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Recent years have seen a series of intense, increasingly acrimonious debates over the status and legitimacy of the natural sciences. These "science wars" take place in the public arena with current battles over evolution and global warming and in academia, where assumptions about scientific objectivity have been called into question. Given these hostilities, what makes a scientific claim merit our consideration? In *Cogent Science in Context*, William Rehg examines what makes scientific arguments cogent—that is, strong and convincing—and how we should assess that cogency. Drawing on the tools of argumentation theory, Rehg proposes a multidimensional, context-sensitive framework both for understanding the cogency of scientific arguments and for conducting cooperative interdisciplinary assessments of the cogency of actual scientific arguments.

Rehg first shows how argumentation theory, with methods for evaluating arguments that draw on disciplines ranging from logic to rhetoric, can provide an interdisciplinary lens through which to view the issues in the academic science wars. He then closely examines Jürgen Habermas's argumentation theory and its implications for understanding cogency, applying it to a case from high-energy physics. A series of problems, however, beset Habermas's approach. In response, Rehg outlines his own "critical contextualist" approach, which uses argumentation-theory categories in a new and more context-sensitive way inspired by ethnography of science. Critical contextualism not only responds to the academic debates but also has relevance for the study of debates in the public arena, as Rehg demonstrates with a case study of National Academy of Sciences panels appointed to study the possible links between diet and health.