



Replacing Victoria's Scientific Culture

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Traditional views of nineteenth century science has viewed it in terms of a largely unproblematic institutional consolidation. More recently, the consensus view of the century as a period of leisurely progress towards scientific professionalization has been decisively broken. In particular the issues of what counted as science at all and what sorts of spaces counted as scientific have been rigorously contested. A variety of new accounts of Victorian science have now emerged, built around new sets of questions concerning science's place in culture and the emergence of new strategies of self-fashioning and legitimation. In this overview I survey promising trends in the cultural history of nineteenth-century science with a view to assessing the possibility of resurrecting a new grand narrative. I suggest in conclusion that the possibility of reconstructing such a big picture as an explicitly political account might be improved by rethinking the category of Victorian science and reorienting our understanding around the French Revolution and its immediate aftermath.

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