

# Introduction

In Australia, as elsewhere among the advanced societies, social-science knowledge and thinking has moulded, in subtle but often important ways, the shape of modern society. While most social-science research is by its nature academic in focus, the ideas and debates that it generates have important and tangible consequences for how modern society is organised. It would be difficult to understand, for example, current thinking towards social policy without reference to debates concerning redistributive justice, or approaches to multiculturalism without taking into account academic research on citizenship. In practice, most contemporary public policy is grounded firmly in social-science knowledge, frequently using information that has been painstakingly accumulated and analysed over several decades. As a consequence of this continuing interplay between ideas and outcomes, the influence of social science on the form and character of society is and remains one of the major themes of the modern age.

This book provides an overview of the current state of social-science research about Australia at the beginning of the twenty-first century. While the focus of the contributions is on research that is relevant to Australia, the contributions necessarily also encompass the broader development of the social sciences outside Australia, as well as the emerging changes introduced by the growth of interdisciplinary work and the internationalisation of social science. Each contribution describes the range of research that has been conducted in the particular field, places it in context, explains why and how it is significant, and evaluates its contribution towards a better understanding of Australian society. The major criterion for selecting the material to be included in each of the contributions is its theoretical or empirical significance in furthering our understanding of how Australian society functions.

## The development of the social sciences

Although there is no single definition of what constitutes the social sciences, it is generally agreed that the focus of social-science research is on human behaviour as it occurs in groups. These forms are reflected most obviously in patterns of group behaviour, but also in more formal expressions of human activity, such as the institutions of

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society, which are created to order and regulate behaviour. Human behaviour is also reflected in culture, which accumulates over time as a consequence of continuous patterns of human behaviour, and in turn socialises and shapes the behaviour of each succeeding generation.

While social science aspires to emulate the scientific method found in the natural and physical sciences, controversy has always surrounded whether or not an objective scientific method can be applied to human behaviour. The formative work in this field was Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), which laid out the key events in the development of a scientific method in the natural sciences. While a vigorous debate has always surrounded how well this model can be applied to the social sciences – critics emphasise the number of unique events and vast range of variables inherent in human behaviour – it is clear that most of the social-science disciplines adhere most closely to what Kuhn called the prescientific phase of 'random fact-gathering'. For this reason, social science is sometimes referred to as social studies, particularly where it encompasses fields of study that are more traditionally located in the humanities, such as history, philosophy and art.

This last point raises the question of which disciplines actually constitute the social sciences. Once again, opinions vary widely. Many classifications point to the break between philosophy and science in the eighteenth century – what C.P. Snow (1959) called the 'two cultures' – as the defining event in the formation of the social sciences. It has been argued that this fundamental division – between science, based on empiricism and observation, and philosophy, based on speculation or deduction – has structured the formal organisation of universities and, as a consequence, our intellectual choices, for the past two centuries (Wallerstein 1996). As universities expanded during the course of the nineteenth century, their formal academic structure and methods of instruction reflected this division. In turn, scholarly journals emerged to promote research and debate in these disciplines, and major libraries used them as a basis for classification. As the division became ever more formalised, the options for reorganisation of the social sciences have become ever more limited.

Wallerstein's (1996) influential study has identified three major lines of demarcation that emerged as a consequence of this rift between philosophy and science. The first is what he calls the past–present division, which places history on one side of the divide, and political science, sociology and economics on the other. Furthermore, because these last three disciplines (or significant parts of them) wanted to be objective, they adopted quantification as a primary method of analysis during the twentieth century, further emphasising their focus on contemporary problems. The second line of demarcation is an intellectual one, between the study of the countries that were most industrialised at the turn of the century and the rest. As a result, other disciplines, such as anthropology and oriental studies, emerged to study these less-advanced societies. And the third line of demarcation identified by Wallerstein is the division of social science itself into three separate disciplines: political science, sociology and economics (Wallerstein 1996).

