

FROM THE SOCIAL SCIENCES TO ONE SOCIAL SCIENCE.
ANTI-UTILITARIAN FOUNDATIONS

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ABSTRACT

In the light of the current fragmented state of social sciences, it may appear paradoxical to call for a general social science. After all, however, there already exist whole sections of such science under the form of what could be defined as the “economic model”, resting on the theory of rational (or quasi rational) choice. The problem with this economic model is that its applicability is local and partial at best. Some thirty internationally renowned social scientists (anthropologists, economists, geographers, historians, philosophers, and sociologists from all over the world) met in 2015 at Château de Cerisy-la-Salle (France) and reached a consensus on the need and urgency to build a general social science on non- ou anti-utilitarian foundations. In the article, we illustrate the various arguments made in the discussion and focus on the epistemological difficulties inherent to the project. We conclude that such problems are mainly of an institutional character. The aim of developing a general social science requires recruiting professors and scholars who have received a two- or three-disciplinary education. Medicine needs generalist, and not only specialists. This is even truer of social science.

Keywords: Rational Choice Theory, Anti-Utilitarianism, Interdisciplinarity, Unity of Science.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the social sciences is to help us understand the laws that govern societies, to explain how the world works. Yet, strangely enough, they seem in some ways to grow increasingly incapable of doing so. One reason for this, of course, is that the rhythm of the world has been accelerating. It changes and mutates much faster than our theories can adapt or

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update. The owl of Minerva does not wake at sunset anymore, but rises in the middle of the night. There is, however, another reason: the social sciences are drowning in hyper-specializations, as disciplines, sub- and sub-sub-disciplines are at war with each other. They see details with ever greater clarity but fail to view the whole. Because of hyper-specialization, we have become much more intelligent than when the social sciences were invented, but also much stupider. Analytically, methodologically, we are producing works of great refinement, yet we seem unable to think synthetically. Can one hope to escape from this dreadful fate and avoid the sterilizing effects of hyper-specialization?

To try and find answers to these questions, thirty or so academics met from May 16 to 23, 2015, in the castle of Cerisy-la-Salle, one of the most famous centres of free thought in France. These academics came from all the major disciplines of the social sciences, and from all over the world: France, of course, for most of them, but also Germany, Brazil, the United States, Israel and Italy.¹ They came to discuss the following:

TOWARDS NEW (NON- OR POST-UTILITARIAN) FOUNDATIONS OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCE (*LOST IN FOUNDATIONS?*)

Are there any fundamental concepts shared by sociologists, economists, philosophers, historians, anthropologists, and so on, about how individual and collective social actions are determined, and about what shapes institutions and societies? Are there concepts that grant *the* social science a sort of unity, beyond the unsurmountable diversity of the social sciences – precisely because these concepts are shared by all? The answer, which some might find surprising, is: yes. One just needs to bring together all the different variants of Rational Choice Theory and methodological individualism, exactly as has been happening in the social sciences (and in political philosophy) since the 1970's: this is what has been called the “economic model” of the social sciences. It is however possible to consider this economic model a crystallisation of utilitarianism and the axiomatics of subjective ends. But this purely economic model of a general social science is extremely problematic, both on a theoretical level and in its practical implications.² Thus, it is indeed

¹ Besides the authors of the articles gathered in this volume, and here mentioned, these scholars also came and gave talks: Daniel Cefaï (“Les formes du public”), Roland Gori (“La psychanalyse contre l'utilitarisme”), G. Le Gauffey (“Le désir ne pousse pas, il tire”), J. Nederveen Pieterse (“Retooling Social Theory in the Age of Multipolarity”) and R. Stichweh (“On the Evolutionary Foundations of a Sociological Paradigm”).

² We should add, even though this would require a more detailed analysis, that the radical

imperative to know if it is possible to find other foundations to a general social science that would not be utilitarian.

GOING BEYOND THE SOCIAL SCIENCE ECONOMIC MODEL

The scholars and academics who disagree with this general economic model tend to splinter off into various small groups, cliques or circles, into different fields and sub-disciplines, bickering with or simply ignoring one another. It is probably useful to point out as well that the structure of the academic world is quite isomorphic to that of the economic and political worlds. All over the globe, the champions of the Marketplace (be it real, financial or speculative) speak the same language and compel anyone who dares protest to adopt their views, all the while those protesters struggle to find a common language and to have any influence at all.

This dissension with non- and anti-utilitarian social science did not always occur. For a long time, because of Durkheim's influence in France, or Weber's in Germany, or because of pragmatist ideas in the United States, a lexicon and many common theoretical and epistemological foundations were shared by several disciplines. The same is true of Marxism as well, and even, for a while at least, of structuralism and post-structuralism.

Looking back on these traditions of thinking as a whole, it seems clear that the strictly sociological moment of social science (i.e. the extension of moral and political philosophy through other means³) was made possible by opposing symbolism to utilitarianism and meaning, norms and values to individual ends, and by bringing together the normative and symbolic foundations of the social order (How is society possible? What keeps society together?) and the critical analysis of ruling interests (What drives society apart?).

