society. He was born in 1925, and was brought up in New Zealand. He took his DPhil at Oxford and lectured at Cambridge before becoming Professor of Theoretical Physics at Bristol in 1964. His research on the electrical properties of metals earned his election to the Royal Society in 1967. After voluntary early retirement from Bristol in 1982 he devoted himself to the systematic analysis and public exposition of various aspects of the social relations of science and technology, on which he is a recognised world authority. He was for many years chairman of the council for Science and Society, and between 1986 and 1991 he headed the Science Policy Support Group. He is currently Convenor of the Epistemology Group.

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