From the 1930s, with the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, most observers have agreed that the 'core' social-science disciplines are economics, political science and sociology

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(for a review of the debates, see Whittington 1989). These disciplines have been regarded as central to the social sciences because, in many important respects, they share a scientific approach to problem-solving; for that reason, psychology has often been added to the list, as have, on occasion, anthropology and geography. In recent years, as a result of the influence of quantification on the discipline, history has also sometimes been included. The main difficulties in arriving at any generally agreed set of social-science disciplines are the rapid pace of change within the area; the increasing specialisation that is taking place within the disciplines, sometimes as a result of technological change in data processing; the inevitable fragmentation that follows from specialisation; and, not least, the different patterns of development that take place from country to country (Wagner, Wittrock and Whitley 1991).

The increasing diversity that is the hallmark of the social sciences in the late twentieth century has meant that disciplinary boundaries are becoming weaker. Notwithstanding this diversity, however, the majority of universities in the advanced societies, and the majority of the academic staff who work in them, are organised around, and identify themselves by, disciplinary labels. For this reason, the organisation of this book follows this traditional, tripartite division of the social sciences into economics, political science and sociology. But as the chapter headings make clear, there is very considerable diversity, and even overlap, between the fields of academic endeavour within each of the three areas. Political economy, for example, covers political science and economics; interest groups and social movements covers political science and sociology; and work, employment and technology covers sociology as well as economics. The headings of the three subsections in this book – economics, political science and sociology – should be regarded as generic titles for related forms of intellectual activities, rather than as cohesive, disciplinary labels.

## The social sciences in Australia

The social sciences have developed in different ways across different countries, but in general most countries followed the pattern outlined in the previous section (for reviews, see Dogan and Pahre 1990; Wagner, Wittrock and Whitley 1991). As we would expect, the American model – given that region's size and economic development – has been most influential in the evolution of the social sciences, largely because it was most easily diffused across the advanced societies (Mancias 1991). The American model also places considerable store by academic independence, with scholars being shielded from political pressure – always an important consideration in the social sciences. By contrast, the Continental European model is more state-centred, because the state organises, funds and controls the universities. As a consequence, the social sciences, particularly in Germany and Italy, evolved in institutions that were defined by their relationships to the state (Schiera 1991).

Australian social science has developed as a hybrid of these two models. The attractiveness of the American model stemmed from Australia's increasingly close association with North America, particularly after the end of World War II, when many American

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scholars were recruited to work in Australian universities. The ideal of academic independence in Australia – while lacking the philanthropic private sector that underpins it in the United States – has also been a cornerstone of Australian academic culture. Nevertheless, as in Britain, where many of the earliest founders of Australian social science originated or were trained, the influence of the state was crucial to the funding of universities.

Although many of the individual disciplines that form the social sciences in Australia were established early in the century, the social sciences as such did not achieve a corporate identity until 1942, when the Social Science Research Committee (later the Social Science Research Council) was formed. This new priority was given institutional form when the Australian National University (ANU) was established in 1946; of the four foundation research schools, one was dedicated to social sciences, the other three to medicine, Pacific studies, and the physical sciences, respectively. The Research School of Social Sciences remains one of the largest schools in the ANU today and houses some 100 academic staff. The social sciences gained their own learned society in 1971 when the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia took over the functions of the Social Science Research Council (see Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia 1998).

Citation studies show the contribution that the Australian social sciences make internationally, and also allow a better understanding of the structure of the social sciences within the country. Based on an analysis of citations between 1983 and 1994, a study found that over that period, Australia's share of total publications in the Social Science Citation Index in economics and sociology declined substantially, while psychology and business studies increased significantly (Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia 1998:12). Overall, however, Australian economics attracted more citations than those of its counterpart countries internationally, while political science and sociology both attracted fewer citations. A more recent study by Katz (1999) found that in economics, Australia's share of the total citations between 1981 and 1997 was 3.3 per cent, compared to 10.7 per cent for the UK and 64.8 per cent for the US; in political science, Australia's share was 4.8 per cent, compared to 12 per cent for the UK and 57.7 per cent for the US; and in sociology, Australia attracted 2.9 per cent, compared to 7.4 per cent for the UK and 59.4 per cent for the US. While Australia's international contribution is necessarily small, parts of the social sciences clearly gain considerable international attention.