The question we have to ask ourselves now is whether it is still possible, in this era of globalisation in the world and in the social sciences,⁴ to carry on the works of the classics and thus develop a single, unified, generalised social science (or a general sociology) –

constructivist-deconstructionist posture that has been dominant in sociology or in philosophy since the 1990's may be seen as the natural extension of this economic model and of utilitarianism.

³ We have elected here to consider philosophy, moral, political or social, as an integral part as *the social science largo sensu*.

⁴ This globalisation is also a scattering, because it can only unfold and move forward by systematically breaking down anything that is common and collective into tiny fragments that can be separated and reassembled at will, according to the (commercial) needs of the moment.

both negatively, by opposing rational choice theory, and positively, by carefully examining symbols, empathy, values and meaning. Could there be such a thing as a social science capable of providing positive foundations to an alternative theory of globalisation and, therefore, a credible and potentially universal alternative to neo-liberalism? From this first question, we can induce two more:

Why have such non-utilitarian foundations of social science never managed to crystallise?

And why, conversely, did the economic model succeed in its unification and relative axiomatizations?

One might be tempted to answer that the economic model finds strength in its very simplicity. But are we then condemned to swing back and forth endlessly between destructive over-simplification and poorly controlled inter-disciplinary theoretical and epistemological complexities?

The results of our discussions greatly exceeded expectations. They took place in an extraordinarily friendly atmosphere, and they allowed us all to reach an astonishingly broad consensus on at least two points:

- Yes, it is highly desirable to overcome the dispersion of disciplines and sub-disciplines, and to make sure all work done in all fields (including moral and political philosophy) comes within the scope of a single social science, of a general social science.
- Yes, the main issue is the necessity to go beyond the economic-utilitarian view of social agents and of the foundations of societies, even in economics – especially in economics.

The problem is how. How do we make sure these good intentions do not turn into empty promises, impossible to fulfil? There is no denying it: there are significant obstacles to overcome. Nevertheless, when readers peruse the chapters of this book they will be quite surprised, we believe, by the fact that the authors, each of them famous in his or her own field, do not simply pay lip service to this programme, to this double programme, but subscribe sincerely to it. Most amazing to us was the consensus on the second point. Because we did not want to set a Maussian tone to the proceedings, we had suggested looking for “non – or post-utilitarian” foundations to this unity aiming to win back the social science. But for many, including us, this clearly meant anti-utilitarian foundations. We shall, then, examine first the problem of the relationship to utilitarianism,⁵ before mov-

⁵ What is utilitarianism? In this contentious debate, there are many and often contradictory positions. To quickly summarize: can be considered utilitarian doctrines and views of the

ing on to some crucial sociological notions (society, culture, institutions). Thirdly, we will address the issue of the shape that the regulating ideal of a certain form of unity of the social science could take today.

UTILITARIANISM AND ANTI-UTILITARIANISM

Let us first examine how the relationship between utilitarianism and anti-utilitarianism was seen by the various disciplines present at the Cerisy conference.

Anthropology

From the outset, Marshall Sahlins, most respected in his field, claims in his *Anthropological Manifesto* that

neither the Marxist version of economic determinism nor that produced by liberal economists take into account the way in which most human societies organise themselves. The theory according to which the organisation of a society, on a political, religious or any other level, depends on its “economic base” and in particular on its means of subsistence, turns out to be a reflexion on the different modes of organisation of modern capitalist societies. “Economic determinism” and all its variants is nothing more than the awareness of our own society pretending to be the science of all the others.

Lucien Scubla, one of the greatest scholars of the history of anthropology, staying within the confines of France and beginning by studying the evolution of Maurice Godelier, wants to

suggest that anthropology could find a way out of the crisis that has been undermining it for the last half-century or so, if it could resist the temptation of cleaning the slate entirely, ignore the sirens of post-modernity and return instead to its fundamental principles, as defined by Morgan and Tylor: kinship and religion. In these fields, there are still quite a few nice discoveries to be made, in a similar spirit to that of the pioneers of the discipline.

world that believe all problems can be resolved by answering one single question: is it useful? Is it useful to individuals, that is, mutually indifferent monads, the only legitimate holders of rights, with one goal in mind – maximizing their own personal gains? This is the liberal variant, which serves as the basis of all economics. Is it useful to the community, whose aim is to grant through reason and science the greatest happiness to the most people? This is the holistic, socialist variant. Today, it is the liberal, or rather, neo-liberal, economic variant that dominates, and it is in order to oppose it that the authors of this volume attempted to question the relevance of the image of the *homo economicus* on which standard economics are based.

Again, the point is to avoid the assumptions of economic (utilitarian) determinism while eschewing the pervading post-modernist deconstructionism.

