

Umbrellaology

Dear Sir,

I am taking this liberty of calling upon you to be a judge in a dispute between an acquaintance and me who is no longer a friend. The question at issue is this: Is my creation, umbrellaology, a science. Allow me to explain this situation. For the past eighteen years I have been collecting materials on a subject hitherto almost wholly neglected by scientists, the umbrella. The results of my investigation to date are embodied in the nine volumes, which I am sending to you under separate cover. Pending their receipt, let me describe to you briefly the nature of their contents and the method I pursued in compiling them. I began on the Island of Manhattan. Proceeding block-by-block, house-by-house, family-by-family, and individual-by-individual, I ascertained (1) the number of umbrellas possessed, (2) their size, (3) their weight, (4) their color. Having covered Manhattan, I eventually extended the survey.

It was at this point that I approached my friend... I felt I had the right to be recognized as the creator of a new science. He, on the other hand, claimed that umbrellaology was not a science at all. First, he said, it was silly to investigate umbrellas. Now this argument is false because science scorns not to deal with any object, however humble, even to the "hind leg of a flea." Then why not umbrellas? Next he said that umbrellaology could not be recognized as a science because it was of no use or benefit to mankind. But is not the truth the most precious thing in life? And are not my nine volumes filled with the truth of my subject? ...When he asked me what was the object of umbrellaology I was proud to say, "To seek and discover the truth is object enough for me." I am a pure scientist: I have no ulterior motives... Next, he said my truths were dated and that any one of my findings might cease to be true tomorrow. But this, I pointed out, is not an argument against umbrellaology, but rather an argument for keeping it up to date, which is exactly what I propose... His next contention was that umbrellaology had entertained no hypotheses and had developed no theories or laws. This is a great error. In the course of my investigations, I employed numerous hypotheses. Before entering each new block and each new section of the city, I entertained an hypothesis as regards the number and characteristics of the umbrellas that would be found there, which hypotheses were either verified or nullified by my subsequent observations, in accordance with proper scientific procedure, as explained in authoritative texts... As for theories and laws, my work presents an abundance of them. I will here mention only a few by way of illustrations. There is the Law of Color Variation Relative to Ownership of Sex. (Umbrellas owned by women tend to a great variety of color, whereas those owned by men are almost all black). ...There is also the Law of Tendency towards Acquisition of Umbrellas in Rainy Weather. To this law I have given experimental verification... Thus I feel that my creation is in all respects a genuine science, and I appeal to you for substantiation of my opinion.

Excerpted from J. Somerville: 1941, "Umbrellaology" *Philosophy of Science*, 8, 557-566.