1

Introduction

Roger E. Backhouse and Philippe Fontaine

The Social Sciences and Their Histories

In the past decade or so, there have been a number of retrospective surveys of the histories of the social sciences. For instance, to mark the centenary of the American Political Science Association, the *American Political Science Review*, widely viewed as the premier scholarly research journal in that field, published a centennial issue of some twenty-five articles on the "evolution of political science" with special emphasis on the period since the Second World War. Likewise, to celebrate its hundredth anniversary, the American Sociological Association sponsored *Sociology in America* (Calhoun 2007), a 900-page volume that, as one reviewer (Geary 2008) put it, placed more emphasis on the history of the discipline than on its current state. These volumes attest to the depth of research being undertaken on the history of these disciplines; however, interest in the histories of other disciplines may be less. For example, the American Economic Association did not choose to mark its centenary two decades ago in a similar way, and it seems unlikely that its leading journal, the *American Economic Review*, will devote an issue to historical reflection on its first hundred years. Nonetheless, there is a significant amount of work being undertaken on the recent history of the discipline.[1]

Historical work on what Ross (1993, p. 99) has called the "core social sciences in the U.S." has been undertaken, despite the fact that history has increasingly been seen as irrelevant to the shaping of theory.[2] However,

[1] The main concentration of such work is probably in the annual supplements to the journal *History of Political Economy*.

[2] Here we are concerned not so much with the uses of history across the social sciences (see Monkkonen 1994) as with the significance of their disciplinary histories. It should be noted that there is also increasing interest in the history of the social sciences from intellectual historians who have no institutional connections with the social sciences.

virtually all of this work either focuses on one social science in isolation or considers the social sciences in the context of specific historical problems. There are hardly any attempts to write their history as a whole. An exception to this generalization is Daniel Bell's *The Social Sciences Since the Second World War* (1982). As befits a work included in *The Great Ideas Today*, Bell's book identifies key innovative ideas and even makes some effort to contextualize them. Conscious that Auguste Comte's hope "to present a unified view of man's knowledge through the unity of science" had not been realized, Bell noted that "there is a sense today that we are probably farther from that ambition than at most times in our intellectual history" (p. 10). This, together with his sociological outlook, may explain why he does not offer much in the way of historicizing the developments of the social sciences as a whole. Another exception is the special issue of *Dædalus* on the transformation of academic culture in America after the Second World War. The essays on economics and political science contain material that is of great value to a historian of modern social science, but it is the three essays on cross-disciplinary comparisons (Hollinger 1997, Katznelson 1997, Schorske 1997) that represent the most valuable efforts to build upon the disciplinary histories of several social sciences.[3]

Much more momentous than either of these is the collection of essays edited by Theodore Porter and Dorothy Ross (2003), *The Modern Social Sciences*, published as volume VII of *The Cambridge History of Science*. This offers a systematic coverage without suffering from the historiographic limitations of Bell's book. The history it offers is of the social sciences since the late eighteenth century. If one is trying to understand the deeper roots of the modern social sciences, this approach is especially helpful – the late eighteenth century is a key period without which the nineteenth-century origins of much social science cannot be understood. However, if one is trying to understand the social sciences since the Second World War, it suffers from a number of disadvantages if only because there is simply not enough space to explore recent events in sufficient detail. Furthermore, possibly because of the different focus that results from adopting a long time frame, the volume's coverage of interrelations among the social sciences in this period does not go as far as one might hope. Disciplinary histories are integrated in a chapter

[3] Collini distinguished between "discipline history," which "offers an account of the alleged historical development of an enterprise the identity of which is defined by the concerns of the current practitioners of a particular scientific field" (1988, p. 388) and a broader "intellectual history," which cannot be reduced to "an assemblage of 'discipline-histories' " (p. 390). On the definition of intellectual history, see Collini (1985).

by Ross and in eight chapters dealing with the "internationalization of the social sciences," as well as in fourteen chapters on "social science as discourse in public and private life."[4] Given the objectives of the volume as a whole, this structure has much to commend it; however, it means that, although there are accounts of the social sciences in Latin America, Africa, and major Asian countries, there are no essays on the social sciences as a whole in North America or Europe, the main centers of academic social science in this period.[5]

