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Review of *Shaping a Science of Social Work: Professional Knowledge and Identity* by John Brekke and Jeane Anastas

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Book Reviews

John Brekke and Jeane Anastas, *Shaping a Science of Social Work: Professional Knowledge and Identity*. Oxford University Press (2019), 252 pages, \$45.00 (hardcover).

Over the one-hundred-year history of the social work profession, different generations of social workers have discussed, clarified, and debated the relationship between social work and science. Those recurring debates were pursued in the hope of creating theoretically-based social work practice, to professionalize and standardize social work education, to identify the best guiding perspectives for the profession of social work, and to give the social work profession a strong footing among other scientific disciplines. Such efforts have not yet resulted in a definite understanding or agreement; nevertheless, they have provided social work professionals with abundant intellectual wealth and a springboard to further this important topic.

The book carries into the present that self-reflective discussion. It is a culmination of roundtable consultations undertaken within a circle of social work leaders from North America, Europe, and Asia between 2012 and 2016 at the IslandWood conference center near Seattle. The book is largely a collection of the presentations, discussions, and consensus reports made by various scholars at those meetings, organized into four sections: Why? What? How? Then what?

Part 1 answers the question *why*; it provides a background and rationale for organizing the IslandWood roundtable meetings, and delineates its process, content, and overarching consensus achieved at those meetings. Part 2 seeks to answer the *what is a science of social work* question by articulating the intellectual foundations for social work science. In this section, John Brekke and others outline the domains, constructs, and characteristics of a social work science, exploring the identify issue faced by the social

work profession within the larger context of academic sciences. They detail rigorous analyses of social work values and social work science and explore the centrality of theory in social work.

Part 3 examines *how* the application of a science of social work to practice and identifies essential issues, such as the challenges in converging the different concerns held by researchers (rigor) and practitioners (relevance), elucidating the conundrum of whether we ought to pursue evidence-based practice or practice-based evidence. Part 4 answers the question of *then what* by discussing the implication of adopting a realist/critical-realist informed perspective for future social work education and practice.

The accomplishments represented in this book are best summarized by the initiator and core sponsor of the IslandWood roundtable meeting, namely Marilyn Flynn, former Dean of the Dworak-Peck School of Social Work at the University of Southern California. In a succinct Forward, Flynn stresses that these chapters provide clarity, reaffirmation, and a comprehensive sense of science and the meaning of science in relation to social work. Through these intellectual discussions and debates, the roots of science can be firmly secured in all the professional undertakings. Building upon this secure foundation, future learning, teaching, and problem solving for social good can be nourished.

The book is an open invitation to the wider social work profession for participation in this important reflective process. Readers are invited to ponder the question of where and how the social work profession should position itself in the 21st-century. Such a soul-searching exercise is especially relevant to the social work profession in face of the grand challenges American society will encounter as it undergoes what has been called a "4th industrial revolution," which will entail radical reconstructing of many social institutions and communities, as well as individual lives. This book serves as a valuable resource for social work academics, students, and practitioners as we seek to rethink just what does and will define our profession.

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