

# Before the strong programme philosophy essay

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The Strong Programme  
Jo Connor Introduction  
The strong programme has been the catalyst for many heated debates, in particular with the several philosophers of science, and sociologists. It has also been influential in the sociology of science. In this paper I will be looking at the Strong Programme, its major arguments and some criticisms of those arguments.

Before the Strong programme - some context  
The study of science has been dominated by essentially two viewpoints. The first is, the 'rational reconstruction' approach of Lakatos (1971), Popper (1966)) which neither fully reflect what historical and contemporary scientists did or why. Rather their philosophies were firmly entrenched in how science ought to work. Therefore true scientific knowledge would be the culmination of idealized rational process of conjecture, refutation and falsification. This was what the strong programme challenged. The exclusion of the social or cultural aspects, working environments, and employer training and funding that could be important advantages or disadvantages to a variety of scientific roles are not considered in their philosophies, so the gap has been filled by a variety of sociological, anthropological and cultural philosophers. While other philosophers devised different versions of the process, such as Thomas Kuhn whose seminal book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* makes a significant impact to scientist and sociologists alike. The second is more specific to the sociology of science, and that was Robert Merton, who wrote extensively on the sociology of scientists - However Merton's view on the sociology of science did not include the field of knowledge'. Merton did however concede that in some instances of 'bad science,' there had been some unjustifiable interference by social factors; examples would be [1] Lysenko or Nazi science.

What is the strong programme  
The Strong Programme was a sociological

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attempt to gain a view of science through knowledge that is empirically improved and more accurate. Its strategy was to dispel the long held belief that the scientist is a detached observer. It is often associated with social constructionism or constructivism because it views scientific knowledge as possessing social causes in the production of its content. The strong programme finds some of its origins in the works of authors such as Karl Mannheim and Thomas Kuhn as well as Robert Merton. It incorporates the earlier empiricist traditions of philosophers such as David Hume and John Locke. However it was Kuhn's book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), which introduced and popularised the idea that the contexts in which he said that "science takes place should be given thought when considering how science actually works". Kuhn wrote that science exists in a social and historical framework, and that "an apparently arbitrary element compounded of personal and historical accident, is always a formative ingredient of the beliefs espoused by a given scientific community at a time (Kuhn 1962). As such causality undoubtedly plays a significant role in Kuhn's view of science, and this is reflected in the framework of Bloor's book and the strong programme. So key to the dissemination of the strong programme is that these social elements were perceived as detached from the actual creation of scientific knowledge, and in the "best case scenarios" these 'social factors' may or may not have influence on the scientific knowledge or how it is applied. To quote Steve Yearly "what was strong about the strong programme was its insistence that social science should treat all kinds of knowledge equally" (Yearly 2005) However, can the sociology of knowledge investigate and explain the very content and nature of scientific knowledge using the methodology of the strong programme, well that depends on your <https://assignbuster.com/before-the-strong-programme-philosophy-essay/>

perspective, as we shall see. Many sociologists believe all knowledge, whether it is in the empirical sciences or mathematics, should be treated as valid material for sociological investigation. There are limitations, such as sciences like psychology. Yet there should be no division or limitation in analysing scientific knowledge itself, or the formation of rationality, validity, truth or objectivity within scientific knowledge. What the strong programme did do, and what Bloor was hailed and slated for was to move in to the area currently occupied by philosophers of science, who defined, and owned the nature of scientific knowledge. The desired culmination of Bloor and the Strong Programme was to establish an objective socialised view of science. This was always going to be controversial as Bloor's framework for creating a more truthful epistemological stance (that was not corrupted by traditional objectivity of the detached observer point of view) was sure to create contentious debate with the philosophers of science. The framework for this was Bloor's book ' Knowledge and Social Imagery' (1976). Within its obvious that Bloor's 'strong programme' is framed directly in opposition to Mertonian science, because it does not separate scientific knowledge from social context. Bloor refused to think of 'good science' and ' bad science' by different models; such as good science being immune to sociological effects while bad science is directly influenced by social factors. So instead of rational reconstruction, Bloor's aim was to study science as a social construction. Bloor wrote that the sociology of scientific knowledge should adhere to the following four tenets (Bloor 1976). The four main criteria in Bloor's theory are: 1) Causal. By recognising that scientific beliefs are not attained in isolation but rather that social factors such as laboratory practices and the training scientists may receive may differ, as well as their

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own work and personal goals that are involved in knowledge production. The intention here is not to entirely discount scientific evidence; rather Bloor advocates that non-scientific causes should be given equal consideration in how beliefs are produced. 2) Impartial. Impartiality has generated a lot of heated debate with certain philosophers of science, as Bloor advocates that true and false beliefs should be examined in exactly the same way. 3) Symmetrical. In being symmetrical, we should expect the style of explanation to take in to account the same types of causes behind scientific beliefs. Examples of this are Lysenko who adopted an unproven Lamarckian theory of evolution because it agreed with political beliefs held in the USSR. Lysenko's theory aligned to the Marxist idea that humanity could develop towards perfection (in contrast to Hegel's interpretation, from which Marx drew his inspiration) by way of the struggle of historical conflict. 4) Reflexive. Essentially the methodology of the strong programme must undergo the same level of rigorous analysis it applies to the scientific production of beliefs. An example would be the strong programmes examination of a political agenda with in its own political framework. Bloor defines the strong programme by these four tenets, and they certainly place emphasis on social construction and contingencies. Bloor firmly places science, in a historical and social context. As such the strong programme represents a realist, empirical theory of knowledge, embedded in relativist tendencies, that sees rationality as having social components...this proved to be without doubt a highly contentious point with the traditional philosophers of science. Does the strong programme do enough in terms of rationality, is there an avoidance of a detailed analysis. For example if we use rationality as the basis of arriving at beliefs as well as its goal, then we are bound to run into <https://assignbuster.com/before-the-strong-programme-philosophy-essay/>

problems: the main point being that "rational" beliefs are not subjected to as much analysis as they might otherwise have been, which bring us back to the Lysenko Situation. David Bloor comments on this in *Knowledge and Social Imagery*. Bloor says "that if we suppose that it is assumed that truth, rationality and validity are man's natural goal and the direction of certain natural tendencies with which he is endowed. Man is a rational animal and he naturally reasons justly and cleaves to the truth when it comes within his view. Beliefs that are true clearly require no special comment. For them, their truth is all the explanation that is needed of why they are believed" (Bloor 1976). Bloor accounts of belief production illustrate just how the strong programme contrasts from conventional philosophies in science. They set up the conflict which Bloor outlines in *Knowledge and Social Imagery*; that of "teleological" tradition versus its "empirical" alternative. Therefore, the Strong Programme must present its own standards for critical analysis and answer the charge of nonsensical relativist nonsense. As we will see the strong programmes critics will use its tenets as ammunition against it, saying that relativism cannot even support itself, because it shows that its own claims must be as contingent and substantial as every other knowledge claim. Latour and Laudans responses