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Social science
In retrospect and prospect

Abstract

This discussion paper is conceived as a commentary aiming to describe the broad philosophical object of social science. In the article, I subject the work and practice of modern social science disciplines to a 'classic' pre-disciplinary critique. I suggest that as a collection of separate disciplines ('separatism'), social science is unable to realise its essence: an understanding of the social totality, or 'society'. The rejection of any such totality in post-modern literature forms an additional problematic that the paper addresses. By way of conclusion, I advance the conjecture that the social sciences must adopt, in order to overcome their failures, a more systematic interdisciplinary mode of enquiry.

Introduction

The purpose, or task, of modern social science is the study of *society*. How this task has been carried out has varied throughout modernity. For the past century it has been characteristic of social science to proliferate, to operate as a collection of separate 'disciplines'; that is, for aspects of society to be studied in isolation. As a *study*, a number of disciplines are today on display – sociology, economics, political science, psychology, geography, social policy, and so on. Rarely is a systematic interdisciplinary methodological and theoretical approach to social science adopted, and nowhere is such an approach universally applied.¹ While it has occasionally been considered commendable for disciplines to work together, such an enterprise is generally thought only marginally worthwhile: economists, for example, pay little attention to political theory, and vice-versa. The *separatism* of the social sciences is an institutional reality. Each discipline, confident in its abilities, has not only sought but acquired independence. In this paper I shall be arguing that the separatist tendency of social science is in need of rethinking – in as much as separatism, and its associated practices (outlined below), is resulting in the *failure* of social science.

The main thesis of this paper is that, while the process has not been of linear or even development, social science has been suffering a prolonged failure for decades. Broadly speaking, the social sciences are failing in so far as the most important (and

¹ What I mean by a *systematic interdisciplinary approach* to social science will be described below. At this point, I wish to stress that the following argument requires qualification: I am referring to *general tendencies* rather than an absolute or finished process. There are, as such, exceptions to this rule; for example, the interdisciplinary approach of the *Graduate Journal of Social Science* is quite unusual.

interesting) questions about society are rarely the ambit of any single discipline, but are instead the concern of several. For example, the general problem of the governing dynamics of society cannot be explained simply by reference to psychological phenomenon, or to economic affairs or geographical areas. Similarly, addressing less general concerns, the question of understanding the 'crisis' of the welfare state, or asking about the 'breakdown' of family life, is not the preserve of political analysis or studies in social administration. *It is my contention that an interdisciplinary approach is crucial because the object of social science – society – may only be comprehended on the basis of the various disciplines working together.*²

By failure, I am referring to the non-realisation of the *essence* of social science.³ My point of departure is: if the object of social science is minimally defined in terms of the scientific study of society, then social science disciplines are far from successful; indeed one of the main theses of the present paper is that the contemporary social sciences serve to prevent rather than facilitate the scientific examination of society. *Social science objectives and the reality of social science disciplines do not match.* Yet

² I am not in a position to examine the interdisciplinary basis of social science in an exhaustive manner. I am leaving untouched, for example, the question of method, save to say the following: As *science*, the methods of the social sciences constitute a major area of contention – in as much as many people object to the methodological characteristics employed in the study of society, on the grounds that they fail to produce the same sort of 'exact' results as exhibited in the physical sciences. Any such objection to social science is, I suggest, founded upon a very narrow understanding of what 'science' means – the concept derives from the Latin *scientia*, meaning simply a body of knowledge gained through study.

³ The concept of 'essence' in relation to social science is now very unfashionable. Yet, the fashionable status of a particular concept does not prove it wrong. The term was more widely used in mid-19th century Continental European literature, e.g. Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, 1841, and refers to the objective, underlying nature of a given social relationship or structure, as opposed to its mere appearance.

the failures of the social sciences should not be evaded or ignored, but identified and criticised. To do so is not to depart from social science, but to rejoin it. There is no place for any fideism in social science.

