



Reforming Philosophy: A Victorian Debate on Science and Society

Laura J. Snyder

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The Victorian period in Britain was an “age of reform.” It is therefore not surprising that two of the era’s most eminent intellects described themselves as reformers. Both William Whewell and John Stuart Mill believed that by reforming philosophy—including the philosophy of science—they could effect social and political change. But their divergent visions of this societal transformation led to a sustained and spirited controversy that covered morality, politics, science, and economics. Situating their debate within the larger context of Victorian society and its concerns, *Reforming Philosophy* shows how two very different men captured the intellectual spirit of the day and engaged the attention of other scientists and philosophers, including the young Charles Darwin.

Mill—philosopher, political economist, and Parliamentarian—remains a canonical author of Anglo-American philosophy, while Whewell—Anglican cleric, scientist, and educator—is now often overlooked, though in his day he was renowned as an authority on science. Placing their teachings in their proper intellectual, cultural, and argumentative spheres, Laura Snyder revises the standard views of these two important Victorian figures, showing that both men’s concerns remain relevant today.

A philosophically and historically sensitive account of the engagement of the major protagonists of Victorian British philosophy, *Reforming Philosophy* is the first book-length examination of the dispute between Mill and Whewell in its entirety. A rich and nuanced understanding of the intellectual spirit of Victorian Britain, it will be welcomed by philosophers and historians of science, scholars of Victorian studies, and students of the history of philosophy and political economy.



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