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Book Review

Science Studies. History, Theory, Criticism

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BOOK REVIEW

Vitenskapsstudier. Historie, teori, kritikk [Science Studies. History, theory, criticism]

Vidar Enebakk

Oslo, Unipub AS, 2008

299 pp., ISBN978-82-7477-330-1

After recently fought wars, a certain time must elapse in order for the survivors to clearly see what actually happened. So also after the Science War, which was taking place most intensely during the second half of the 1990's. In this war, where social constructionism was under attack from scientists, who viewed it as unscientific and therefore a target for ridicule, science studies stood out as a particular arena for attacks.

One focal point in this particular arena for the criticism was "the Strong Programme", founded in the seventies at Edinburgh University in the small, but important Unit for Science Studies, later known as the "Edinburgh school". Not only was this a focal point for criticism, but on the contrary, the activities at the Unit had also served as a great source of inspiration for scholars from the start in 1966 – years before the theoretical programme itself was explicitly formulated.

Even if the interest in the Strong Programme among scholars later was replaced by focus on new movements in Science Studies, many of the new ones were indebted to the Strong Programme and especially to David Bloor's principle of symmetry. Where Bloor focused on true and false beliefs, others have used the principle to focus on other areas, like Bijker and Pinch: science and technology, Woolgar: subject and object, and Latour and Callon: nature and society. Consequently, the Edinburgh school deserves attention from two directions, one that examines the criticism against it during the Science war, and one that examines its influence on generations of scholars.

The task that Oslo-based historian of science, Vidar Enebakk has set for himself in this book is to reconstruct the formation of the Edinburgh school, and to outline the historical predicaments for its founding. In doing so, he also argues for a new understanding of the Edinburgh school: as a bridge between the two cultures, rather than a project of undermining science. In that sense, Enebakk acts as a mediator.

The historical context to the formation of the Edinburgh school is to be found in the British interwar discussion about science and society, including influential debaters as J.D. Bernal and Robert Merton. Bernal's book *The Social Function of Science* (1939), advocated for the liberation of science (from capitalism), in order to better fit societies and peoples' needs. Between Bernal and C.P. Snow, who influenced the field immensely after WWII, there is a red line, which can be seen in Snow's engagement in science as a deliberator, especially for the third world. Snow, who was appointed as minister in the post-war Ministry of Technology, was an accelerator for applied science, and for the transformation of universities to examine more science students than humanity students. Two state investigations pointed in the same

direction, and as a result of this, Unit of Science Studies were started, as a means to serve the needs of both scientists and social scientists. The initiative came from C H Waddington, a biologist and geneticist who was a close friend to Bernal and Snow, which shows that the origin of the unit in actual fact was a discussion within scientists themselves, a discussion that had its roots in the thirties.

Then Enebakk turns to examine, in detail, how the Unit worked, and devotes five chapters to five of the most influential employed and their specializations and influence in the years 1966 – 1976: David Edge (founder), David Bloor (philosophy of science), Barry Barnes (sociology of science), Steven Shapin (history of science) and Gary Werskey (academic activism). Each of these chapters is partly based on interviews, partly on printed matter. Enebakk states, with support from Barry Barnes, that the Strong Programme was an orientation, not an exhaustive theoretical program, and with Steven Shapin, that the focus lay on *naturalism* as much as on symmetry, which means to study what scientists do, instead of what they should do.

The last chapter deals with the Edinburgh school as an institution. Here, Enebakk argues for the existence of *three* different Edinburgh schools: one where the academic interests were in focus and where the strong programme was formulated, another, where focus lay on practical and policy-oriented work, especially in the third world. This direction was a result of David Edge's cooperation with Harry Dickinson at the Department of Electrical Engineers at Edinburgh University. The third Edinburgh school, is one who immensely focused on history of science, and is a tradition not only in Edinburgh, that still is very lively. Of the three different Edinburgh schools, only the third one survived until today, and is nowadays located within the established discipline of history of science.

Enebakks book is well written, and can indeed be used as a starting point for a broader discussion between science and the humanities. Considering this, it is a pity that it's only available in Norwegian.