

Editors' Foreword

This issue of *SiC* brings together some of the contributions presented at a Workshop held at the Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas, dedicated to the work of Yehuda Elkana — who, together with the late Amos Funkenstein, founded the Cohn Institute. However, Yehuda Elkana is also connected in a special way to this journal. It was in the spring of 1985 that he sent a circular letter to colleagues and friends presenting a proposal for a new journal for the study of science.

Elkana's formulation of the rationale for the journal was the following:

This is a proposal for a new journal devoted to problems in the theory of science with no artificial distinction between the history, philosophy and sociology of science. With growing maturity of historical scholarship on the emergence, growth and diffusion of ideas in the body of knowledge, be it physical, biological, social or psychological in character, it has become eminently clear in the last decade or so that once a problem is studied in fine structure, one cannot separate anymore the historical, philosophical or sociological considerations. In multicausal history these are all intimately interwoven. It is very rarely that a problem is of such character that without gross oversimplification one can separate the strands into straight history or philosophy or sociology. Not even the pleasantly useful dichotomy into context of discovery and context of justification is really useful any more. In order to understand at least the necessary conditions, without which a discovery could not have been made, the analysis must rely on a deep understanding of the body of knowledge, on the images of knowledge, that is, the ideas about the sources and aims of knowledge constituting the context of the problem but also the logical, philosophical structure of the discipline in order to pinpoint the crucial element in the discovery. On the other hand, even in the context of justification, a historical understanding of the issue is indispensable.

It is not enough to realize that the time has come for such an approach — one has to provide also the institutional tools for it, like the creation of departments and the establishment of journals like the one proposed here. Often the political career of ideas will be part of the discussion of the social context. The field to which the journal is to be devoted could be called "Science as a Cultural System," thus invoking the Geertzian anthropological overtones; alternatively a "Historical Sociology of Scientific Knowledge"

involving the combination of modern, sophisticated history of science and Mertonian and post-mertonian sociology of science.

Another formulation could be illuminating, invoking the French school of anthropological history of science, exemplified by the work of Jean-Pierre Vernant. Here a type of history relying on “cunning reason” — the Greek *metis* — will be followed. Instead of de-limiting the scope of the arguments to the purely epistemic one, the kind of studies which Vernant and his colleagues undertook of classical Greece can and should be applied to science in Late Antiquity, medieval times and through the scientific revolution. One last formulation to clarify the kind of research the journal would promote: The historical question asked should not be “how did an event take place considering that it had to happen” thus illustrating a fully deterministic or dramatic view of history, but rather “why did it happen the way it did when anything else could have happened,” which is an epic view of history. So far the rationale for the journal.

Yehuda Elkana belongs to this rare breed of intellectuals who not only disseminate ideas but also make it their business to implement them. With his contaminating energy and enthusiasm, and especially with his talent for persuasion, he succeeded within a short period of time to convince Cambridge University Press to found *Science in Context*. In publishing the collection of papers devoted to Elkana’s work, *Science in Context* does not only honor its initiator and one of its permanent editors but also reflects on the very ideas which led to its inception.