

Public lecture by

Janet Kourany

(University of
Notre Dame)

Bacon's Promise



Thursday, April 11 at 3:30pm in CAB 239

Abstract: At the dawn of modern science, a promise was made. If society would but support the new enterprise, the resulting knowledge would (in the words of Francis Bacon) “establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race over the universe” for the benefit of all humankind. Now, centuries later, has the promise been kept? Science has brought us food in ever greater variety and abundance, but the food is tainted with every manner of pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics, growth hormones, and other harmful chemicals. Science has brought us more comfortable homes and more convenient modes of transportation and communication, but the costs of these benefits include ever-rising mountains of garbage and toxic wastes and, more alarming still, global climate change. Finally, the benefits that science *has* provided have improved the lot of only some of humankind, not all of humankind. What has gone wrong? It helps to get concrete. This talk will consider three areas in which Bacon’s promise remains largely unfulfilled, some of the factors that have led to this result, and some of the responses that these factors have elicited. And it will argue for a different kind of response that has yet to be tried.

Janet Kourany is a Fellow of the John J. Reilly Center for Science, Technology, and Values and Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. A renowned feminist philosopher of science, her research centers around science and values, gender and science, and most recently, agnotology, the study of ignorance. In her latest and widely discussed book, *Philosophy of Science after Feminism* (2010), Kourany argues against the ideal of value-free science and for a socially responsible science, an account that makes social values such as equity an indispensable criterion in addition to epistemic values such as objectivity. Her previous books include *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice* (1998), *Scientific Knowledge* (1998, 1987), and the co-edited volumes *The Challenge of the Social and the Pressure of Practice: Science and Values Revisited* (2008) and *Feminist Philosophies* (1999, 1992). She is currently working on a new book entitled *Forbidden Knowledge: The Social Construction and Management of Ignorance*.