

# Introduction: Mapping “Going Amiss”

Giora Hon, Jutta Schickore and Friedrich Steinle

It is a common human trait to wish to disown one’s errors. While it is a truism that one can learn from one’s failures, no one wants to be remembered for them, best to forget one’s faults, left buried in layers of history. Philosophers are concerned with warranted knowledge—error is simply everything that is excluded from the domain of accepted claims to knowledge. It is the historians’ task to uncover the past, but they too prefer to leave failures hidden away. Their worries, however, are more concrete. Historians fear that the study of past errors is intrinsically Whiggish and inadvertently produces anachronistic historical accounts. We take these worries seriously and transform them productively. We are convinced that it is fruitful to uncover forgotten and lost failures, subject them to analysis and learn from their moral. The central tenet of this volume is that failures count; they are quarries for knowledge. To be sure, failures should not be considered knowledge. Strictly speaking, they have proven to be false claims to knowledge, or, alternatively, the ground for a claim to be formulated could not be provided. We argue, however, that the study of failures, errors, pitfalls and mistakes shed light on the way knowledge is pursued and indeed generated, and we substantiate this position with historical accounts and philosophical analyses.

Science is a field of inquiry in which failures assume specific characteristics. If there is a method to scientific pursuits, their principles and features determine the scope and nature of the failures. We propose to examine the failures of scientific claims like an engineer who studies the breakdown of a certain technological system. However, unlike the engineer who knows well the expected performance of the technological system he or she has helped design, the historian and the philosopher of science are not privy to the original design; hence the inherent vagueness in the determination of characteristics of scientific failures. This is reflected in the title of this volume, *Going Amiss in Experimental Research*. “Going amiss” comprises two related themes: first the experimental results that proved wrong, and secondly the challenges that practitioners are facing in their everyday endeavors to generate experimental knowledge. The notion

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G. Hon (✉)

Department of Philosophy, University of Haifa, Israel  
e-mail: hon@research.haifa.ac.il