

## EDITORIAL PREFACE

The present volume is devoted to problems in the methodology of action science and action research, more especially of its 'communicative' or 'participatory' variants. The contributions stem from rather different quarters. This volume by no means offers a survey of all the problems in the field, or even of those discussed recently. Yet, it confronts the reader with an interesting sample of the basic problems that lie behind the ongoing discussion.

But why, the reader might ask, is this discussion so important in the first place, and why is it relevant for philosophers? The answer is twofold. First of all, the discussion is an excellent example of the development of a new research-tradition or paradigm, or of a set of related such traditions. In this sense it constitutes an excellent test for the variety of views that have been advocated recently in philosophy of science. Next, the problems are directly relevant to very basic epistemological standpoints, and indirectly to other philosophical disciplines as well. In my view it is quite obvious that the outcome of the discussion on action science, whichever direction it may take, will enforce certain changes on philosophy. I shall briefly comment on each of these points.

Social scientists and philosophers that work in or defend the tenets of (the different branches of) action science claim to dispose of an alternative, still under development, for the traditional methodology and practice of the social sciences. This alternative tradition coexists with its rivals. Its adherents, raised in different traditions themselves, argue that the traditional guiding assumptions are not functionally adequate. The adherents of the distinct traditions disagree about which are the most important problems to solve. Conceptual problems play an important role in the ongoing dispute. The assessment of guiding principles depends to a large extent on ideological and other nonscientific factors. Each of these statements agrees with methodological theses that have recently been advocated in philosophy of science. A most interesting set of such theses is presented in "Scientific change: philosophical models and historical research" by Larry Laudan, Arthur Donovan, Rachel Laudan, Peter Barker, Harold Brown, Jarrett Leplin, Paul Thagard, and Steve Wykstra (*Synthese*, 69, 1986, 141-223). It is

obvious that the study of the alternative research tradition in view of those theses would provide an interesting and workable way to partially test the latter.

Action science is relevant for epistemology and philosophy in general in another way as well. First, and trivially, it provides new and sometimes novel information that, in view of its nature, will influence epistemology and other philosophical disciplines. Next, its presuppositions about the nature of humans run counter to the view on humans posited by traditional epistemology with respect to the social sciences. As these presuppositions are at the same time very attractive, the growing successes of action science will sooner or later force philosophers to adapt their views. This will directly influence epistemology, but indirectly also philosophical anthropology, social and political philosophy, and ethics. Apart from all of this, the view on humans that evolves from action science will modify the anthropological presuppositions inherent in epistemology itself, viz. the concept of the epistemic subject. Action science deals with aspects of human decision making, of human communication and of human cooperation. Unlike what is the case for other theories in the social sciences, these aspects are so close to and so intermingled with basic epistemological processes, that our views on the latter cannot remain unaffected. Phrased differently, for the first time a social science approaches human behavior in such a way that it may describe epistemic behavior in its full complexity. The resulting conceptual and empirical threat to epistemology is enormous; and given the fact that epistemology has been playing a leading role in the philosophy of the last two centuries and that epistemological problems are becoming increasingly important in philosophy of science and to some extent also in social philosophy and ethics, one may expect rather drastic changes throughout philosophy.

If the preceding picture is correct and the evolution continues, both the sciences and philosophy are approaching another turning point. The recent history of, mainly, philosophy of science has been clearing the way for new approaches, in methodology but also in the sciences themselves. Old dogmas have been devastated; more importantly, a richer and more equilibrated approach to science is developing. It may be hoped that the present volume stimulates philosophers to take part in the movement, and prevents them from having to run behind it later.

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