

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Kelly Moore, *Disrupting Science: Social Movements, American Scientists, and the Politics of the Military, 1945–1975*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, 328 pp. \$US 35.00 hardcover (978-0-691-11352-4)

Through a series of careful empirical case studies, Kelly Moore examines how for thirty years scientists puzzled through troubling political implications of scientific work during the height of the Cold War. She states that at “the heart of this book are the vibrant efforts of scientists to redefine the relationships between fact and value” (p. 2). The topic, germane to much critical sociology, is compelling and she provides an account of the context for the massive expansion of both scientific endeavours and the military after World War II. Moore analyzes how scientific communities in America formed associations in order to respond to the moral dilemmas of doing research with military uses. The first case is the emergence and activities of scientists involved in the Society for Social Responsibility in Science. Inspired by Quakerism, this group argued that scientists needed to carefully examine their own conscience and act in accordance with it when it came to their research activities and the implications. Moore highlights the extent to which this focus on individual moral examination undermined organized, targeted, collective, political interventions. The second case study considers how several different scientific organizations used their expertise to report on the implications of military uses of the natural sciences, in a manner accessible to the public. Doing so, these scientists believed, would provide the public with an alternative to governmental advocates and their inherent biases. Sociologists interested in environmentalism will appreciate her very interesting examination of the tactics used in the debate about the effects of milk contaminated by radiation fallout from atomic weapons testing. Chapters 5 and 6 explore the impact on scientific associations of the New Left, anti-Vietnam war protest, and growing militancy amongst university students. Drawing on this material, the core thesis of the book is that scientists’ own interventions in public life have served to undermine the social authority of science contributing to contemporary ambivalence of the public, and indeed scientists themselves, about the role and impact of scientific endeavours on politics.

Moore's book is very well-written, scholarly, and impeccably organized, making it a useful reference tool. It is relevant to those interested in political sociology, the "fact-value" debate in the philosophy of science, questions of science and ideology, and science studies. There are also discussions of the pitfalls of linking university funding to instrumentalist governmental imperatives, not least on encouraging careerist scientists. In this regard, I was struck by the similarity between the ethical orientation of the Quaker-inspired call for individual moral responsibility on the part of scientists and the advocacy of individual "care of the self" found in Foucault's later works. Arguably, the failures of this Quakerism and those scientists who relied on making scientific information accessible to the public have a lesson to teach those committed to the Foucauldian vision of the effectiveness of being a "specific intellectual."

The virtue of Moore's book is the shift of focus in the "fact-value" debate to the terrain of detailed empirical case studies. In doing so, we find a sophisticated account of the normative beliefs of various scientists about the nature of civic engagement rather than theoreticism, a welcome feature to be sure. The book reads much like a work of the contemporary history of ideas and perhaps, it could better be characterized as a chronicle of scientists' beliefs about civic morals. Consequently, Moore relies on what scientists themselves said and wrote about what they did and why. Here is an opportunity for others to extend her work to attend to the overdetermination of scientific practice. For instance, it would be fruitful to analyze and explain the articulations of scientists as employees of the state, religious persons, and citizens, and the practical contradictions, arising from such articulations in particular cases. Doing so would help us better grasp the concrete exigencies of how scientists puzzle through normative questions.

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