### Economics

The practice of economics in Australia differs substantially from that of the other social-science disciplines in that a substantial amount of research is conducted outside the universities. Research employment is divided between the universities (with an increasing number of specialised research centres), government and business. While this means that economic research is probably better funded than other areas of social science in Australia, the diversity of interests behind the funding inevitably puts pressure on the 'objectivity' of the research. We see this most obviously as economists are called upon by businesses to argue a particular case, whether in lobbying governments, or in legal disputes with regulators or other businesses. Government research bureaus operate in the context of political agendas. In contrast to the UK, there is no tradition of trans-

parency in competition between macroeconomic models. University research centres are typically reliant on funding from government department contracts. These pressures put the onus on the economic academy to step back from the fray of competing interests and deliver less partial analyses. While some economists still like to lay claim to 'scientific objectivity' in their pronouncements, a more reasonable and achievable role for the academy is to encourage transparent debate and to insist that the pronouncements and prescriptions of the free-marketeters and the market-interventionists are subject to the same requirements of logical consistency and conformity with evidence.

The heyday for economists in government probably occurred in the 1980s, under the treasurership of Paul Keating, when every public servant (and every pub conversationalist) was expected to sound knowledgeable on such arcane matters as the J-curve in the balance of payments or the relationship between the money supply and the rate of inflation. Macroeconomic modelling and policy research was (and continues to be) carried out within the Commonwealth Treasury and the Reserve Bank of Australia – in addition to the now-defunct Economic Planning and Advisory Council, which played a key role in the 1980s Prices and Incomes Accord between the federal government and the trade unions, and the Industry Commission, which investigated policy concerns in relation to competition and trade protection. Specialised federal-government research bureaus abounded – analysing the microeconomics of markets for labour, for immigration, for transport, for agricultural products, for mining products and for industrial production – some of which have since disappeared, either through abolition or through absorption into the Productivity Commission.

The economic context necessarily influences the focus of economic research. The arrival of high unemployment and high rates of price inflation in the 1970s stimulated intense debate on the macro economy, with sharp distinctions between the Keynesians and the monetarists (followed by the neo-Keynesian and the new classical schools); similar economic conditions and similar economic debates occurred in the other industrialised economies. Some degree of consensus, or at least grudging coexistence, has been achieved between rival schools of macroeconomic thought – around an uneasy compromise between 'short-run Keynesian' and 'long-run neoclassical' analyses. Graeme Wells discusses the state of research around these and other still-contentious macroeconomic issues such as the 'natural' rate of unemployment and the conduct of fiscal policy.

Since the 1983 floating of the Australian dollar in the foreign exchange market, the supply of bank credit and the interest rate are largely in the hands of the Reserve Bank and the domestic banking system. Here, Bruce Felmingham charts the course of institutional and policy development, particularly the stages of deregulation of the financial sector. The concomitant reduction in tariff protection for Australian manufacturing and service industries has led not only to an increase in trade, but also to important shifts in patterns of production and trade, as analysed in the chapter by Kym Anderson, who also highlights the contributions of Australian economists to the development of national and international trade policies and institutions. While international flows of finance, goods and services have been increasingly deregulated, Glenn Withers surveys the effects of, and debates around, the highly controlled flow of people into Australia –

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finding that the supply-side and demand-side effects of immigration largely balance out in terms of their net impact on unemployment and growth in living standards.

The longstanding institution of industrial tribunals setting (once gender-specific) minimum wages and conditions, the successes and failures of the 1980s Accord between government and unions, and the subsequent move towards bargaining at the level of the individual enterprise, have led to a strong Australian focus on the operations of labour markets and institutions. Jeff Borland surveys the changes that have occurred in the Australian labour market and industrial-relations system over the past few decades, particularly the decline of the male 'breadwinner' as the principal subject, the rise in educational attainment (most particularly among females) and the rising concentration of unemployment within households and neighbourhoods. Peter Saunders examines research into the consequences of these labour-market changes, as well as changes to the tax and welfare system, for the distribution of income. He highlights the methodological problems, charting a clear course through the complexities of definition and measurement.

