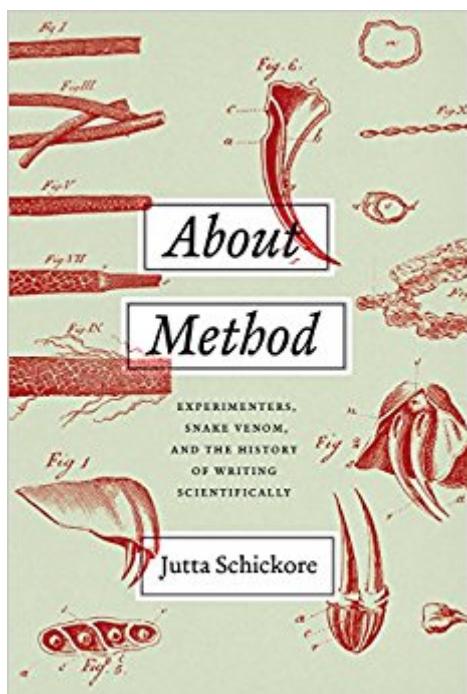


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About Method: Experimenters, Snake Venom, And The History Of Writing Scientifically



Synopsis

Scientists' views on what makes an experiment successful have developed dramatically throughout history. Different criteria for proper experimentation were privileged at different times, and entirely new criteria for securing experimental results emerged, and the meaning of commitment to experimentation altered. In *About Method*, Schickore captures this complex trajectory of change from 1660 to the twentieth century through the history of snake venom research. As experiments with poisonous snakes and venom were both challenging and controversial, the experimenters produced very detailed accounts of their investigations, which go back three hundred years—making venom research uniquely suited for such a long-term study. By analyzing key episodes in the transformation of venom research, Schickore is able to draw out the factors that have shaped methods discourse in science. *About Method* shows that methodological advancement throughout history has not been simply a steady progression toward better, more sophisticated and improved methodologies of experimentation. Rather, it was a progression in awareness of the obstacles and limitations that scientists face in developing strategies to probe the myriad unknown complexities of nature. The first long-term history of this development and of snake venom research, *About Method* offers a major contribution to integrated history and philosophy of science.

Book Information

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; 1 edition (May 19, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 022644998X

ISBN-13: 978-0226449982

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

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Best Sellers Rank: #742,154 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #102 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Zoology > Ichthyology #683 in Books > Science & Math > Experiments, Instruments & Measurement > Methodology & Statistics #3961 in Books > Science & Math > History & Philosophy

Customer Reviews

Jutta Schickore's *About Method* seeks to rescue methodology from

Feyerabend’s more radical views by showing that, while scientific methodologies change, they play a crucial role in directing the practice of science. Her examples are informative and are firmly grounded in their historical contexts. (Times Higher Education) “Schickore entices us to be interested in snake venom and then shows how researchers worked their way to answers that made sense in their different circumstances. The process of uncovering what made snake venom poisonous did not follow a straight line that culminates in our superior knowledge today. She follows the complex steps forward, sideways, and sometimes backward to show how scientific understanding emerged and evolved within the complex contexts of the time. Whether about Fontana, Weir Mitchell, or recent protein studies, Schickore’s discussions ring true to her sources while also drawing out larger lessons from history and discussion of methodological and epistemological approaches to the fascinating nature of snake bites.” (Jane Maienschein, Arizona State University) “Who would have thought that a book on the history of snake venom research could yield so many interesting and important insights? One of Schickore’s great strengths is her nose for good problems and for sources relevant to them. She has an uncanny ability to probe the seemingly barren landscape of neglected developments and minor historical figures and to find gold. Her new book adds much evidence to the claim that the detailed epistemology of modern science has arisen out of scientific work itself, in the various disciplines, rather than from grand methodological theories such as inductivism. No one has done more than Schickore to demonstrate the value of an integrated history and philosophy of science.” (Thomas Nickles, emeritus, University of Nevada, Reno) “Following The Microscope and the Eye, Schickore has produced another sophisticated treatise giving a fully historicized view of scientific knowledge and scientific methodology as dynamically evolving entities. She weaves together history, philosophy, and science into a coherent and pleasing tapestry. Her choice of subject matter in About Method is itself a testament to her sharp eye for a phase of the history of science that reveals easily overlooked aspects of practice and effectively exposes the blind spots in standard philosophical discourse. Under her deft treatment, the long and complicated history of research on snake venom emerges not only as a fascinating episode in its own right but also as a rich source of insights for a new general framework for philosophical thinking on scientific methodology. Schickore’s historical reflections also have plenty of pertinence to current methodological debates in science, such as the ongoing replication crisis in biology and psychology.” (Hasok Chang, University of Cambridge)

Jutta Schickore is associate professor of history and philosophy of science and medicine at Indiana University. She is the author of The Microscope and the Eye: A History of Reflections, 1740-1870, also published by the University of Chicago Press. A

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