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Book Review: Scientific Controversies: A Socio-Historical Perspective on the Advancement of Science

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The following review appeared in the October 2015 issue of CHOICE:

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Raynaud, Dominique. **Scientific controversies: a socio-historical perspective on the advancement of science**, [tr.] by Lisa C. Chien. Transaction, 2015. 298p indexes bibl ISBN 9781412855716, \$69.95.

Raynaud (Univ. de Grenoble, France) shows the importance of organized debates around scientific controversies that help confirm our knowledge about the world. He examines the following unique scientific conflicts within their sociohistoric contexts: Pasteur's germ theory versus the theory of spontaneous generation; vitalism versus experimental medicine; visual rays and the science of optics; and the origins of relativism. Raynaud's carefully chosen examples not only show pivotal moments in the history of science but also help explain the origins and evolution of more recent scientific debates. His incrementalist theory explains the advancement of science through scientific controversies, as opposed to Thomas Kuhn, who attributes progress to scientific revolutions and paradigm shifts, such as Copernicus's heliocentric model versus the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic geocentric cosmology. While Kuhn sees science advancing out of crisis, Raynaud persuasively shows that understanding the role of controversy helps our understanding of the function of science and the importance of contemporary scientific debates. Raynaud offers a sober voice and clear commitment to pursuing scientific truths via scientific methods, as opposed to the politicization of science seen in the controversies surrounding Galileo and the Inquisition, and Stalinism and genetics. For Raynaud, science expresses more than the zeitgeist of an epoch; rather, science is focused on revealing truth.

--D. B. Levy, *Touro College, Lander College for Women*

Summing Up: Highly recommended. Upper-division undergraduates, graduate students, researchers/faculty, professionals/practitioners, and anyone interested in what constitutes true knowledge.