The weight of economic activity has shifted towards the service sector of the economy, most noticeably with the contraction of jobs in manufacturing and the expansion of the financial, education and health sectors over the past few decades. These structural changes have not been unique to Australia; they are common to most of the advanced industrialised economies. The rapid rate of technological progress in industrial sectors allows increasing production of goods with a shrinking industrial labour force. As real incomes rise, consumers tend to demand relatively more services, where production is often labour-intensive. Jane Hall describes the results of research into the most complex and politically sensitive of the service sectors – the health sector – where both supply and demand are part market-driven and part government-operated. Rising affluence is also expressed in the increasing weight being given to environmental concerns in the economic and political arenas. Jeff Bennett describes the evolution of Australian research into the problems of valuing and regulating activities that impact on the environment and the availability of natural resources.

As Australian governments have moved in the 1990s towards deregulation of markets and the privatisation of public enterprises, so there has been an expansion of research in the areas of competition policy and regulation. Stephen King reviews research on the motivation for, and the effects of, the development of policies promoting competition – and the areas where governments have sought to directly regulate, particularly where natural (or unnatural) monopolies dominate. John Quiggin presents a critical review of research into the motives for and effects of the privatisation programs of Australian governments, an area where claims of fiscal benefits and productivity improvements are hotly contested. Productivity growth is addressed from a very different angle by Peter Sheehan and George Messinis, who examine sources of growth in the operation of the national system of innovation, a system that derives from the interaction of private incentives to invent and experiment with the public operation of research-and-development activities and the incentives of the tax system. Patricia Apps, Glenn Jones and Elizabeth Savage examine the structure and impact of the tax system, particularly in the light of recent moves from progressive income taxation

towards flat-rate consumption taxation, on incentives to participate in the labour force and on the distribution of economic welfare. They emphasise significant developments in the economic theory of optimal taxation.

The growing emphasis of Australian research on microeconomics is reflected in the selection of topics within the economics section of this handbook. The brief for contributors has been to concentrate their surveys on what research has to tell us about the state of, and changes in, Australian society and economy. Inevitably, this focuses attention on research with a strong empirical content. But it would be remiss to ignore the contributions that Australians have made to the global body of economic theory and to global and/or regional policy development. Australians have continued the tradition established in the 1950s and 1960s of contributing to our understanding of how small economies can successfully trade and grow within the global economy, with more recent contributions assessing the merits of global and/or regional and/or bilateral trade agreements.

Significant contributions continue to be made by Australians to quantitative methods in economics, including the building of sophisticated models that simulate the workings of the regional and/or global economy, and the development of econometric theory (the application of statistical analysis to economic data). A distinctive Australasian school of thought has arisen in the analysis of decision-making under uncertainty, emphasising alternatives to the standard model based on expected utility. Over the past twenty years, Australians have made significant contributions to the theory of public goods and to economic-welfare analysis, including the analysis of household decision-making. Australian research on the funding of higher education has contributed to policy development overseas. A fascinating research program, based at Monash University, is currently rewriting the corpus of microeconomics and macroeconomics, based on formal modelling of the Smithian division of labour.

## Political science

Political science as a discipline in Australia owes its origins to the establishment of several groups in the 1930s, notably the Department of Public Administration at Sydney University and the Australian Institute of Political Science, and the publication of an outlet for academic work in the area, the *Australian Quarterly* (Aitkin 1985; Zetlin 1998). The discipline's professional association, the Australasian Political Studies Association, was established in 1952. Prior to the expansion of the universities following the 1957 Murray Report, the majority of university staff in political science had been trained outside Australia; by the late 1970s, for the first time, more staff had received their training in Australia than outside the country (Tatz and Starr 1978). This period also saw a shift in emphasis, from the concerns of the British discipline, to those of North America, in line with broader changes of emphasis within Australian society during the 1970s (Galligan 1984).

