

Science is value neutral

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The paper “ The Nature and Place of Science in the World" is a great version of an essay on science. The nature and place of science in our world has long been a topic of the most heated and vehement debate in many levels of society. People have myriad ways of understanding and thinking about science: to some, it is a golden child which will bring truth and beauty into the world, to others, it creates devilish monstrosities which should not even be considered, and to some, it is neither of these things, but simply a tool and a way of understanding the universe. The last group would say that science is “ value-neutral” that it is neither good nor bad, but neutral in its inherent ethics. The last group is correct for several reasons, but a discussion of one particular aspect of science, its ability to enhance human abilities, can demonstrate very clearly that science is certainly value-neutral.

Science, at its most elemental and basic form, is simply a way of understanding the universe. It is the belief that the universe is governed by rational laws, and that through careful experimentation we can observe them. The problem, however, is that science is not simply about understanding, because each new breakthrough of understanding can also lead to a practical breakthrough that affects how we live our lives. These effects are one of the major reasons people ascribe value to science. One of the main sticking points many people have with science is that it allows humans to “ play God” (Stevenson, Byerly 20). In other words, science allows humans to far surpass our natural abilities and do things we could never have dreamt of previously. Depending on one’s point of view, this could be anything from a very bad to a very, very good thing. To some, the idea of <https://assignbuster.com/science-is-value-neutral/>

humans having the ability to far surpass our natural abilities is terrifying. They believe that humans are inherently limited creatures and that as we lack a perfect understanding of the universe, it can only be damaging for us to have the ability to do amazing things; we have a natural place in the world, should understand and accept its limitations. They believe that science is evil because it gives humans abilities we should not have such as the ability to destroy our environment, remove forests, and create nuclear bombs

Some people, however, have the opposite conception. They see humans as living in an imperfect world, and science allows us to correct the wrongs that are perpetrated on us. These people would point to, for instance, the fact that no one should have to lose a child due to a childhood illness, and the science, by allowing humans to “play god,” has allowed us to save lives and create a better, healthier, happier place for everyone in the world. In this conception science is a beautiful and laudable thing, a good thing, and human progress measured by science is excellent. Both the previously stated arguments, that science is evil and that science is good are, on their surfaces, correct. But this means that both are absolutely incorrect. Yes, science can lead to some terrible and horribly destructive things; many lives have ended because of weapons brought about by science, many people perhaps live less actualized and happy lives because of the way science has affected their worldview, and, possibly worst of all, science has been used to justify some of the most horrific things known to man like racist justifications of biological supremacy. Science certainly has a lot to answer for. On the other hand, one would have to be blind not to recognize the way science has

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enhanced and enriched peoples' lives, from giving an amputee a new leg that works as well as the one they lost or allowing loved ones to spend a few more years together due to breakthroughs in modern medicine. So does one figure out the value of science by weighing the good against the bad? By saying 'this scientifically created land mine made the child need a new limb in the first place, so clearly the bad in science wins out' or vice versa? No. The answer is rather that science is a tool, and that like any tool it can be used for good or evil. The term "playing God" is especially helpful here – human mythology is littered with stories of good gods and bad gods – what makes them good or bad is not their godly powers, but what they do with them.

Science, has many faces, some beautiful, some ugly. But ultimately the main thing it does is enhance humans' ability to control and interact with our surroundings, like the wheel, a bow, and an arrow or a hammer. None of these objects can be good or evil; their value is neutral. The same is true of science.