

Nowotny

Insatiable Curiosity

Innovation in a Fragile Future

An influential scholar in science studies argues that innovation tames the insatiable and limitless curiosity driving science, and that society's acute ambivalence about this is an inevitable legacy of modernity. Curiosity is the main driving force behind scientific activity. Scientific curiosity, insatiable in its explorations, does not know what it will find, or where it will lead. Science needs autonomy to cultivate this kind of untrammelled curiosity; innovation, however, responds to the needs and desires of society. Innovation, argues influential European science studies scholar Helga Nowotny, tames the passion of science, harnessing it to produce "deliverables." Science brings uncertainties; innovation successfully copes with them. Society calls for both the passion for knowledge and its taming. This ambivalence, Nowotny contends, is an inevitable result of modernity. In *Insatiable Curiosity*, Nowotny explores the strands of the often unexpected intertwining of science and technology and society. Uncertainty arises, she writes, from an oversupply of knowledge. The quest for innovation is society's response to the uncertainties that come with scientific and technological achievement. Our dilemma is how to balance the immense but unpredictable potential of science and technology with our acknowledgement that not everything that can be done should be done. We can escape the old polarities of utopias and dystopias, writes Nowotny, by accepting our ambivalence—as a legacy of modernism and a positive cultural resource.

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