Economics

The way in which non-standard economists distance themselves from economic orthodoxy is most important. In this regard, Robert Boyer's, Olivier Favereau's and André Orléan's papers – the three main leaders of heterodox economics in France – make for most enlightening reading.⁶ From a sociologist's perspective, the empirical and theoretical work done over the last forty years by the Regulation school, and very clearly summarised here by Robert Boyer, seems stunningly close to... Max Weber's! Let's look, for example, at this affirmation:

If we put side by side the history of economic doctrines and theories, on the one hand, and the history of capitalist institutions and organisations on the other, the hypothesis of a simple linear causality is evidently proven wrong. Contrary to a popular idea, Adam Smith did not create the conditions of capitalism. He simply analysed and theorised the processes of a socio-economic system that had yet to emerge completely, but was already there. John Maynard Keynes did not inspire the New Deal all by himself. Milton Friedman's talents as a debater would not have been sufficient to suppress the Keynesian heritage, because other ideas and many organised interests were brought together and managed to attain the same result. It is important, therefore, to take a synoptic view of all the various channels by which scholarly theories, general ideas and agents' representations interact and become involved in the emergence of new ways to organise social life and the economy.

This seemingly overlooked closeness is made even stronger by R. Boyer's appeal for comparative studies by various disciplines of a predetermined object, for example – as far as the regulationists are concerned, capitalism.⁷

Olivier Favereau, one of the main Champion of the “économie des conventions” school, begins by stating his great approval of A. Caillé's vision of a single social science,⁸ even if the main references, M. Mauss for one, C. S. Lewis for the other, are quite different and thus generate obviously different intellectual trajectories. At the end of his examination, as

⁶ The first with the Regulation School, the second with the Conventions School, and the third... with both of them and the *Association française d'économie politique*, of which he was the first president, up until very recently.

⁷ On this point and on Max Weber, cf. KALBERG 2012.

⁸ Cf. CAILLÉ 2015.

always extremely precise, meticulous and elegant, of the issues raised by interdisciplinarity, he concludes by what looks like a nice structuration programme for *the* social science.

The economics of conventions, he writes, reveals two tendencies: economists go from the value of goods to the value of people (through considerations of the power of valuation); sociologists go from the value of people to the value of goods (by taking into account qualities or the necessity to justify prices). Thus begins to appear a general social science for today.

In any event, “in the great reconstruction project started by the economics of conventions, the *homo oeconomicus* is already *persona non grata*”.

The issue of value (how does one determine the value of goods, of people or groups, of ideas or beliefs?) stands at the absolute centre of the social science – that is what we understand after reading André Orléan. He describes what led him to write the book that put him at odds with orthodox economics, *L'Empire de la valeur*. His starting point was the

evidence that a damaging divergence existed between the concept of value as held by a majority of what we shall call the historical sciences (anthropology, history, sociology) and the concept promoted by currently dominant neo-classical economics. Historical sciences essentially think of values as collective beliefs, to which certain social groups subscribe, that provides them with reasons to act and ways of thinking; economics think value is just what determines the price. It is not a belief, it simply measures the rarity of a merchandise. Consequently, the same word is used to express two completely heterogeneous types of phenomena.

Yet, he shows that “during speculative bubbles, price is not based at all on the sum of individual decisions, because it is the market that shapes private decisions. The investor is swept away by a movement that is greater than him. Similarly, the desire for currency is the result of a collective polarisation on a given object and that utilitarian reason is unable to explain. For all those who believe in this alternative conceptual framework, there is essentially nothing to distinguish economic activity from all other social activities”. He then ends with a call to bring together sociology and economics:

For this reason, it is becoming possible to imagine a global framework of intelligibility within which could be set up, as was Émile Durkheim’s wish, the collaboration of many diverse disciplines: ‘the economy thus loses the predominance it has given itself and becomes a social science like any other, interdependent with them, with no claim to rule them’.⁹

⁹ DURKHEIM 1975: 221.

For these three economists, economics must be considered a part of the social science, rather than a branch of physics. It must rid itself, therefore, of the fiction of the *homo oeconomicus*.¹⁰

History

Romain Bertrand's contribution provided particularly valuable insights to our discussion of a general social science. He is one of the foremost French scholars of global history and, more precisely, of Connected History. He lays out precisely why "in this game of reiterated meetings between global history and anti-utilitarian sociology" (which he knows personally), "there is something extremely interesting to take and to think about". First of all because "to talk about the *homo oeconomicus* in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries, to talk about that autonomous individual who acts based solely on his goals and desires, about that being who is "fully in control of his destiny and the captain of his own soul",¹¹ that is from the outset "an anachronism that distorts the words of the agents and changes the way in which we are able to make sense of what they said, or, in any case, of what they wrote". The first question one must ask then becomes: "What kind of sociology can be used to effectively describe the history that struggles with the (relative, at the very least) uncanniness of the modern era?" Our first answer could be that, when dealing with societies of ritualised interaction, sociologies like that of Goffman are more relevant than structural deterministic sociologies. The second answer is that "in order to analyse contact situations in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries", anti-utilitarian sociologies and, chief among them, "the MAUSS sociology, are a lot less detrimental than others to the way agents are stated".