My critique of separatism shall proceed as follows: Part one addresses the general failure of the social sciences during the past century, in terms of how the disciplinary approach of modernity has resulted in an atheoretical standpoint. In part two I address how, in recent decades, the attempt by many disciplines to redefine the 'social' has resulted in a further degradation of social science. In developing this argument, however, my aim is not merely to provide diagnosis but is to advance *prognosis*. It should be noted that this paper is intended as a presentation of theoretical analysis, not a work of exegesis. These comments are intended above all to illuminate general aspects of social scientific endeavour. In an empiricist sense, because the literature in this field is so immense, and because I wish to avoid academic ponderousness, I have chosen not to clutter the paper with frequent references.

Part 1: Passages from the theoretical to the atheoretical

The current state of affairs, of separate social science disciplines operating for the most part in isolation, is well known – indeed it is daily *experienced* in universities and colleges throughout the world. It has become commonplace, then, for social science to proliferate, to function as a diverse number of *micro* studies; that is, it has been broken down into 'areas' (disciplines) which focus on particular aspects of society rather than on the social as a totality. Indeed the fragmentation of social science is not merely

disciplinary in extent, but *sub-disciplinary*. For example, the subject of politics – which traditionally concerned itself with the examination of the nature of power, state theory, the nation, etc. – is in some educational establishments taught solely as the study of 'government', resulting for example in certain contemporary 'political scientists' being interested in little more than, say, party politics and voting patterns. The tendency for disciplines to divide, and in some instances for those sub-disciplines to further proliferate, has become routine: sociology, for instance, has spawned cultural studies, media studies, gender studies, social policy studies ... and, in turn, the study of social policy has given rise to community studies, and so on.

Although often priding themselves as 'new' disciplines, and indeed at times proclaiming to be interdisciplinary, these studies are in fact sub-disciplinary: As an example, while the study of gender may involve aspects of psychology, social policy, history, etc., such programmes of study are often based in a particular department – in the case of gender, often sociology. As such, sociology is no longer the study of social relations in *general* but is, in this instance, concerned with *gendered* relations. This is also the case with the study of ethnicity, (dis)ability, sexuality, and so on. I am suggesting that, as social scientists, it is only possible to understand the complexities and contexts of such matters as gender, ethnicity, etc. by way of an examination of social relations generally. By focussing on these matters *as supposed subjects in their own right* so social science can be drawn away from its analysis of society as a whole. The study of society has, in effect, fragmented: there has been a displacement of attention towards *sub*-aspects of disciplinary agendas. Fragmentation is not simply a problem of coordination; for the lack of an integrated social science is systemic as opposed to pragmatic: separatist

tendencies are – at the theoretical level – the antithesis of holistic social science. Thus it is precisely this *process of fragmentation*, i.e. concern only with specifics, which contributes to the general failure of social science.

As indicated in the introduction, the failure of modern social science is understandable only by reference to its underlying nature. So as to make such reference, I daringly pose the question: *What is the essence of social science?* The nature of social science is an articulation unlike that of any other science; the parameters of the physical sciences, therefore, are simply too restrictive to explain *society*. The study of society can be traced back to Antiquity, to the ancient civilisations of, for example, Egypt, China, Greece and Rome. What is unique to the modern age is the development of an *organised* approach to the study of society – only in the last 150 years, for instance, have the social sciences been established as academic subjects in universities (Hobsbawn, 1962: 342-352). It was the social revolutions of the late 18th and mid 19th centuries that established *modern* social science; henceforth such studies have been closely associated with understanding social change. In societal terms, Europe experienced the passage from feudalism to capitalism, and the development of organised social science can be seen as a *response* to the widespread intellectual chaos that existed during this epoch of upheaval. Accordingly, the focus of early modern social science reflected the emerging conditions and situations produced by capitalism: focusing on, for example, the sharpened inequalities (especially class division), the nature of the market system, and the extension

of democracy.⁴ During this transitional phase, social science tended to *promote* the developing capitalism (e.g. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, 1776; or Cesare Beccaria's *On Crime and Punishments*, 1764), in particular celebrating the concept of individualism: a normative philosophy legitimising the dominance of the bourgeoisie, and echoed in a private property judicial system. However, it was not until the mid-to-late 19th century, as made possible by the advancement of a systematic critique of individualism, that social science became a sophisticated body of knowledge. And it is to such knowledge that we now turn.

