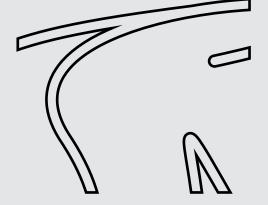
riod 1500-1700 is depicted as the crucible in Planck Institute for the History of Science, The English verb 'to err' has largely lost its powhich modern science was forged: a triumphal Berlin, and Visiting Professor in the Com- sitive connotations. It no longer invokes wanparade of great minds - Copernicus, Kepler, mittee on Social Thought at the University of dering, rambling, or roaming, and is now un-Galileo, Descartes, Leibniz, Huygens, New- Chicago. She is the author of numerous books derstood negatively in relation to a prescribed ton - transformed our understanding of the and articles on the history of probability and path or goal. To be sure, errors are acknowearth and heavens and set the pattern for mo- statistics, wonders in early modern science, ledged to play an important role in the pursuit dern science ever since. It was the first of many visualization in science, objectivity, and scien- of knowledge and hap-piness, but usually only progressive revolutions in science. For many tific observation. Her most recent book (with to the extent that their recognition allows for historians, this Scientific Revolution of six- Paul Erikson et al.) is How Reason Almost Lost their elimination, correction, and avoidance. teenth- and seventeenth-century Europe was Its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Ratio- Recognizing that a critique of ideals of prothe Big Bang event that ignited modernity. Yet *nality* (2014). from the standpoint of contemporaries, the events retrospectively celebrated as the Scientific Revolution were perceived as a horrific realization that for almost two millennia, the finest minds had been thoroughly mistaken about the geography of the earth, the nature of comets, the anatomy and physiology of the human body, the system of the heavens, and much, much else. For them, their epoch was one of grievous errors revealed as much as one of new knowledge discovered. This acute consciousness of error and fallibility stamped modern epistemology ever since - and triggered an acute fear of being taken in by beguiling counterfeit realities, from Don Quixote's romantic fantasies to Descartes' vortices and other "palaces of the imagination."

In most histories of Western science, the pe- Lorraine Daston is Director of the Max ICI Lecture Series ERRANS

ductivity, success, goal-orientation, and determination is necessarily paradoxical, the ICI Lecture Series ERRANS takes the shifting meanings of 'erring' - connoting the violation of norms as well as the activity of wandering - as a prompt to explore the critical potentials and risks of embracing error, randomness, failure, and non-teleological temporalities, and to do so across different disciplines and discourses.



Lorraine **Daston**

Before Scientific Revolutions: Error and the Fear of Error