François Hartog does not attempt to resolve the issue of utilitarian explanations or interpretations, but rather the somewhat prejudicial problem of knowing what can and should remain within the bounds of the disci-

¹⁰ At Cerisy and in this volume, only the French heterodox schools of economics were represented. There are of course many others all over the world. Some of them signed the "Quasi-manifeste institutionnaliste. Vers une économie politique institutionnaliste" that was published in the *Revue du MAUSS semestrielle* (number 30, 2nd semester 2007) titled "Towards new economics?". More recently still, 900 economists got together in Edinburgh (birthplace of Adam Smith) at the instigation of the Institute for New Economic Thinking. They deplored the triumph of standard economics and demonstrated how it rose to dominance through an overemphasis on mathematics. George Akerlof, Nobel prize winner in economics, pleaded for a new economics, "where the hypothesis of rationality would be replaced by the study of storytelling and of the behavior of agents, using the tools provided by psychology, ethnology, sociology and history". (A. Reverchon, *Le Monde* newspaper, 24 November 2017, Economics pages: 7). We could not have said it any better.

¹¹ To quote WE. Henley's *Invictus* (1888). See TALAL 1993 (15): 273.

pline of history. It is prejudicial because the social sciences must still exist if they are to converge dialogically and become *the* social science. Indeed, it can be said that history today (the discipline) is threatened in its very structure by the radical transformation of the spatial and temporal coordinates that used to frame it. F. Hartog calls this “presentism”, because it seems “as if the present, the present of financial capitalism, absorbed all categories (that become thereby more or less obsolete) of past and future”. Besides, Globalisation, as it expands the legitimate points of view to an infinite degree, also expands the number of possible stories. What role is left to history if History itself becomes more and more impenetrable? “It is up to history, concludes F. Hartog, both local and global, to take into account these new experiences of time, if it wants to get in touch with the world again. It must try to make visible, out of the apparent contemporaneity of everything with everything, and of everyone with everyone, all that is ‘simultaneous out of the non-simultaneous’, from within what shows itself as a unique and uniform present”.

This globalisation has not only existed historically as a phenomenon, but also as a concept. In his historical and sociological study of the social sciences, Stéphane Dufoix demonstrates how the conceptual use of the word globalisation, starting at the end of the 1980’s, became popular in many disciplines at once, but especially in philosophy, sociology and anthropology. As opposed to the histories of Global Studies, written by those who participated in them and whose analyses tend to simplify the past in order to favour a more presentist approach, the examination of the conditions that made possible its emergence, after the debates about modernity and the calling into question of certain paradigms (such as Wallerstein’s world-system), allows for the development of what Foucault, following Nietzsche, called an “effective history”: complex, non-teleological and non-linear.

Philosophy

It is difficult, in moral, social and political philosophy (the part of philosophy that seems to us to belong to the social science), to find authors that are as clearly representative of their discipline as those whose work on the relation to utilitarianism we have so far summarised. Francesco Fistetti, Marcel Hénaff or Elena Pulcini, of course, are indeed quite representative, but many other philosophers could be thought so as well. What is most interesting about those three particular philosophers is that they all share an effective and sincere openness to the social sciences.

In some ways, Francesco Fistetti echoes François Hartog’s anxieties. If it is hard for the various social sciences to properly understand their own

current status, since their spatiotemporal (or, in short, national) points of reference have exploded out of the framework that helped them define themselves, “it is because there isn’t yet a world-philosophy capable of functioning as an alternative meta-paradigm, as both rival and opponent to the currently dominant utilitarian world-philosophy”. This meta-paradigm will have to be encyclopaedic,¹² hybrid, bringing together philosophy and social sciences (as we shall soon see), much as Mauss’ notion of hybrid gift of motivated and contradictory practices.

This is an ambitious project. No less so is Marcel Hénaff’s: he wants to analyse the dialectics of the discourses of interests, institutions and recognition. The paradox that we must overcome is that

institutions and recognition are not possible without the contribution of instrumental reason, all the while they constantly undermine and question its hegemonic tendency. Which leads to the following questions: where does this hegemonic tendency (of the discourse of interests) come from? Why does it appear at a particular time in our history? How do we overcome it?

At this point, let us remember that these three items underline an enlightening typology of the discourses and schools in philosophy and/or in the social sciences: the discourses of interests, of institutions and of recognition and emancipation.

Elena Pulcini establishes an interesting distinction between political philosophy and social philosophy, by distancing herself from the way Axel Honneth presented the latter. The difference between these two philosophies is that the first is mainly normative and is based, one way or another, on axiomatics of interests, while the second focuses on effective reality (i.e. that already belongs to *the* social science) and stands on anti-utilitarian foundations. Three paradigms help shape it: the paradigm of recognition, the paradigm of care and the paradigm of giving. All that remains is for these to better integrate the issue of the motives of actions and to take into account feelings and passions.