Despite their differences in theoretical perspective and orientation, the 'founders' of modern social science – including, for example, such figures as Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, and Emile Durkheim – all contributed to the insertion of the *social* into scientific enquiry. Concerned with the discovery of the *laws* that govern society, these 'grand theorists' considered all hitherto knowledge of the social – i.e. metaphysical and religious knowledge – to be deficient in explaining the complex mechanisms that regulate human life.⁵ It must be stated, however, that while their efforts represent unquestionably the most significant development in our understanding of society, nowhere do we find in these classics a comprehensive exposition of the social. These authors did not specifically

⁴ Many areas of social science tend to continue to single out for attention Western-type, capitalist countries (modern Britain and Holland serve as examples).

⁵ As opposed to all previous accounts of the human condition, the 'founders' of modern social science considered themselves genuine scientists: Comte aimed to formulate scientific laws – the 'laws of social dynamics' (*The Positive Philosophy*, 1853); as did Marx – the stated objective of *Capital* (1867) was 'to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society'. Likewise, Durkheim pioneered the discovery of 'social facts' via the search for empirical regularities, in an attempt to establish relations of cause and effect (see *The Rules of Sociological Method*, 1895).

discuss *society* in terms of theoretical systematicity – that was not their aim: for example, Marx's main concern was to locate the complex structural dynamic of capitalist social formations (see his *Grundrisse* and, with Engels, *The German Ideology*). Nonetheless, although these 'grand theorists' did not explicitly and systematically deal with the theory of society in the strong sense of the term, what we can find in their works is an *implicit* conception of the social in general. On the basis of these elements of theoretical knowledge, we may address the question: What, according to the founders of modern social science, is the reality of the *social*?

Through a reading of the classics, we discover that social life is possessed of an interconnected, *dualistic* foundation: On the one hand, every human being is inseparably linked to all others (through, for example, the division of labour, exchange, communication, and so on); that is, every species member is both mutually dependent on, and mutually determining of, one another. Nowhere do humans exist as isolated agents, but rather always in the company of others. We are, therefore, *social individuals*. Indeed it is only in the midst of social intercourse that it becomes possible to individuate ourselves. What defines our individuality is a multiplicity of social characteristics: to be a teacher, to be a doctor, is a relationship *between* individuals, i.e. the embodiment of both how we relate to others and how others relate to us. This can be illustrated by way of a classic example: Marx (1975: 349) proposed that:

'The *human* essence of nature exists only for *social* man; for only here does nature exist for him as a *bond* with other men, as his existence for others and their existence for him, as the vital element of human reality; only here does it exist as the *basis* of his own *human* existence.'

This thesis – that the human essence comprises of a *series of social relationships* – is developed throughout Marx's writings⁶ and those of other early modern social scientists – for example, Weber wrote: 'In general, such concepts as "state", "association", "feudalism", and the like, designate certain categories of *human interaction*' (1922: 415, my emphasis). Complimenting this dimension of the human essence, the classics inform us that social relations function as a *catalyst*; a creative power through which the human species is increasingly able to free itself from the restrictive bounds of nature. In fact, human beings have moved *outside* nature: we alone, of all species, survive not by adapting ourselves to the natural environment (evolution), but instead shape this environment to meet our own needs. As biologists concede, humans have not altered in millennia; the complex lifeworld we inhabit is, therefore, a product of sociality (Leakey, 1994: 79-80). And so, it is our non-isolated, non-natural mode of life that defines the *social*. In terms of these characteristics, humankind stands out as qualitatively distinct from all other forms of life.

