Queen Mary
University of London

Histories of Scientific Experience in Early Modern Europe

Professor Lorraine Daston
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Since Antiquity, science has been understood as a privileged form of knowledge: more certain, more rigorous, harder won and longer lived. No one doubted that other forms of knowledge were useful, even essential. But a line was drawn between these forms of knowledge and science proper, and a hierarchy erected – even though the grounds for the distinction varied. Early modern Europe witnessed a radical reconceptualization of the relationship between science and knowledge. Nowhere was this rethinking more dramatic than in the realm of experience. *Experientia*, once the province of knowledge, was cultivated by the learned, who created new forms of scientific knowing and concomitant practices: experimenting, observing, collecting, note-taking, table-making, measuring, archiving. These practices were in part derived from the traditional realm of knowledge. But in part they relied on the scholar's skills: reading, excerpting, collating, comparing. "Learned experience" (in Francis Bacon's phrase) redrew the boundary between knowledge and science in ways that still reverberate in our contemporary classification of the disciplines.

Lorraine Daston is Director of the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin and a Visiting Professor in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. She has published extensively in the history of science, including on such topics as probability, wonder, objectivity and authority.

Thursday 10 March 2011 at 6.30pm
Arts Lecture Theatre, Arts Building, Queen Mary, University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS. A reception will follow the lecture in the Arts Building Foyer
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