Political Sciences

In the field of political sciences, *Thomas Lindemann* brings up an interesting idea: to extend and apply the paradigm of recognition to the study of international relations and conflicts. This is particularly relevant, since in this discipline, it is often believed that subjects only have interests and that,

¹² “Encyclopaedic’, if one is to admit that the encyclopaedia of the sciences is not pyramid-shaped anymore, i.e. made up of rigidly confined and hierarchical disciplines, but rather horizontal and structured much like fibers, a maze, an ocean” SERRES 1980.

consequently, utilitarian explanations are extremely useful when dealing with relations between states, this “coldest of all monsters”. However, as T. Lindemann clearly demonstrates, these relations are often based on the desire for recognition.¹³

Sociology

Obviously, we chose the order of the authors arbitrarily, by alphabetical order and by field. Furthermore, sociology is over-represented – which is not completely random, since classical sociologists, such as Durkheim, Weber, Parsons, Bourdieu, Habermas or Luhmann, considered sociology as the best example of *the* social science, a meeting place, at once reflective and empirical, for all of the social sciences. Can it, should it even hope to still play such a role? Before answering this question, let us continue our investigation into the relationship between the social science and utilitarianism, but now from the point of view of sociologists.

Sociology (Utilitarianism vs. Anti-utilitarianism, continued and concluded)

For this discussion, we benefited greatly from the contributions of Jeffrey Alexander and Ann Rawls. Indeed, Jeffrey Alexander, as Talcott Parsons’ main intellectual heir, was in an especially good position to remind us that his mentor’s entire sociology (mocked by Wright Mills, who called it the “grandiose theory”) was based on anti-utilitarian foundations, but that its consensualist and functionalist¹⁴ presuppositions stopped him from fully exploring his anti-utilitarianism. In order to go beyond these limits, Alexander and his friends set up “cultural sociology”, which stands as a sort of general social theory and includes the contributions, apart from sociologists *stricto sensu*, of authors as diverse as Ricœur, Taylor, Walzer, Wittgenstein, Austin, Lévi-Strauss, Barthes, etc. Once again, we can see that sociology is not and cannot be just sociology anymore.

Ann Rawls’ input is quite illuminating and in its way complements very nicely Alexander’s (and vice-versa). One of the main proponents of ethnomethodology, she insists, firstly, on “Durkheim’s pioneer role in the development of a great number of contemporary studies, by Garkinkel, Goffman and Sacks”, which allows her to explore a little-known side of the history of the American sociological tradition.

¹³ See CAILLÉ and LINDEMANN 2016.

¹⁴ What is, in effect, functionalism, if not an extension of utilitarianism to the explanation of institutions? Why does this institution exist? Because it is useful, because it helps social cohesion, it creates consensus.

That history begins with the Durkheimian distinction between two ways to create social facts, that of traditional societies and that of modern societies, an idea which was further explored by his student Marcel Mauss in his famous essay *The Gift*, first published in 1924. It was then imported to the United States by Talcott Parsons in the 1930's, who transmitted it to his student Harold Garfinkel in 1946-47, then to their colleague Erving Goffman at the beginning of the 50's and finally, between 1959-1964, to Harvey Sacks, who studied with the latter two.

Just like Alexander, A. Rawls shows Parsons' inability to break definitely with the very individualism and utilitarianism which he liked to criticise. That led to the falling-out with Garfinkel and Goffman, which in turn allowed Garfinkel and Sacks to develop a theory of communication as a praxis based on reciprocal obligations ("obligation to hear and to listen", in Sacks' terms), more or less similar to Mauss' in *The Gift* (the obligation to speak, to listen and to respond). This little-known history is quite interesting.

It is really more than just interesting, as it suggests a new alliance between the social sciences and social philosophy. Philippe Chaniel says as much: by emphasising the non-utilitarian foundations of interaction (in sociological terms), or of intersubjectivity (in philosophical terms), an alternative to Rational Choice Theory opens up. Chaniel proposes the name it: Relational Choice Theory. Unless one wants to dilute interhuman relations in the cold waters of selfish calculations, one should hypothesise that a desire for relations, a preference for sociability (and not usefulness) comes first, in effect reversing the principle of Rational Choice Theory, and substituting, from an axiomatic perspective, lust for bonds rather than for profit. From that point of view, the paradigm of gift, ethnomethodology, Goffman's sociology, Habermas' theory of communicational acts, and most notably the theories of recognition and care all agree to criticise utilitarian anthropology, with its independent and self-sufficient agents, and focus instead on human interdependency to define the conditions of individualisation as well as to reveal the relational infrastructure of the social world.

After this review of all the criticism that utilitarianism has received, it is good, in conclusion, to heed the warnings of Nathalie Heinich and Ilana Silber about the dangers of an anti-utilitarianism that would be too simple, too consensual and naive.