Having provided a rudimentary sketch of the 'social', we are now in a position to briefly address the issue of the *essence* of social science: namely, the totality of social relations – society.⁷ The founders of social science proposed that the interrelations between humans go to form *structured relationships*; that is, definite spatial and temporal

⁶ For example, in the *Grundrisse* (1972, 265), Marx states: 'Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum total of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand'. And, more specifically, 'The human being ... is an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society' (p. 84).

⁷ 'Society' constitutes a highly abstract, and in some ways artificial concept – and does not exist in reality. It is used here purely for purposes of ease of readership. A more appropriate (and complex) term is *social formation*, i.e. a historically real social whole, such as Greco-Roman Antiquity or European feudalism.

complexes such as the 'market' (Ricardo, 1817), the 'state' (J.S. Mill, 1861) and the 'family' (Engels, 1884). Each structure exists as an ensemble of social relations, based on their own rules and laws. A society is the concentration of such determinations; both in terms of relations and structures. It is a concrete, living whole inclusive of all social phenomenon. This view of society as the *universe of human relations* is, of course, a totalising perspective; but it is nonetheless correct, for society is *total*. Society is the only existing axes of social organisation and practice: no form of social life can occur 'outside' of society (although much social life occurs without regard to society's existence). It is only on acceptance of the fact that a society is the expression of the totality of interrelations and structures that connect its members that we may appreciate the real, rich essence of social science.

Thus the 'classics' of modern social science direct attention towards the exposition of what may be referred to as *regional theories*, i.e. theories of the various structural ensembles (e.g. a theory of bureaucracy, see Weber, 1921), and *general theories*, i.e. theories of different social formations (e.g. British capitalism, see Marx, 1867). A general / regional theoretical orientation is *alone* capable of providing a foundation for the genuine scientific examination of social specifics. The object of this pursuit is not to 'explain away' differences and particulars, but is to incorporate such into a holistic framework that illuminates interrelations, and thereby enrich the study of diversity. Yet this mode of approach has rarely been reflected in the work and practice of 20th century

social science disciplines.⁸ Rather, these disciplines have rigidly compartmentalised aspects of the social in terms of 'economics', 'politics', and so on. *Thus in modern times we have witnessed a general shift from a pre-disciplinary method of enquiry to a disciplinary system of investigation.* By way of consequence of this shift, many areas of social science have increasingly lacked a sense of intellectual unity and perspective – for no feature of social life is purely economic, or solely political, etc. And it is in this regard that the disciplinary approach goes wrong, for it is unable to grasp the interdisciplinary-theoretical orientation required for the study of society. It is fair to say, therefore, that the disciplinary model is in general void of adequate theoretical content, both in terms of regional and general theory.⁹ Quite simply, it too often fails to grapple with the fundamental problems of social theory, and as an approach it may deservedly be designated as *atheoretical*.¹⁰

⁸ There are, of course, exceptions to the rule. Some examples of quite recent work adhering to the regional / general orientation of social science include: in terms of state / political theory, see Dahl's *After the Revolution* (1990) or Jessop's *State Theory* (1990); for economic philosophy, see Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom* (1982) or Laibman's *Capitalist Macrodynamics* (1997); and by way of social history see Anderson's *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (1974) or Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992).

⁹ This is not to suggest that all work done within the various disciplines is worthless – rather, that such work is generally lacking in terms of theoretical foundation. By contrast, much contemporary social science is possessed of value in an empiricist sense.

