

Vale: Ian Hacking (1936-2023)

Ian Hacking, an outstanding Canadian philosopher of science and cross-disciplinary scholar, died on 10 May age 87 years.

He is internationally known for his work across a range of disciplines, including philosophy of science, the philosophy of probability, philosophy of math, philosophy of language, philosophy of mental illness, social construction, and the philosophy of history, among others.



His books include *The Logic of Statistical Inference* (1965), *The Emergence of Probability* (1975), *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?* (1975), *Representing and Intervening* (1983), *The Taming of Chance* (1990), *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (1995), *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses* (1998),

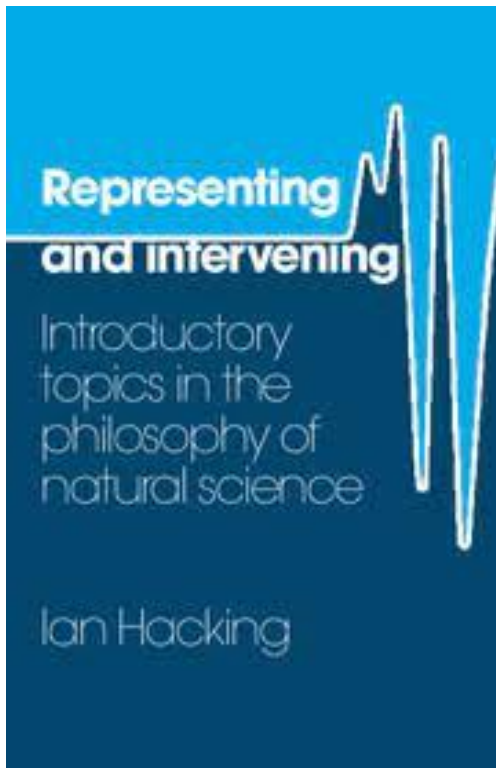
The Social Construction of What? (1999), *Historical Ontology* (2002), and *Why is there Philosophy of Mathematics at All?* (2014).

Cheryl Misak, a philosophy colleague at the University of Toronto, noted: 'Ian Hacking was a one-person interdisciplinary department all by himself'.

Hacking wrote little on education. He did not need to. His scholarly life embodied what liberal education is about: Curiosity, seriousness, broad horizons, rejection of silo-life or academic specialism, and engagement in public issues that can be illuminated by philosophy. Scholars who are doing all of this need not write about it; their example suffices.

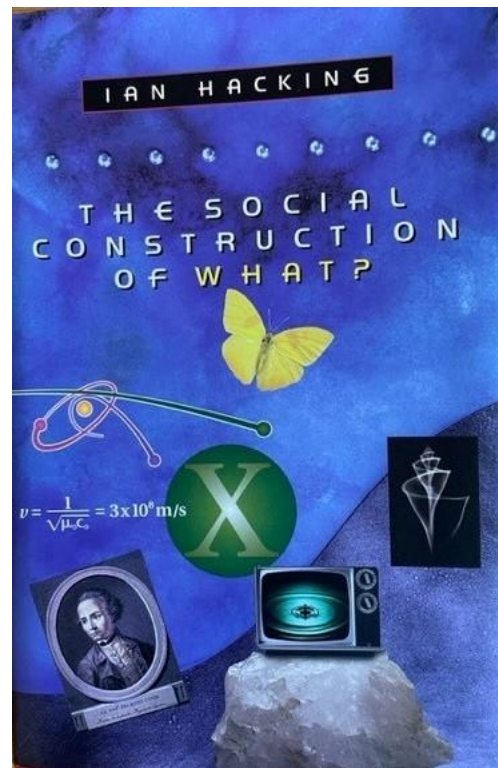
One public educational issue to which Hacking contributed was the debate over teaching evolution in schools.

In the October 8, 2007, issue of *The Nation*, he reviewed five books relevant to the creationism/evolution controversy: Philip Kitcher's *Living with Darwin: Evolution, Design, and the Future of Faith*, Michael Lienesch's *In the Beginning: Fundamentalism, the Scopes Trial, and the Making of the Antievolution Movement*, Michael Behe's *The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism*, Ronald L Numbers's *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design*, and *A Religious Orgy in Tennessee: A Reporter's Account of the Scopes Monkey Trial*, a collection of HL Mencken's contemporary reportage.



Glenn Branch of the National Centre for Science Education commented on Hacking's review, writing that: 'Hacking began by looking on the bright side: "The anti-Darwin movement has racked up one astounding achievement. It has made a significant proportion of American parents care about what their children are taught in school"'. However, he subsequently observed, "The debate about who decides what gets taught is fascinating, albeit excruciating for those who have to defend the schools against bunkum." With Kitcher, he prefers to classify creationist bunkum not as bad science or pseudoscience, but as dead science — or, borrowing a term from the philosopher of science Imre Lakatos, "degenerate" science"'.

There has been plentiful philosophical energy expended on the differences between productive science, unproductive science, degenerate science and pseudoscience. In many countries, significant educational, policy and economic consequences follow



from one or other accounts. A strong position is that pseudosciences were simply never science despite having some features of science. They had some necessary features, but not sufficient to warrant being scientific.

One of his few direct educational engagements was a lecture to Portuguese science teachers under the auspices of the Ministry of Education (chap. 7 of *Social Construction of What?* He chose dolomite rocks as the subject of his lecture, saying 'it that it was old-fashioned because it explained some traditional philosophy of science and also introduced contemporary science studies'. Nothing fancy, but what science teachers appreciate hearing about.

Much of Hacking's *oeuvre* can shed light on important theoretical debates in science education, most obviously debates about Nature of Science (NOS), Science and Culture, and Constructivism.

For many, his delimited entity realism, so well captured in his comment on the existence of electrons manipulated in cathode tubes – ‘if you can spray them about, they are real’ - is the entry price for being scientific. Others want a more robust realism that extends to affirmation of truth claims made within scientific theories. The confirmed existence, typically by experiment, of the postulated entities bears on the truth of the theory and metaphysical framework that led to their postulation with their specified properties. These more robust realists see a more intimate connection between ontology and epistemology than bare entity realism requires.

An informative *NYT* obituary for Hacking can be read [HERE](#). A University of Toronto Philosophy Department Memoriam can be read [HERE](#). A *Daily Nous* obituary can be read [HERE](#).