When Porter and Ross (2003, pp. 1–10) introduced their volume, they had to be attentive to changes in terminology – what are now known as the social sciences had been called, in different contexts, moral and human sciences. These changes were associated with different perceptions of what this group of disciplines covered: was psychology, for example, a social science or a natural science, closer to biology? Such disagreements over the use of the word "social" were accompanied by disputes over whether, or in what sense, they were "sciences," the difference between French and English usages of the word being a factor. Here, dealing with a narrower period that did not see the same changes in the institutional setting of the social sciences, we do not need to pay such attention to these shifts in terminology, although the scientific status of the social sciences was repeatedly questioned, particularly by outsiders, and the boundaries between the social and the human sciences varied from one country to another. Though these questions have not disappeared – in particular, the claim of the social sciences to the title "science" is disputed as hotly as ever, especially when some failure in the public arena can be blamed on their inadequacies – the institutionalization of the social sciences in academia makes them less of an issue.

More directly relevant is the question of which disciplines are to be covered. Clearly economics, political science, sociology, and social anthropology must be included: on this, there is no disagreement. Though there may be reasonable doubts whether it is a social science at all (Calhoun 1992, p. 170), we also include psychology because it was central to many cross-disciplinary research ventures in the social sciences after the Second

[4] These are the headings to Parts III and IV of the volume.

[5] Heilbron, Guilhot, and JeanPierre (2008) explore the possibility of a transnational history of the social sciences. Regarding the lack of histories of the social sciences as whole, two other exceptions can be mentioned: Scott Gordon's (1991) *The History and Philosophy of Social Science* and the *Fontana History of the Human Sciences* by Roger Smith (1997). Yet, in these two volumes, little attention is paid to the postwar era.

World War. The final inclusion is human geography, a discipline that came to be seen as a social science after the Second World War.[6]

While these six disciplines span the modern social sciences, they are not the only choices that could legitimately have been made. Even in a period when their institutionalization within academia has imparted rigidity, the boundaries of the social sciences and their relationships have remained fluid. There were many cross-disciplinary ventures, some of which challenged conventional disciplinary boundaries and some of which accepted them. They might be based, as was Parsons's reconceptualization of sociology "as the unifying center of an interdisciplinary nexus" (Nichols 1998, p. 83), on an overarching theoretical framework.[7] Alternatively, they might be based on no more than a pragmatic, commonsense view that social scientists tackling common problems ought to work together, exemplified by area studies, a self-consciously cross-disciplinary network of academic departments and research centers set up in the 1950s and 1960s to tackle problems relating to the Soviet Union, Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia (see pp. 193–4). In other cases, such as management science (or its various branches from marketing to accountancy), there emerged what effectively have become independent disciplines but, because of their practical, applied orientation, they never became core social science disciplines. There were also disciplines that were partly within social science yet retained strong identifications outside of it. Social history drew on sociology and might be considered the counterpart of human geography, concerned with time rather than space. However, though it was subject to many of the same intellectual fashions as the social sciences, it retained a separate disciplinary identity linked to history and the humanities (see Sewell 2005). Linguistics can also be seen as a social science but, like social history, it extends outside

[6] Though he was more concerned with the definition of the "behavioral sciences," Berelson (1963, p. 1), who served as director of the Behavioral Sciences Program of the Ford Foundation from 1951 to 1957, listed anthropology, economics, history (not geography), political science, psychology, and sociology under the term social sciences. He regarded the American versions of anthropology, psychology, and sociology as the core disciplines of the behavioral sciences and included as well parts of political science, law, psychiatry, geography, biology, economics, and business and history (p. 2). Kenneth Prewitt (2005, p. 222) notes that "the social sciences formed themselves in the now familiar five core disciplines: anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology." Joel Isaac (2007) provides an informative survey of the history of Cold War studies since 1990. He notes "a burgeoning research front: the history of the American human sciences during the Cold War" (p. 727). Interestingly, by the term "human sciences," he means: philosophy, psychology, economics, sociology, and anthropology.