As in most other countries, political theory was the major preoccupation of the discipline in the early years of consolidation, and it remains a strong theme in Australia today, with considerable international visibility. Australian political theory has remained a vibrant subdiscipline largely by absorbing the criticisms made of it by radical theory,

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cultural studies and, more latterly, postmodernism. It has also been distinctive in maintaining a practical focus, and Chandran Kukathas outlines the contribution that it has made to contemporary political debates and issues, which he places in three categories: globalisation and economic rationalism; multiculturalism and immigration; and indigenous rights and citizenship. Australian political theorists have been some of the most active in the world in analysing these problems.

A major concern for political theory has been the intersection between liberal values and the operation of political institutions, the latter also an early preoccupation of the discipline. This is covered by Brian Galligan in his review of federalism and the constitution, where he examines the development of the federal system and the challenges that it faces. He identifies the countervailing trends of fiscal centralism and the desire of the states for greater decentralisation as the major challenge for the twenty-first century. This theme is continued by Campbell Sharman in his examination of research on legislative institutions, where he reviews the major debates about Australia's representative institutions, at the state and federal levels, and about the link they provide between society and government. He argues that the Commonwealth Parliament is largely atypical of its counterparts overseas. These institutions have given rise to a distinctly Australian tradition of public policy and public administration, as John Wanna outlines in his chapter. This tradition has its origins in the federal system, as well as on the diverse international influences to which it has been exposed during the course of the twentieth century.

The behavioural revolution of the 1960s that has profoundly influenced American and, to a lesser extent, European political science has largely failed to take hold in Australia. The establishment of the Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research in 1976 by a group of universities (and now representing almost all of them) has facilitated access to data and the provision of training in empirical research. However, this innovation has largely benefited other disciplines, as well as the state and federal public services. Nevertheless, there is a tradition of research and analysis in the areas of political parties and electoral behaviour, and Simon Jackman reviews the range of studies that has been conducted and its contribution to broader debates and concerns in the discipline. Central to his analysis is the importance of strongly disciplined political parties in shaping the form and character of political behaviour.

David Farrell and Ian McAllister examine how parties and voting behaviour intersect with electoral institutions. Australia has been distinctive in designing electoral systems that are internationally innovative, particularly in the development of preferential voting systems, and in the use of compulsory voting; these provide the two main themes in chapter 17. Institutional arrangements have also been an important influence on gender politics. Although women gained the vote in Australia earlier than in any comparable society, except for New Zealand, women's electoral representation has been slow to develop. Patty Renfrow traces the develop of gender politics in Australia, focusing on voting behaviour, women in parliament and women's representation.

Over the past three decades, interest groups and social movements have acquired an independent standing in the Australian political system, though, as Ian Marsh outlines, their precise role and contribution has been the subject of considerable debate. Never-



theless, these numerous groups and movements – covering almost every conceivable aspect of Australian society – are now a central component within the decision-making processes of government. Among the various groups vying for political attention and influence, some of the most important are those promoting environmental concerns and policies, and as Elim Papadakis argues in his chapter, such groups have attained considerable prominence in the policy world. Environmental issues are also important because of their relevance to and intersection with international relations, as well as with the policy priorities of many younger, better-educated voters.

One of the most rapidly growing areas of research in political science is international relations and international political economy. While retaining a focus on the region, the study of international relations in Australia in recent years has tended to displace the traditional emphasis on area studies and, to a lesser extent, the study of foreign policy. Christian Reus-Smit examines the various approaches to international relations in Australia, covering critical theory, realist and rationalist approaches, as well as constructivism, feminism and normative scholarship. The study of international relations runs in parallel with international political economy; in turn, Australia's specific circumstances mean this international dimension is strongly related to the domestic, and for that reason, Stephen Bell and John Ravenhill provide a single, extended chapter that examines these national and international dimensions to political economy, focusing particularly on the causes and consequences of the transition to neoliberalism that began in the 1970s.

