

## Foreword

The Centre for Advanced Study (CAS) at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters has two overriding long-term objectives. The first is to enhance the quality of Norwegian basic (fundamental) research to the highest international level and standard. Here the call is for specialization and penetration in depth – to benefit basic disciplinary science and scholarship. The other is to promote the same quality and achieve the same level of excellence when it comes to interdisciplinary research. Here the call is for wholeness and integration in breadth straddling disciplinary boundaries without losing out in depth. The two objectives relate equally to the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences, and both are supposed to find expression within and between the three fields of academe.

This book is the result of a series of weekly luncheon seminars in which the fellows of the Centre have been invited to make presentations of their respective specialties aiming of fostering a multidisciplinary dialogue and exchange between the groups and across disciplinary delineations. Three groups were in action throughout the academic year of 2005/2006. The humanists addressed the relationship between *Narrative Theory and Analysis*, the social scientists aimed at developing a deeper understanding of *Environmental Economics* giving special attention to the role of *policy instruments*, *technology development* and *international cooperation*, whereas the natural science group were concerned with *Statistical Analysis of Complex Event History Data* (See presentations on blue pages).

It turned out that a central theme of discussion in the seminars concerned differences and overlaps in methods and approaches. The social and natural scientists had a common denominator in quantitative methods and mathematically based statistics, whereas the methodological device of the humanist group was that of qualitative assessments and interpretations. Here ‘objective’ facts stood against ‘subjective’ meaning. This made up a diversified and varied basis for intellectual interchange of ideas between partly contrasting research cultures, highlighting their pros and cons, flaws and strengths. In this post-positivist friendly ‘battle of cultures’ the call from within the humanist group was for literary studies to become more concerned with methodology aiming at committing text reading to a higher degree of scientific systematization (See second article by Anniken Greve).

To provide an overall synthetic perspective to the book, the editor has contributed an introductory article on *Reductionism versus Holism – Contrasting approaches?*, arguing that there are no insurmountable ideological or practical contradictions between reductionism and holism in scientific synthesis. What is required to succeed is *curiosity* to explore what is on the other side of the ‘fence’, *courage* to jump over it and *willingness* to make investments in terms of time and effort after touch down.

For the first time in the short history of this book series, all articles have been peer reviewed and adjusted to preserve a reasonable standard of popularization without compromising the high standards of sound scientific and scholarly research and reporting. Altogether, six nationalities took part in this evaluation process.

CAS has two hopes for the book. First, to extend the internal multi-and interdisciplinary discussions of the groups to a wider readership – nationally as well as internationally – and to ease communication between readers and authors by providing the e-mail addresses of the authors. Second, and closely related to the first point, we want to contribute to break down the alleged “ivory tower of basic research” by dispersion of a scientifically reliable book written to appeal to readers beyond the realm of pure experts.

Happy Reading!

Oslo, January 2007

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