¹⁰ In addition, the various disciplines (and their respective sub-disciplinary offshoots) express a tendency towards *explicit* atheoretical practice: We have, in the last 100 years, witnessed the vast expansion of social science involvement with government apparatus and the business sector. For example, universities are increasingly dependent for financial support on wealthy individuals and corporate enterprise in the pursuit of their social science activities, especially research. In addition, social science academics are more involved than ever before in both the business world and the life of the state. Social science has become increasingly *pragmatic* – examples of the most successful instances are Taylorism and Keynesianism.

This is the general failure of separatism: On the basis of the object of social science, the various disciplines may advance via one of two legitimate routes – either taking a general or regional instance as a point of departure and finishing at the smallest of determinations; or to move in the reverse direction, beginning with a small determinant category and arriving at either a structural ensemble or a social whole. But existing social science disciplines tend to do neither of these, for they all too often *stop short* of arriving at, or embarking from, a regional or general instance. The disciplines are confined by the impasse imposed by their respective separatist parameters: the *psychological*, the *anthropological*, the *cultural*, and so on. Such boundaries restrict (or blind) the disciplines from addressing the social relations and structural logics that impregnate society-as-totality. Thus the separatist approach hinges on a crude tearing-apart of social science. In contrast, a genuinely interdisciplinary social science must embody the realisation that each aspect of society both mediates and creates all other aspects.

The 'founders' of social science were certain of one thing: social science is principally concerned with the totality of social life. Yet much of modern social science has failed to recognise this; indeed in recent decades the social sciences have been challenged by a set of doctrines that deny the existence of any such totality. It is this challenge that we address in the next section.

Through this atheoretical process, the disciplines are increasingly valued solely in terms of their capacity to promote social integration and consensus.

Part 2: Shifts from the social to the asocial

What I take to be a further degradation of social science results from the advancement, and also from a critique, of separatism. In the last three decades, but particularly more recently, an increasing number of social scientists have viewed the 'scientific' orientation of modernity as inappropriate for social inquiry (Bhaskar, 1979). In this regard, modern social science has been recognised as failing in so far as it has been unable to achieve a cumulative growth in objective knowledge (Bloor, 1976). In an attempt to overcome such failure, various practitioners have sermonised the notion that the essence of the 'social' in social science is not a fixed or universal category (Lewis, 2000). Contemporary social science, we are duly informed, should not concern itself with structural ensembles; it is, accordingly, 'post-structural' (Derrida, 1978, 1981). Likewise, the disciplinary particulars of modernity, e.g. the particular of the political, are no longer to be considered wholly relevant; social science is to be 'post-modern' (Lyotard, 1984). What we have witnessed, I will argue, is the infection of a 'post'-condition which has resulted not in the emancipation of the social, but in its deformation.¹¹

Contemporary social science, in an effort to liberate itself from both the 'grand' theories of the early modern period and the disciplinary approaches of the 20th century, has receded into an abstract individualism: the social has been redefined around

¹¹ The variety of the terms used within the 'post'-condition indicates some of the uncertainties of its analysis. What they suggest is that the thing being hyphenated (e.g. modernity, social structures) has in fact transformed and been replaced by something quite different. Yet their imprecision is testament that something very similar to the old is still around. It requires noting that there are, of course, various schools of thought within the 'post'-condition. For present purposes, brevity dictates a degree of simplification with regard to these differing emphases.

conceptions of micro-locales (see especially the work of Foucault, 1980). Through the study of *specific instances of subjectivity*, the search has been made for finalist explanations of human conduct in the sphere of dispersed local sites (from single individuals to small groups), thereby denying the possibility that society exists as an objective formation possessed of an internal unity and logic which governs the relations within and between such locales. Post-modern theorists thus view social reality as *constructed* in and through micro-situations, and consider the 'social' purely in terms of locales for the articulation of *meaning*. In this way, human action is seen as a cultural artefact, regulated by discursive practices: discourse *constitutes* the social world; it constructs both subject positions and their configuration of interactions.¹² As such, the basic philosophical assumption of all post-modern thought is that social existence is a *system of representation*, i.e. that we live in an essentially symbolised world. What defines any particular aspect of the social world is not its correspondence with elements of an objective reality, but its acceptance, as knowledge, by a given community (Burr, 1995).

