

Science as context is, and can only be, descriptive and explanatory.

Excerpt: "At the heart of this controversy is the conflict between the positive nature of science and the normative function of value systems and political thought. Science is, and can only be, descriptive and explanatory. Whether a scientific finding is accurate is dependent on the quality and rigor of the methods used and whether that finding is replicable. The scientific process is not democratic, i.e. no amount of desire for different results can establish them and inconsistent findings create true controversy only when their methods are of comparable validity. At the same time, **the sciences cannot be normative. They can establish context and a factual base for normative discourse, but scientific findings cannot entail any particular normative conclusion without reference to outside systems of thought.** Science, for example, cannot resolve the never-ending debate over abortion in the United States. Medical science can describe the maternal health risks of pregnancy, elucidate fetal development, and establish risks of birth defects and complications. Nothing, however, inherently follows from any of these; rather, policy makers must look outside science, to moral, religious, ethical, and legal norms, e.g., when aggregated cells become human life or what the relationship between citizens and their government should be. Medical science can, and should, inform these discussions, and in a vibrant and healthy society, such value questions will be vigorously debated."

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JAMA: The Politicization of Professional Practice Guidelines

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Tomorrow's issue of *Journal of the American Medical Association* (Feb 11, vol. 301, #6) includes an article: "Science, Politics, and Values: The Politicization of Professional Practice Guidelines."