[7] On the place of *The Structure of Social Action* of 1937 in Parsons's effort, see Camic (1989).

the social sciences as usually understood. Law offers another example of a discipline outside of what is traditionally considered social science yet draws heavily on its frameworks, whether via criminology or via the various approaches of bringing together law and economics. There have also been attempts (such as communication studies) to spin new disciplines from established ones. The lesson to be drawn is that, using Calhoun's (1992) apt phrase, the social sciences are part of a complex "project of a general understanding of social life," reinforcing the argument that the histories of the different social sciences need to be considered together.

While the ideal is, without doubt, a comprehensive history of the social sciences as a whole that explores both developments within each discipline and the networks of interdisciplinary engagements that helped frame disciplinary identities, such a history is some way off. Although much useful work has been undertaken on the history of the social sciences since the Second World War, there remain significant gaps in our knowledge so that the task of synthesis is only at a preliminary stage. The type of synoptic work, achieved by *The Cambridge History* in relation to the post-Enlightenment creation of the social sciences, is not yet possible. Yet much can be learned simply from placing the histories of the different social sciences alongside each other, as is done here, in Chapters 2 to 7. Doing so enables us to answer a number of questions that are central to any understanding of the social sciences as a whole, and that pave the way toward an integrated history (see Chapter 8).

Recognizing that the histories of our six social sciences share common features but also exhibit significant differences, we asked contributors to prepare their chapters in a way that fitted the discipline about which they were writing. We suggested a number of questions that contributors might consider, although emphasizing that they were only illustrative of potentially significant themes.

1. Was the Second World War a significant dividing line in the orientation and development of social scientific knowledge for all disciplines?
2. Has the development of social science disciplines been teaching or research driven, and what have been the effects of this?
3. How important was the influence from the United States and, more broadly, how important were national traditions within the social sciences?
4. What were the relationships among the various social sciences?
5. What were the relationships with the natural sciences?
6. Was the size of the various communities significant in any respects?

7. What was the role of professional societies in the development of social science disciplines?
8. What was the role of the Cold War and politics, including the radical movements of the 1960s and the rise of neoliberalism?
9. How was dissent handled?

Though the contributors could not be expected to respond to all of these questions – most were phrased in a way that was not especially conducive to a treatment centered on disciplinary history – their accounts provide a basis on which an intellectual history of the various social sciences could be contemplated.

Professionalism, Methods, and Disciplinary Identity

The six chapters that follow reveal much about the perceived identities of the different disciplines as they evolved in response to the challenges facing social scientists during this period. Mitchell G. Ash starts Chapter 2 by pointing to the peculiar place of psychology, "suspended between methodological orientations derived from the physical and biological sciences, and a subject matter extending into the social and human sciences" (p. 16). This location helps to explain the variety found within psychology and also the tensions and dynamics within a discipline that is in some ways closer to being an assemblage of different fields than a single discipline. After the Second World War, a growing number of psychologists endorsed a "sociotropic" orientation and accordingly emphasized the social scientific dimension of the discipline (see Capshew 1999, pp. 155–158). Interestingly, at the very same time, "biotropic" psychology experienced a relative retreat, economists embraced the model of the natural sciences with much enthusiasm. In Chapter 3, Roger E. Backhouse argues that the Second World War brought economists together with mathematicians, statisticians, engineers, and, more generally, natural scientists in a way that had profound consequences for how the discipline was conceived. Whereas in psychology, the rapprochement with the social sciences reinforced the discipline's protean identity, the increasingly scientistic ambitions of economists served to consolidate a strong disciplinary identity based on their image "as the practitioners of a rigorous, dispassionate, and apolitical discipline" (Bernstein 2001, p. 152).

