

Uniquely Structured? Debating Concepts of Science, from the Two Cultures to the Science Wars

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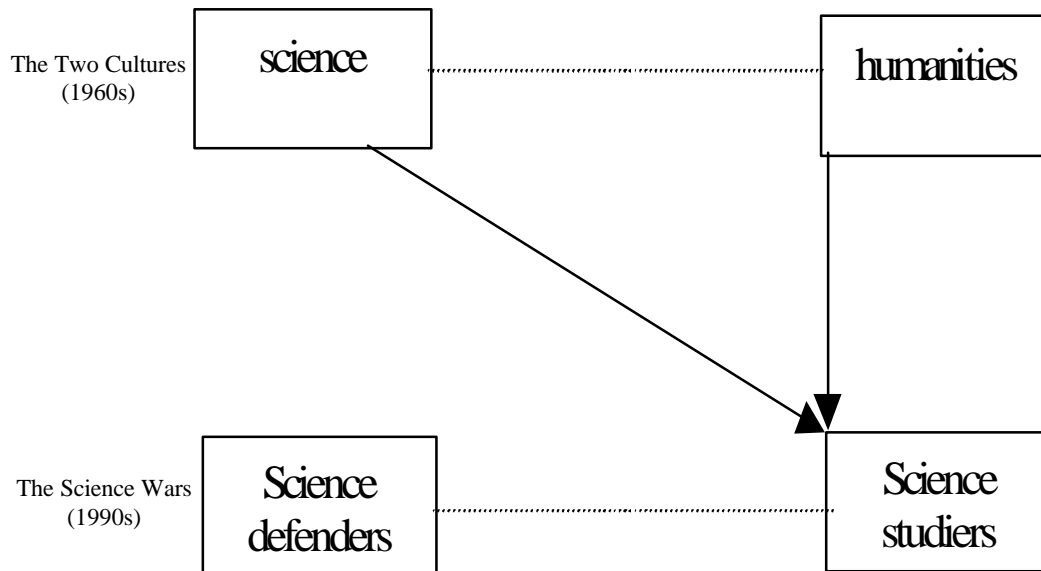
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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this thesis is to compare the science wars of the 1990s with the two-culture debate of the 1960s. It is a work in the history of intellectual debates, focusing on contested concepts of science. Over the past decade, there have been numerous references made in science wars literature that evoke comparisons to the two-culture controversy. I intend to show that while these comparisons have merit for their popular cultural reference, they are not valid when we consider the structures and contexts of the two debates. Thus, I will compare those structures, summarizing the main points of argument between the relevant actors in each instance, to illustrate the differences. The thesis advanced by C.P. Snow in 1959, and responded to most pointedly by F.R. Leavis in 1962, was predicated on the existence of foundational differences between science and humanities. The broader issues then were what validity a distinction between forms of knowledge had and which domain had the more reliable claim to knowledge. Just as the two-culture controversy called into question the credibility of literary knowledge, the credibility of science studies scholarship was ultimately at stake in the science wars, and is of central concern in this thesis. My contention is that recognizing the differences between the two-culture debate and the science wars can help guide the future of science studies, since those differences demonstrate the importance and validity of STS scholarship. When scholars ignore those differences, and presume that the two debates are comparable, they unintentionally give credibility to those who defend science against perceived assaults by STS scholars.