

Discussion Forum

## Book Review

# Science meets Philosophy: What makes Science divided but still significant?

**Av Hans Christian Garmann Johnsen**  
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Hans Christian Garmann Johnsen is Professor of Working Life and Innovation, a field which draws on several traditions of scientific research and engagement with practitioners. In this ambitious and well-referenced book, the author sets out to map the choice of routes through the forest of knowledge, presenting an historical context from the ancient Greeks to the present day. He emphasises three distinct routes, based on realism, idealism and scepticism, and supports his account with detailed study of key publications in the history of social and political thought.

The history and philosophy of science is not typically given prominence in current business education. The focus can instead be on the application domain of business, with implicit assumptions that the philosophical underpinnings are unproblematic. The book suggests otherwise, and it introduces the reader to a rich literature, drawing particularly on European traditions. It could be read as part of a university course, supported by a series of tutorial videos, or regarded as an illuminating free-standing text. It follows his earlier book on knowledge: "The New Natural Resource: Knowledge Development, Society and Economics" (Gower 2014).

My suggestion is that the book offers a useful "intellectual underground map" of the development of science, and in particular social science. The individual reflective researcher could use it as a "virtual Satnav system", demystifying complexity, and helping the researcher to navigate, using known landmarks. As in many of his previous books, Johnsen presents schematic choices, illustrating alternative approaches to epistemology.

Some readers may wish that the arguments were supported by more practical examples and "war stories" from current research. It has been planned that a second volume would take and apply the explanatory frameworks, exploring "Sustainable Scientific Knowledge". This could involve some of the same contributors as the earlier "Higher Education in a Sustainable Society: a Case for Mutual Competence Building", (eds. Johnsen, Torjesen and Ennals; Springer 2015), but with a stronger central argument derived from this first volume.

Such an ambitious book must inevitably have some omissions. I can identify three in particular:

The book does not address the author's distinctive specialist field of Working Life Research and Innovation, where the researcher is often closely engaged and committed to the subject matter, bringing about change rather than remaining clinically detached. How can this account of scientific traditions be applied to the current context of separate traditions which have converged in recent years with "Industry 4.0", but may soon diverge, with variants of "Industry 5.0"?

There is little mention of Action Research, which has been a strong tradition especially in Scandinavia. Action Research can be seen as constituting action, with consequences. Has Action Research acquired the rigour to enable rival varieties to be compared and contrasted?

We might have expected more discussion of Artificial Intelligence, to which social scientists have made some notable contributions. What is the role of scientific explanation in the age of Machine Learning?

In other words, there is much more to be done, but this book has opened the door to a new set of debates, which are relevant both to academic researchers and practitioners. In this book Johnsen presented a traditional account of "great thinkers". A second volume may put the analysis to the test of practice.

We had hoped to publish a review of this book by Olav Eikeland, who brought a distinctive perspective derived from ancient philosophy and Action Research. His sudden death on 1<sup>st</sup> September left an immediate gap.