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BOOK REVIEW

Shadows of the Enlightenment: The Hidden Politics and Ideology of the Natural and Social Sciences

McCarthy E-George

Delhi, Aakar Books, 2026, Pages: 535, Price Rs. 1250

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Reviewed By

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The book authored by George E. McCarthy is a valuable contribution to the field of Scientific philosophy, process of enlightenment and dynamics in the fields of natural sciences and social sciences due to the multiple roles of ideologies, when this reviewer was reading this book of McCarthy, one more book which she read earlier appeared in her mind.

The book authored by Patrick Baert entitled as 'Philosophy of the Social Sciences' (2005, Polity, Cambridge) reveals those theoretical frames of reference which construct the growth of Philosophy of Social Sciences. The theoretical and methodological premises based on the ideas of Emile Durkheim (Naturalism), Max Weber (Interpretative Method), Karl Popper (Falsification), Paul Feyerabend and Richard Rorty (Critical realism), Frankfurt School and Jurgen

Habermas (Critical theory) and Pragmatism (Richard Rorty) have been analysed by Patrick Baert who points out that the elements of 'self-correction' and normalization (which leads to examination) are roots for making deep understanding of Philosophy of Social Sciences.

The book, according to McCarthy, is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on history, epistemology and methodology of post-analytic and neo-Kantian philosophy of science and its related descriptive-critique. The second part narrates the historical and political economic foundations of natural science in historical materialism while third part deals with the political dimensions of science as they influence our understanding of the social sciences and the evolution of the methodological and theoretical debates about the relationship between sociology and science. These three parts must be read in terms of the evolution of history and philosophy of knowledge. But one major structural gap is there in the book to my mind. South Asian scholarship and value systems prevailed in humanities particularly in literature have not been paid attention. Schools of Indian Philosophy, contributions of Indian academia in the field of knowledge of natural sciences and social sciences, the evolution of Chinese civilization and roles of Chinese scholars in the field of science and technology and its political impact are absent in the book. In the opinion of the reviewer, this absence leads to the logic of 'academic-colonization'. However, the book is very rich in terms of concepts, theories and thoughts. The ideas of Kant, Nietzsche, Marx, Max Weber, Durkheim, Husserl, Max Scheler, Marcuse, Gramsci, Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas and a lot of Scholars make this book, multidimensional and to an extent encyclopaedic. The book has extensively examined the critical use of dialectical-historical materialism.

In one sense the book of McCarthy is an evaluation of the 'history of intellectualism' which determines the nature and direction of development of natural and social sciences. His one of the intentions is to critically assess the interface between Reason, Science and Social Justice, McCarthy is deeply influenced by school of Marxism in

Constructing the ideas. In the very beginning of the book, he reveals clearly the objective. He States, 'This book examines the hidden metaphysics and politics of the modern natural and social sciences and their implications for diagnosing and resolving social and ecological crises and for developing a Comprehensive theory of Social Justice' (Page 11). It means that McCarthy wishes to frame those ideas and methods in natural and social sciences by which the 'era of insecurity and risk' replaced by security and dynamic coordination between the groups and between the states. The humane character of human Civilization is needed with the help of natural sciences and social sciences. One must Understand this logic that there is a (multiple) cause-effect relationship between systems of knowledge and values of enlightenment. The values of enlightenment according to reviewer destroy myths, magical activities, orthodoxies and oppressive character of hierarchies. These values of enlightenment give rise to democratic and secular order- the core of political economy of egalitarian character. McCarthy, for framing this logical proposition gives importance to the ideas of large number of scholars which make this book 'distinctive' as well as thought-provoking. The book introduces a critical commentary about positivist approach to social sciences, which again reminds me the view of Patrick Baert who states that Philosophy of the social sciences is a meta-theoretical enterprise in so far as it reflects on the practices of social research (2005: 1-2).

In the 'present-day-world' of neo-liberal economy, the systems of scientific knowledge and associated technologies have been used by the ruling power (mainly the far-rightist forces) as tools of exploitation, oppression and control is the view of the author which needs discussions in the 'campuses' and in 'public domain' so that the practice of enlightenment values could become part of way of life. Can natural and social sciences transform culture, polity, economy and psychological world of people? constitutes the philosophy of McCarthy's book, The book contains 535 pages thus its study needs time. At various stage, the language of the book has become complex, thus it becomes a difficult reading for the students. The book must be

read by natural sciences and social sciences scholars for making their academic understanding diverse, analytical and Ideology-centric.

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Editorial Note:

This comprehensive review by Jyoti Sidana of George E. McCarthy's *Shadows of the Enlightenment: The Hidden Politics and Ideology of the Natural and Social Sciences* (Aakar Books, 2026) was originally featured in the Special Volume of *Social Science Gazetteer* (SSG) with the Theme: *Challenges Before Social Sciences*. Due to an inadvertent editorial oversight, the review was previously published in an incomplete format. Recognizing the academic value and depth of this critique, we are reprinting the review here in its entirety to ensure readers have access to the complete, unabridged analysis.