

Antti Eskola

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ANTTI ESKOLA WAS appointed professor of social psychology at the University of Tampere in 1965, only three years after Finland's first chair in this subject had been created in Helsinki. This means that his career as a professor and emeritus professor of social psychology covered virtually the whole history of the subject in this country.

Professor Eskola was elected to membership of the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters in 1983.

Before his appointment to the professorship in Tampere, Eskola had been professor of sociology at the University of Turku and the first editor-in-chief of the Finnish journal *Sosiologia*, so that, alongside Erik Allardt, he is regarded as one of the leading figures in shaping post-war sociology in Finland and in developing the methodology of the social sciences. The two textbooks on methods in sociology that he wrote in the 1960s have passed through the hands of numerous generations of students over the years.

Although Eskola began his academic career as a sociologist, the title of his doctoral thesis *Social Influence and Power in Two-Person Groups* (1961), was indicative of his early interest in the core issues of social psychology, and his textbook *So-*

siaalipsykologia ("Social psychology") (1971), the first of its kind in Finland, was required reading for university entrance examinations in both sociology and social psychology for many years. The book eventually ran to 10 editions and was of international significance in that it was translated into five other languages.

Eskola's importance as a pioneer of Finnish social psychology was grounded in the fact that his writings and teaching projected a view of the human individual as both a part of a constantly changing interpersonal and social reality and a contributor to the changes in that reality. He was able to place everyday interaction between individuals within a broader social framework and at the same time to demonstrate its essential relevance to research into social psychology. The breadth of his intellect combined with his high productivity on all fronts helped his students to create a picture of social psychology as a science that analyses a combination of the individual level and the level of social systems. Thus, in advance of the current ideal of crossing the boundaries between scientific disciplines, he maintained that social psychology could not rely entirely on its own research but should seek for ex-

planations elsewhere, perhaps far away. Another important legacy from the discipline's academic background was the emphasis placed on theory. Empirical description alone, whether statistical or in terms of quotations from interview material, is not sufficient; an analysis of social reality calls for abstract thought which transcends everyday facts.

For decades on end Eskola retained his position as a social scientist who is capable of criticising the ways of the world, sometimes very severely, and at the same time cares about social phenomena both in Finland and in the world at large. He published three largely polemic works during the period of global student and intellectual unrest, in 1968, 1969 and 1972. These were, in chronological order, *Suomi sulo Pohjola* ("Finland, Delight of the North"), *Vasen laita lavea* ("The Broad Way on the Left") and *Yhteisiä asioita* ("Matters in Common"). These were all politically leftist, as was generally the case with the neo-left movement of that time, both in Finland and elsewhere, but even so his theoretical Marxist indulgences did not lead to any political affiliation.

Eskola was most comfortable when he could step aside from the mainstream and criticise it, and one of his favourite areas of social psychology that lay outside the mainstream was peace studies and political psychology. He was a founder member of the International Society of Political Psychology and a member of its board, and he was also instrumental in arranging for a couple of related conferences to take place in Finland in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The following citation from a speech of his made at the European Psychologists for Peace congress in 1986 serves well to illustrate his academic and

sociological views: "Whether or not we want to influence people's way of life through peace education is also worth thinking about. (...) My own personal view is clear: I feel that my own life is important only when I can meet other people (...) and use all my powers to influence things that concern us all." In his opinion knowledge should not be generated exclusively for the scientific community, its professionals, decision-makers or consultants but also for those people whom that knowledge concerns.

Eskola later went on to write more discursive works that linked research findings to political and social viewpoints, such as his *Sotapäiväkirja* ("War Diary", 1991) and *Työpäiväkirja* ("Logbook", 1992). These were followed in the late 1990s and the 2000s by more personal works that considered themes involving religion and the course of human life, such as *Uskon tunnustelua* ("Groping for Faith", 1999), *Yksinkertainen usko* ("Simple Faith", 2006), *Mikä henki meitä kantaa* ("What spirit carries us forward", 2009) and *Vanhuus* ("Old Age", 2016). These books on religion show him to be a rather low-key Christian who preferred to distance himself somewhat from the Church. The last of these books, *Vanhuus*, is a good example of Eskola's widely recognised ability to write in simple language on scientifically interesting topics, as it deals with a number of the most urgent themes in modern research into ageing, such as the re-shaping of one's immediate environment and changes in the relative importance of certain social relationships with the shortening of one's perspective regarding the future.

Throughout his long life and career Antti Eskola wrote in clear and lively

terms about subjects that were of interest to a broad readership, and his colleagues and students will remember him for his inspiring speeches, his skilfully produced written works and his ability to render complicated things comprehensible. As he says in the preface to the first part of his textbook on methods in sociology, "I have attempted to write this book in such a way that any amateur interested in modern research in the social sciences – or in the rules governing the acquisition of knowledge and the making of decisions in general – will benefit from reading it." This same ethos lay behind his other written works, leading Risto Jaakkola, in his review of Eskola's book *Vuorovaikutus, muutokset, merkitys* ("Interaction, change and meaning", 1982) in the Finnish Journal of

Alcohol Policy, to note that "The book is so easy to read that it must certainly have been difficult to write." Whether he was writing a scientific paper, an essay or a book, the structure of his text would have been carefully thought out so that it would be easy for his readers to find their way through it. The sentences would be beautifully polished and his style would be clear and eloquent so that it would have appealed, and undoubtedly will continue to appeal, to a host of new readers with an eager interest in the social psychology of human communities.

Emeritus Professor Antti Eskola continued his career as a writer until the end of his life. His last work, *Vanhanakin voi ajatella* ("Thinking even in Old Age") was published posthumously in January 2019.

Obituary by Johanna Ruusuvuori

Photo:

Touko Hujanen / University of Tampere

Source material was obtained from papers presented by the following persons at the Antti Eskola Memorial Seminar at the University of Tampere on 2nd November 2018: Risto Alapuro (professor emeritus of sociology, University of Helsinki), Pertti Alasuu-tari (academy professor, University of Tampere), Klaus Helkama (professor emeritus of social psychology, University of Helsinki), Vilma Hänninen (professor of social psychology, University of Eastern Finland), Marja Jylhä (professor of gerontology, University of Tampere), Anja-Riitta Lahikainen (professor emerita of social psychology, University of Tampere), Anssi Peräkylä (academy professor, University of Helsinki) and Oili-Helena Ylijoki (director of research, University of Tampere).