The 'social construction of reality' thesis has immediate and profound consequences for social science. As a socially located practice, post-modern thought considers social science to construct the reality it describes, rather than provide a

¹² Recent publications in the field of 'discourse analysis' serve as an example of the developing proliferation of social science disciplines. Indeed, contemporary social science has further fragmented into 'micro-studies', often concerned *only* with individualism and psychologism: as one writer states, discourse analysis 'is concerned with the meanings that events and experiences hold for social actors' (Wetherell, 2001: 1). This resort to *actors* illustrates how discourse analysis not only fails to distinguish between structure and agency but, in so doing, consistently ignores the role of structure.

detached description of a pre-existing reality external to its own practice. Social scientific knowledge, we are told, cannot transcend the context of its production; it is culture- and context-bound, constituting nothing more than 'situated knowledge'. It is claimed that all social relations involve meaning and that meaning is only produced through agency. As such, our *beliefs constitute reality*: that is, if we believe something to be real, then it *is* real – for we behave as if it is real. In this way, social reality is actively constructed (Searle, 1995: 199-228). As an example, the constructionist thesis informs us that the *words* we assign to objects do not refer to any intrinsic, ontological quality possessed by those objects. Rather, the same word can mean different things to different people at different times and places. Meaning, therefore, is situated; and the discourse we employ performs an active role in the process of construction of that meaning.

However, post-modern theory can be criticised on a number of levels, not least that it assumes social scientists so be so deluded as to consistently fail to distinguish between types of knowledge – between false and irrational knowledge on the one hand, and genuine knowledge on the other.¹³ More importantly, the practice of social science must – in order to correspond with its *essence* (as outlined in section one) – reject all forms of subjective focus, and concern itself not with what people 'think' about the social world (how it is perceived, given meaning, mediated through discourse, or constituted by cultural conventions) but instead with the social world *as it exists independent of*

¹³ In reality, some beliefs are *wrong* (e.g. the notion that the Earth is flat, or the Biblical account of creation), and must be rejected as false. Social science ought to concern itself with the discovery of that which is *true*.

subjectivity.¹⁴ It is a fallacy to reduce *social reality* to human agency; that is, to say that social objects (e.g. money) exist only in and through thought and language. In reality, neither language nor consciousness are constructive of objects; rather, language and thought are generated from objects. As such, genuine social science holds *that* alone to be an object which has an existence beyond mental constructs. Social science should not identify an *idea* of a fact with a fact itself – nor should it reduce real existence to an existence in thought.

Without a shift to the objective, the social is denied any external reality; it amounts only to the collection of diverse locales. Yet, contrary to the assertions of constructionists, social relations *extend far beyond micro-situations*. And, crucially, it is social relations in their totality – going to form both structural ensembles and whole societies – which are constitutive of locales. As an example: discourse is produced *in and through* social relations; it is an *aspect* of society, as regulated by social structures. To consider otherwise, to view discourse as constitutive of social phenomena, is to suggest that 'meanings' (and language) are somehow produced *outside* of society, which is to resort to individual agency. The production of discourse by an isolated individual outside society is an absurdity. In reality, discourse requires individuals living together and talking to each other. Discourse, therefore, coincides with definite forms of social activity, and is conditioned by such activity; it can never be anything but the reflection of

¹⁴ Subjectivity *is* a fascinating topic, but it is not – or, rather, should not be – the concern of social science. The scientific study of the social world is concerned with *interactivity*, not *individuality*. By definition, to the extent that something is 'social', i.e. forms an interrelationship, so it is not individual.

actual life processes. Social constructionists consistently ignore the *material* basis of discourse, and being dismissive of such they fail to understand concrete social reality.¹⁵

The 'post'-condition has hollowed out social science. That is, the state of social science today does not look very much like a science of social relations. To the extent that constructionists have promoted a diverse field of specialist focuses, each concerned with the specifics of micro-locals, and thereby turned away from a generalised and interdisciplinary approach, so contemporary social science is failing. Fetishism of 'specifics' has made social scientists incapable of seeing society-as-totality, resulting in the deformation of the social: a shift from a science of social relations, to the study of an abstract individualism, an *asocial* science.