## Sociology

The rise of sociology as a social science became possible when, in the post-enlightenment era, reason and rationality began to be applied to the study of interhuman life. This perspective found its most pervasive expression in the works of classical social theorists like Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. In its early stages, sociology's rise to prominence and its institutionalisation as an academic discipline owed much to its inherently conservative view of society. It can be argued that sociology arose in nineteenth-century Europe as a conservative response to socialism, which advocated radical social reforms. This intellectual orientation allowed sociology to secure a place in academia in the US, where it expanded rapidly. In its formative years in the US, sociology's main focus was the study of social structures and amelioration of social problems in a rapidly urbanising and industrialising, and largely immigrant society (Martindale 1960; Ashley and Orenstein 2001).

The intellectual orientation of Australian sociology owes much to its American variant. But its institutionalisation as an academic discipline was relatively slower in Australia. The established elite universities were slow in their acceptance of sociology as an academic discipline. Most of them still do not have sociology departments, although sociology is now taught as part of other programs in the social sciences and humanities. The establishment and expansion of sociology in Australia was considerably aided by the establishment of the Australian National University in 1946, where one of its research schools was devoted to social sciences, including sociology. In the 1960s, establishment of several new universities gave further impetus to the expansion of sociology, where it became an

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integral part of their social science and humanities undergraduate and graduate curriculum (see Bourke 1981; Richmond 1996; Baldock 1994). This expansion led to the establishment of the Sociological Association of Australia and New Zealand in 1963. In 1988 the association changed its name to the Australian Sociological Association. Its *Journal of Sociology* is well-established, with national and international circulation.

Australian sociology is seen to have four intellectual foci, namely stratification and class analysis, critical sociology and postmodernism, cultural studies, and social networks (Baldock 1994; Walter and Crook 1990; Haralambos et al. 1996). However, the rapid growth of sociology over the past two decades makes it difficult to identify major centres devoted to particular paradigms (Western 1998). The 2001 membership directory of the Australian Sociological Association lists thirty-seven areas of research interests of Australian sociologists, headed by feminism, gender and sexuality, health, medicine and the body, industrial sociology, methodology, family and deviance, social control and criminology (Baxter and McGee 2001).

According to Western (1998), feminist sociology, class analysis, social stratification and social mobility, sociology of migration and ethnic relations, sociology of health and illness, and social theory and social policy analysis are the main areas of strength of Australian sociology. There is an increasing trend towards multidisciplinary research, which is blurring the disciplinary boundaries. This is especially evident in research in feminist sociology, urban and regional studies, health and illness, population and immigration, cultural studies and industrial sociology. The contributions in the 'Sociology' section of the handbook reflect these trends.

The contributions by Dwan and Western, Baxter and Bulbeck explore various aspects of inequality in Australia. Dwan and Western examine the nature and extent of social inequality and provide a general overview of the patterns of class, gender and ethnic inequalities in Australia. Baxter's contribution focuses on four themes: family diversity, family life, women's paid and unpaid work, and the role of the welfare state in regulating family life. She points out the centrality of feminism to much Australian sociological work on the family. Bulbeck's paper further highlights the role of feminist sociology in challenging the public and private divide, and how work, ethnicity and sexuality are constructed to support the existing power structures.

The chapters by Martin, Roach Anleu and Najman deal with subjects that have attracted much attention in Australian sociology but are undergoing a theoretical 'rethink'. Martin, in his paper on 'Work and Employment', argues that the current fragmentation of sociology of work, employment and industry is a sign of maturity. He gives an overview of the current state of this subfield before offering an outline of a new synthesis. Roach Anleu's contribution on 'Crime and Deviance' examines theoretical and empirical work undertaken in the field and concludes by addressing the current supposed crisis in the sociology of crime and deviance. Najman's contribution on the sociology of health and illness examines studies of sociocultural determinants and inequalities of health and health outcomes, and concludes by examining prospects for developing social policies for better public health.

Papers by Peter McDonald and Christine Inglis deal with the Australian population and its ethnic diversity. McDonald provides a critical overview of the demographic