Nathalie Heinich, currently one of the best scholars in the field of the sociology of art (and an enlightened and illuminating disciple of Norbert Elias), reminds us that the representation of art is spontaneously anti-utilitarian, that sociology, when it criticises this spontaneous representation, "comes to utilitarianism's assistance". Even so, sociologists cannot believe in the agents' spontaneous representation either. "A scholar who 'believed', like the artists and the aesthetes, in pleasure, in giving, in inspiration, in

vocation, in individuality, in selflessness, in values, would be quite naive: wouldn't he then just be copying the agents' vision?" What is the purpose, in that case, of anti-utilitarian sociology? What must the sociologists do to resist the enchanted naiveties and the false depth of critical critical sociology? They must, says N. Heinich, objectivise values, take note of them without taking sides, remain true to axiological neutrality. To which one could respond, in an additional twist to the criticism of critical criticism that it is not because values can be objectivised or indeed be made axiomatic, that they are necessarily false – even less so if one intends to take seriously the discourse of the agents.

Ilana Silber also reminds us, in a way that is somewhat similar to Marcel Hénaff, to distrust clear-cut oppositions between utilitarianism and anti-utilitarianism and, furthermore, to avoid identifying them to good and evil. Can one say that today's most murderous events are motivated by utilitarianism? "It is certainly more useful, she writes, to focus seriously our energies on establishing necessary dialogues and theoretical alliances within our own 'camp', that is to say between the various kinds of anti-utilitarian approaches, than trying to fight the failings of utilitarianism". That is precisely what she does here, by emphasising "the many affinities that exist, in particular, between the two major anti-utilitarian trends (both of which, by the way, originated in France): pragmatic sociology of criticism and neo-Maussian theory".

FOUR CRUCIAL NOTIONS: SOCIETY, CULTURE, INSTITUTION AND UNIVERSALISM

Obviously, to move towards this underlying unity of *the* social science, we must all agree on some of the most fundamental notions in sociology. Chief among them, of course, is the notion of *society*. Margaret Thatcher is not the only one who believes that "there is no such thing as society". In fact, this has become a rallying cry for all of postmodern deconstructionist sociology. The idea can be found in the writings of Alain Touraine, who dreads "methodological nationalism". There was (there may have been) society, it is suggested, but it doesn't exist anymore. What is there, then? The Marketplace, and nothing else?

François Dubet denounces these excesses, even though he understands the reasons behind the criticism of methodological nationalism.

Of course, the modern society built by sociologists doesn't exist anymore. Of course, the project of modernity has become fragmented, has broken down into a myriad of modernisation processes. Of course, the project of modernity has accentuated the contradictions that the Founding Fathers had already sensed. But if we don't want to live through identity wars, ruled by an uncontrollable

capitalism, then we must rebuild the image of societies, of the partial and local reorganisations of a social life integrated and robust enough that the social agents can take control their own personal freedom and their collective destiny.

The same goes for the controversial, even vilified notion of *culture*. For many social scientists, it goes without saying that “there is no such thing as culture”. Philippe d’Iribarne explains very well why the social sciences are lead to this declaration which, not unlike the previous one, is a negation of their very reason for being, because it takes to its logical end what P. d’Iribarne calls the founding myth of modernity:

On the one hand, a luminous world inhabited by independent individuals, all equal and enlightened, autonomous, who discuss and exchange with each other, free of the prejudices of tradition; on the other, a dark world where prejudice rules and feeds the oppression of the dominant over the dominated.

This world of darkness is the world of culture. For this concept of cultural heritage as darkness, the paradigm of the gift is virtually inexistent. “The gift raises issues because it is free. It becomes associated with paternalistic relations, and serves as a contradiction to what one has acquired through one’s own means, through a swap or a fight, but, in any case, as an autonomous agent”.¹⁵ P. d’Iribarne goes on: “In this ideological climate, cultural differences, that are so not because of choices freely made and that cannot be erased by a conflict between the dominant and the dominated, cannot be taken into account, as they are irrelevant”. He concludes with this interesting hypothesis as to why a general social science would not be possible today: to come into existence, it would need to be fully aware of the founding myth, of modernity and of itself, and to accept to behold our contemporary societies with the astonishment and the distance (even if it is empathic) of the ethnologist in the field.

The notion of *institution* is also extremely important for all disciplines. Sociologists¹⁶ and heterodox economists equally claim it as their own. “What can its contribution be to the establishment of a common framework for all anti-utilitarian social sciences?”, asks Christian Laval in a remarkable historical and critical survey of the uses of institutions. The results are quite intriguing: critical economics takes the notion and places it at the centre of their reflexions, while critical sociology means to get rid of

¹⁵ To complete P. d’Iribarne analysis, we could add that cultures assert themselves by deciding who must give to whom, and who must receive what from whom (beginning with men and women). This idea of obligation is incompatible with the ideal of the freedom of individuals.