To overcome such failure, social science must assume a realist ontology: society exists, independent of our knowledge of the social, and detached from the practices of social inquiry. The denial of such amounts to the reduction of social science to idealism, to the realm of the meta-physical. Social science is about the study of society-as-totality; it is about the social *generally*. In methodological terms, if a particular finding cannot be generalised, but is specific to a given situation, then the researcher is admitting that the finding is neither constituted by, nor constitutive of, society. If generalisation is not possible, then a finding does not form part of social science; it is irrelevant from the social point of view. If generalisation is appropriate, then such findings are valid throughout a social formation. In turn, social scientific knowledge can be externally

¹⁵ A subsequent paper – entitled *A Critique of Social Constructionism* (forthcoming) – will deal specifically with the material, ontological basis of social objects. Some of the theoretical implications of arguments in the present paper will become more fully apparent in this sequel.

verified – in so far as such knowledge is testable; if genuine, a discovery will be typical within a society, and therefore reproducible.¹⁶ *There is a social totality*; an objective social world that requires scientific examination. The task of social science is to understand the social relations that comprise that totality. Social science is not – or, rather, it should not be – about subjective, situated knowledge.

Conclusion

For reasons of space, the analyses presented in this paper are no more than rudimentary sketches, intended to propose elements for discussion rather than expound comprehensive theses. Throughout, I have argued for a recovery of the real: for an interdisciplinary social science concerned with the *social as a whole*, thereby providing the means to address the most complex and important questions about society.

Modern social science, through employment of the same disciplinary practices as the physical sciences, has borrowed the wrong picture of success. The study of the social whole requires disciplines to work together, rather than function as a collection of separate fields of analysis. In addition, the study of micro-locales, and the gaining of subjective, situated knowledge, is far from enriching in terms of social scientific pursuit. The theoretical labours of social scientists should not be concerned with disciplinary

¹⁶ There is a certain value to the study of specificity – for by way of such endeavour we may distinguish between the *normal* and the *abnormal*, and thereby prove generalities within society via the discovery of that which is unique to a situation.

particulars for their own sake, nor with the specifics of micro-locales for their own sake; but rather the aim of this work is to develop an understanding of *society*.

Social science is, by way of its essence, about the study of the social world as it *really* exists; and it exists as a moving, developing *totality*. My argument is that social science is required, in order to reflect society, to organise itself in a more interdisciplinary manner, for holistic social science is epiphenomenon of the social totality. Thus I am suggesting that the genuine study of society is only possible *via* systematic interdisciplinary social science; a theoretical framework which supersedes both disciplinary and sub-disciplinary parameters.

The elements of my thesis may be summed up as follows:

1. Rather than study the concrete, social whole, modern social science – through its disciplinary focuses (and sub-disciplinary specialisms) – consistently fails to grasp the required theoretical framework necessary for the scientific examination of society.
2. Having diverted themselves in the wrong direction, and thereby failed to acknowledge society as an objective totality, contemporary social scientists conclude that their object of analysis – the social – exists only as constructed, subjective micro-locales.
3. Social science must, in order to realign itself with its essence, turn to the study of *macro* social relations. The initial advance in this direction requires the various disciplines (and sub-disciplines) to *work together*, as interdisciplinary social science.

In this climate of failure, I am more convinced than ever of the need for a unified interdisciplinary framework. Such realignment would be an extraordinary undertaking. It is, however, essential. How it is to be achieved is another story.

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