The natural and social process of science

BY BARRY BARNES

RECONSTRUCTING SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS: THOMAS S. KUHN'S PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE
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far as it is conventional, a product of human judgement and decision, its validity and trustworthiness are called into question. Kuhn helps us to transcend this dualism, to recognise that science is both these things and necessarily so, and that this implies nothing in the way of criticism or distrust.

All this has long been recognised in the social sciences, where Kuhn helped sociologists to realise that research can be studied as a social activity, and scientific knowledge as a cultural product, without denying either the authenticity of the one, the validity of the other, or the relevance of the external world to both. The result has been the development of a fully general sociology of knowledge over the past two decades, which have made a valuable contribution to our understanding of the natural sciences. Hoyningen-Huene apparently knows nothing of this work. On the occasions when he refers to it, it is to criticise it for advocating the kind of exclusively subject-sided point of view which in point of fact it vigorously opposes. Thus it is fortunate that Hoyningen-Huene's concern is entirely with Kuhn as philosopher of science.

Fortunately though this may be, however, it is not the less constitutes a fundamental flaw in Hoyningen-Huene's work. For it is impossible simultaneously to set out what Kuhn actually says and to present him purely and simply as a philosopher: to refer purely philosophical claims in SSR is inevitably to introduce some imprecision into any account that the text itself ascerts. Kuhn's work needs to be understood in relation to a much wider context than this, in a way which makes proper account, for example, of his extensive experience as a historian of science and his continuing interest in what essentially are sociological issues. All this needs emphasis. Because, classic though it is, the orner of Kuhn's work, and hence its serious use and development in the appropriate academic fields, have been seriously inhibited by the narrow frameworks of evaluation. The detrimental consequences of the petty politics of disciplinary boundaries have nowhere been more readily apparent than in the context of the reception of SSR.

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