¹⁶ Mauss and Fauconnet, for example, defined sociology as the “science of institutions” FAUCONNET and MAUSS 1969: 150.

it. Isn't the institution, and all the obligations that come with it, precisely what we should oppose if we want to help subjects become emancipated (which reminds us of what P. d'Iribarne wrote)? We are forced to admit that a "chiasmus exists between the 'anti-institutionalist' trajectory of sociology and the 'pro-institutionalist' trajectory of recent political economics". In the wake of the publication of the *Quasi-Manifeste institutionnaliste*, signed both by economists and sociologists (we'll get back to that later),¹⁷ Christian Laval concludes that the institution stands at the fulcrum between these two movements, and that is why it is destined to play a major role in the social science.¹⁸

The last remaining issue before we can fully explore the possibilities of Social Theory is *universalism*. How much does *the* social science look to universal values, or to values that could be made universal? This is a particularly good moment to raise this issue, since fields such as cultural, subaltern, postcolonial or decolonial studies have called into question the notions invented by Europe and the West. The point, then, is to "provincialize" not only Europe, but all of the social sciences, because they are inextricably linked to Western hegemony. On this topic, Michel Wiewiorka first points out, with bitter irony (as he is the president of the Fondation de la Maison des Sciences de l'homme, he knows all about it), that this seemingly multicultural literature is in fact "incredibly ethnocentric". It only cares about what is written in English and disdainfully ignores anything in Spanish, French or German, not to mention Japanese or Chinese. Looking in a very synthetic manner at the criticism of the very idea of universalism, and at the possible responses to them (from Merleau-Ponty, François Julien, Etienne Balibar, Amartya Sen, Jack Goody, Shmuel Eisenstadt), M. Wiewiorka concludes: "If we want to look into universalism, then we must do away with the expansionist or extensionist universalism that Europe asserted during its horrifying colonisations. We must focus on those universal values that favour liberation and emancipation. Universalism should not be an command to blindly follow values that were conceived in the West; it should be the idea that there are values from which actions of emancipation and demands for rights and democracy originate".

¹⁷ "Manifeste quasi-institutionnaliste", in "Vers une autre science économique (et donc un autre monde)", *Revue du MAUSS semestrielle*, n° 30, 2nd semestre, 2007, La Découverte.

¹⁸ "No economy, he writes, can avoid being ruled by a normative system crystallised in the institutions. The issue of institutions thus marks the limits of the common ground between sociologists and economists – the ground of the moral and political institutions, seen as the base, the pedestal, the framework of all possible economies. It is also the scientific ground on which we must all stand to create a bond between all of us. The common method means believing that, in all fields, political forms and the moral rules of all collective activities allow us to contemplate how they could transform themselves.

POSSIBILITY, DESIRABILITY AND DIFFICULTIES OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCE

We have now come to the most challenging issue: the form of the possible unity of *the* social science, beyond the admittedly necessary plurality of social sciences, starting with the delicate question of its relation to sociology (and vice versa). Of all the social sciences, sociology most thought of itself as *the* social science, but this identification has become counter-productive because, first of all, it did not hold all its promises and, second, because it prevents other disciplines from perceiving themselves as belonging to *the* social science. In no way would they want to run the risk of being seen as mere sub-fields of sociology.

Sociology and/or Social Science?

“There are no social sciences, only a science of societies”, wrote Marcel Mauss in 1927 in his important essay *Divisions et proportions de la sociologie*. There is perhaps no better summary of the conclusion we have come to at the end of the Cerisy proceedings, although two major corrections should be included. To be more accurate, it ought probably be phrased like this, today: “It would be better that there exist not only social sciences, but also a science of society”. Besides, just like his uncle Durkheim, Mauss may have envisioned a science of society that was nothing more than just sociology. At the time, that may have been the correct choice. Sociology, such as it existed within the pages of *L'Année sociologique*, seemed like the long sought-after place for dialogue between all the disciplines of the social sciences: economics, geography, history, law, demographics. In Germany, Max Weber, with the help of his students and disciples, produced a whole *Année sociologique* by himself. Wasn't he all at once jurist, economist, philosopher, historian and... sociologist? And Bourdieu, not so long ago, did foray, every once in a while, into ethnology, philosophy, and, incidentally, economics. He was more than just a sociologist.

Yet, one is forced to admit that this generalist orientation of sociology did not really succeed. A great majority of sociologists today reject it, therefore undermining it from the inside. The same is true in other disciplines. It is in no way certain that the externalisation by sociology of all that relates to philosophy, anthropology, history, economics or psychology has a great future ahead of it. [Alain Caillé](#) and [Frédéric Vandenberghe](#) analyse the four fragmentations that threaten it in relation to other disciplines: the abstraction of grand sociological theories as opposed to the dull concreteness of simple empiricism; the multiples schools of thought that fight over the field; all the other disciplines that study the same subjects; the political

or social philosophies that tend to talk in its stead. Between all these different “fields” that it has to cover, what is left that belongs exclusively to it?

If sociology has been gradually giving up on all its glorious early ambitions, it is also, of course, because other disciplines are just as ambitious and did not feel it deserved the eminent position that it aspired to. In his recent and excellent history of the French social sciences and their relation to time (which was entirely determined by Henri Hubert (“Marcel Mauss’ work twin”) and his discovery that “time is an object of collective representations”), Thomas Hirsch remarks that “sociology, history, psychology and ethnology intended less (back then) to become a science of men than the science of Man”.¹⁹ We should probably add geography to this list. “These approaches (all of the studies of the relation to time), concludes T. Hirsch, all seem like paradigmatic propositions (for sociology, for history, for psychology or for ethnology): each tends to think of itself as *the* science of Man. Even though they often overlap with each other, they are indeed in competition with one another”. The sociology that Durkheim theorised excludes, in some ways, Marc Bloch’s history; the research projects of Marcel Mauss and Lucien Febvre in 1927, of Charles Blondel in 1928, of Jacques Soustelle in 1938, may all contemplate more or less the same object and attempt to create an ideal that is more or less identical. And yet, they are still rivals”.

