

Noretta Koertge: Retirement Notice for Faculty Council

A true Midwesterner, Noretta Koertge grew up in a farmhouse in Southern Illinois. There was no problem nurturing her budding intellectual interests, as both her parents were schoolteachers. Noretta's life-long interest in science was awakened in high school, and she then majored in chemistry at the University of Illinois. After receiving a BS with highest honors, she then received the MA and completed all the work for the Ph.D. in chemistry prior to the dissertation.

At this point, Noretta interrupted her studies and set off to see the wider world. She traveled through the folk music scene in Chicago, took a job as Head of the chemistry section at the American College for Girls in Istanbul, and then ended up in London. Here, in the early 1960s, the philosophy of science was experiencing a particularly exciting period of rebirth—stimulated by Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), and, in England especially, by the work of Karl Popper, whose *Logic of Scientific Discovery* was translated into English in 1959, followed by his *Conjectures and Refutations* in 1963. Noretta resolved to enroll at the London School of Economics and attend the famous Popper Seminar, but, due to an administrative error, she landed in the department of philosophy of science at Chelsea College, led by Heinz Post. Noretta now views this glitch as one of the most fortunate turns in her life, however, for Post's department was especially open and supportive—and she thus had the opportunity to be exposed intellectually, not only to the dominant influence of Popper, but also to a number of other important British philosophers of science.

In 1969 Noretta completed her Ph.D. in philosophy of science under Post with a dissertation on "The General Correspondence Principle: A Study of Relations between Scientific Theories." After lecturing at Toronto, Noretta joined the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at Indiana University in 1970, beginning a long and distinguished academic career here. Throughout the 1970s she established herself as a leading scientific methodologist dealing with both the ideas of Popper and those of the more radical Paul Feyerabend, who had served as an external advisor for Noretta's doctoral dissertation. Particularly notable is a famous paper on Galileo Noretta published in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* in 1977. She also published an important textbook on *The Nature of Scientific Inquiry*, which was later translated into both Spanish and Catalan.

Never having the mind-set of a narrow specialist, Noretta's intellectual interests branched out remarkably throughout the 1980s. She published two novels, an edited volume on scientific and philosophical perspectives on homosexuality, and began serious work on wider ethical issues surrounding science—including the ethics of introducing Western science and technology into developing countries. This work led her naturally into the growing debates about multiculturalism, post-modernism, and academic feminism. Convinced that such debates typically missed the true power of science as a liberating force, Noretta became a leading defender of scientific rationality in the 1990s. She published two substantial contributions to what are now known as “the culture wars”—*Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales From the Strange World of Women's Studies* (1994, co-authored with Daphne Patai), and *A House Built on Sand: Exposing Postmodernist Myths about Science* (1998). These books, as one can imagine, have attracted a lot of attention even in the popular press, and have played an important role in making some of the best work in contemporary history and philosophy of science concerned with post-modernism available to the larger intellectual community.

It is especially fitting that Noretta's long, distinguished, and remarkably rich career has recently been crowned with two major honors. In June 1999 she became editor-and-chief of *Philosophy of Science*, recognized as the leading international journal in the field. Also in 1999 she was elected as a Fellow by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, with special acknowledgement of her earlier work on Karl Popper as well as her most recent work in defense of scientific rationality. Her retirement this year inaugurates a period of lively intellectual activity, as she gets into the full swing of editing *Philosophy of Science* here in Goodbody Hall, continues her research on a variety of fronts, and also continues teaching for our department on an ad hoc basis. But Noretta also hopes to have more time to read the Harry Potter books with her favorite eight-year old, and to be able to arrange more music for the Unitarian Church choir.

Michael Friedman