Chapter 4 on political science, by Robert Adcock and Mark Bevir, focuses instead on the narrative of Americanization. Although all the chapters tackle this issue, Americanization was particularly prominent in political

science because American scholars were at the forefront of the so-called behavioral revolution of the 1950s and 1960s. This involved a shift away from normative problems (increasingly placed in courses in political philosophy) towards the study of how political processes worked in modern societies. The comparatively late establishment of political science in academia and the transatlantic differences within the field also contributed to the question of Americanization being more central to discussions of disciplinary identity in a field characterized by multiple approaches and several subfields.[8] Jennifer Platt, in Chapter 5 on sociology, a discipline that entertained a complex and changing relationship with political science after the Second World War, shows that, even though the fragmentation of the discipline may be less than that in political science, one can hardly escape questioning "the extent to which there has been one sociology with a shared history" (p. 102). Rather than attempt a conventional history, which would, perhaps almost inevitably, give the subject more unity than she believes it has, she confines herself to outlining some of the key features of world sociology. She provides not a single history but a series of histories, ranging from the discipline's demography to its research methods.

The remaining chapters structure their histories around peculiar features of their disciplines. In Chapter 6, Adam Kuper seeks to locate social anthropology firmly in its colonial setting, which made it originally a specifically European enterprise. It was a discipline pursued in elite academic institutions within what were then the world's leading colonial powers. During and after the Second World War, when the United States displaced Britain as the dominant world power and the effects of decolonization began to shake the British Empire, the anthropological landscape changed in many ways. Where the First World War had played no minor role in accelerating the emancipation of anthropology from sociology, making the differences between traditional and modern societies much more meaningful than the simple question of backwardness, the Second World War strengthened the orientation toward the study of different cultures and, in the process, reinforced the vision of the relativism of Western cultural principles even among highly industrialized countries. Building on the legacy of Franz Boas, American anthropologists acquired greater visibility on the

[8] Michael Kenny (2004) shows that the fate of British political studies in the 1950s and 1960s can hardly be understood as a mere conversion to American models, which is not to say that the American version of political science did not weigh on British debates. Robert Adcock and Mark Bevir (2005) point to the historiographic significance of the opposition between the British study of politics, with its emphasis on historical and cultural particulars, and the more ideologically scientistic American science of politics.

international academic scene. Though the ongoing international influence of British social anthropology makes it inappropriate to characterize the developments of anthropology in the Western world after the Second World War as a simple story of Americanization, the relative institutional slowing down of social anthropology and concomitant recognition of sociology in Britain from the mid-1960s facilitated the development of cultural anthropology in the United States.

In contrast with social anthropology, the dynamics of human geography, as Ron Johnston points out in Chapter 7, are explained by its absence from the elite academic institutions. Geography was represented only by the *National Geographic* and school geography teaching. Learning about maps and exotic places might be an important part of the curriculum, and responsibility for training geography teachers might fall upon universities, but for many years human geography lacked the research base that would justify it as an academic discipline.

In all these accounts, with the possible exception of social anthropology for which the interwar period was at least as important, the Second World War was much more than a symbolic dividing line, for it generally strengthened the social sciences, laying the foundations for their postwar expansion: psychologists were needed to conduct personnel assessment and allocation, to treat and reduce psychological casualties of war, and to understand how best to undermine enemy morale; sociologists, political scientists, and social anthropologists were needed to understand the societies within which and against which the Allied powers were fighting; geographers were needed for cartography and for their knowledge of remote parts of the world; and economists were needed to plan the war effort, helping to allocate resources efficiently, and as generalized, technical problem solvers.

The nature of the war's impact, however, varied considerably across disciplines. Psychology experienced enormous growth on the clinical side, with massive numbers of women entering the profession, especially in the "softer" subfields such as developmental and educational psychology. In contrast, sociology managed to keep itself apart from social work, the closest equivalent to clinical psychology. However, despite these differences, all disciplines encountered new tools with strong methodological implications, from the quantitative techniques that posed challenges to much prewar economics to the sample survey, a major tool for postwar sociology and political science.

The most obvious feature of all the social sciences after 1945 was their rapid growth. In psychology, this was associated with specialization, illustrated by

the rapid emergence of a clear divisional structure within the American Psychological Association. By the 1970s, the differences were sufficiently great that complaints were raised that there was no unity to the subject. The discipline held itself together by enforcing methodological conventions, laying out how research was to be conducted and evaluated. Economics did not have the same problem. There was specialization and discussion of method (in the early postwar years, concerning the role of mathematics), but by the 1960s, economics had become more unified. Postwar expansion played an important role here, for the influx of economists from wartime service caused an unusually rapid generational shift, favoring the spread of mathematical and statistical methods, although this happened much more slowly than has often been suggested.

The history of sociology fits neither of these models. Before the Second World War, many sociologists had entertained hopes that sociology might be the master discipline among the social sciences, performing a "grand synthetic function." After 1945, other, perhaps less grandiose, aims appeared, especially in the United States, with a growing number of sociologists making a profession of linking theory to data collection. There was also a contrast with economics in that, far from providing opportunities for economists with experience to practice their subject outside academia, rapid expansion resulted in new staff often having qualifications outside sociology, making for diversity within the discipline. Human geographers, too, came from a range of academic backgrounds (see Robic 2003, p. 384), though, for them, the problem was the lack of a substantial research base to a discipline that was dominated by the need to teach undergraduates and to train school teachers. For very different reasons, in neither human geography nor social anthropology was there postwar expansion to rival that seen by other social sciences.

Another interesting feature of social science disciplines after 1945 was their endorsement of theory. It is unclear whether this turn should be located precisely after the Second World War, as some of its origins can be found in prewar developments, but it is fair to say that by the late 1940s an increasing number of social scientists recognized the necessity for a more theoretical outlook. As shown in several of the contributions to this book, that development may well have been obscured by historians' obsession with the use of new techniques and tools after the Second World War. Economists, political scientists, human geographers, and social anthropologists, as well as sociologists inspired by Parsons, began to develop identities in which theory was more central than had been the case before the war. This is not to say that social scientists had previously neglected theory but rather that

they became more self-conscious of the need for a theoretical basis for the facts they were studying. In part this was because scientific theory helped differentiate lay and expert knowledge.

When we talk of the social science disciplines after the Second World War, there is a tendency to treat them as single entities, as if continuing national traditions were of minor importance to their development. Stories of international homogenization often present the intellectual and institutional changes that characterized the social sciences after 1945 as the outcome of a process of Americanization. Most contributors acknowledge that the significance of the American social sciences after the Second World War can be seen as the effect of their sheer size, combined of course with American wealth and cultural power. Though size may be a necessary condition for dominance or influence, it is hardly sufficient in itself. Thus, American influences seem to have played a significant role in economics where a strong disciplinary identity reinforced the effects of size, but they were less of a factor in psychology where these were offset by the fragmentation of the field and the difficulty any approach faced in claiming hegemony over the psychological discourse in the public sphere. In these cases as in many others, when taken too literally, narratives of Americanization can be misleading.

As many scholars such as Bell (1982) have noted, the 1960s and 1970s were a highly significant period for the social sciences. Hunter Crowther-Heyck (2006) has argued that a new patronage regime began to take shape in the late 1950s and early 1960s, which became dominant by 1970 at a time when a number of social scientists began to show concern about the fragmentation of their fields. The move from the first system, characterized by the prominence of several private foundations, the Social Science Research Council, and a variety of military research agencies, to the second system, which centered on the National Science Foundation and the National Health Institutes, was especially significant because it marked a shift from the cross-disciplinary research ventures following the Second World War to the more specialized orientations that characterized the social science disciplines from the early 1970s. One interesting, and subtle, argument advanced by Crowther-Heyck is that "the program officers of the second system tended to see applied social science as the application or dissemination of existing social scientific knowledge, whereas the behavioralists had seen new, fundamental research as an essential part of solving practical problems" (p. 434). By 1970, it would seem that the "policy orientation … that cuts across the existing specializations" and that Harold Lasswell (1951, p. 3) endorsed in the programmatic *Policy Sciences* had retreated.