In short, the relation between disciplines amounts to a fight for recognition, just like relations between individuals, social groups, nations, cultures or states. Each discipline functions as a nation that, in its moments of glory, just like England, France, Germany or, these days, the United States, dreams of a universal empire. The most prestigious discipline today – one could even call it imperial – is economics. Which brings us back to our starting point: is it possible to construct a single social science, capable of overcoming the unbearable fragmentation of the disciplines? It is indeed a war between all the disciplines, a war that only results in cacophony, in sound and fury, however hushed. Is this desirable? Can it be done? How? What form shall it take? Using what method?

We pointed out, at the beginning, that in some ways, due to our ever-increasing sophistication and formal and methodological refinements, we have become keener, more intelligent, but within narrower disciplinary frameworks, within fields that are smaller and smaller. Meanwhile, we have become stupider and stupider when it comes to the most important: the general problems. It is therefore urgent to train not only specialists, but also generalists, capable of establishing a dialogue between all the dif-

¹⁹ HIRSCH 2016: 17.

ferent fields of the social science. Even more important, these generalists should be able to be understood by the public (which means no jargon) and contribute to what the philosopher Richard Rorty called the “democratic conversation”. It is indeed striking to see that only economists are only ever heard in the media, or those few philosophers that are considered to have a beautiful soul.

Still, even if the social sciences came close at one time or another to a kind of unity – because of the domination of a discipline²⁰ or a paradigm –,²¹ it never did truly achieve or clearly think it out. That is because, to make it plausible, there are many formidable obstacles to overcome.

Epistemological Difficulties

The first obstacles are epistemological, or paradigmatic, if that term is preferred. It has now become obvious that none of the disciplines of the social sciences can legitimately claim hegemony over the others, even less so if one remembers that each wavers, to a degree or another, between models of scientificity, between various paradigms, holistic or not, individualistic or interactionist, explanatory, hermeneutic or descriptive, objectivist or subjectivist, nominalist or realist, and so on. Not to mention political/ideological/ethical positions that follow adopting such and such paradigms. The periods of relative unity were those of transversal domination by a certain school of thought or a certain paradigm: functionalism, Marxism, structuralism, pragmatism, cognitivism, etc. How could one hope to find unity from such theoretical, metatheoretical, ethical and political diversity? It is pointless to expect one particular theory or paradigm to prevail based on its own intrinsic superiority; none can be uncontested, even if some seem more reflexive or are able to cover a wider field than others.²²

²⁰ History, for example, in France or Germany in the XIXth century; sociology at the beginning, and economics at the end of the XXth century.

²¹ Positivism, functionalism, Marxism, structuralism, constructivism, to name a few.

²² Many of the authors of this book believe that the paradigm of gift possesses better explanatory capacities, than it serves as a better translator, a better user of theories than its rivals. Yet, even if that were true, which remains to be proven, its full meaning would only emerge in a dialogue with all others. Let us be more precise. Mauss posited the archaic gift as a total social phenomenon. This is somewhat contentious, but for now, we'll hold on to the idea that in it, economic, political, social and symbolic functions cannot be distinguished. The paradigm of gift recognises the legitimacy and necessity of approaches and schools of thought that concentrate on only one of these functions. But none can account for the whole. Every time, a specific process must be established, and it must be determined how each links up with all others. Reciprocally, the discourse of gift would be empty, vague and abstract if it did not take into account specific analyses from all these other functions.

We have to come up, then, with a versatile mode of coordination, dialogical rather than hegemonic, between disciplines and paradigms. We have also seen many different possible forms. The hybrid and hybridising encyclopaedic form, favoured by F. Fistetti, complements very nicely Ilana Silber's exhortation to look everywhere, in all disciplines and in all schools of thought, for new forms of theoretical thinking that would be less linear, less exclusive, and to look for a certain attitude, a more flexible, more dialogical disposition that would enable a more sensitive approach to plurality and diversity. Another supplemental way to think about the possible mode of existence of a general social science would be to use the metaphor of constellations. "Constellations call to mind, write A. Caillé and F. Vandenberghe, a dispersion around a given asterism²³ (dialogue, care, gift and recognition, for example) and a grouping around an important star that draws the attention (Habermas, Tronto, Mauss, Honneth)".²⁴ But what is most important is probably the interstellar navigation between constellations, which can only be achieved gradually, by following commonalities. Theories of recognition can easily converse with theories of care (and of gift), and theories of communication with the theory of gift because of the mutual interest towards symbolism.

One might consider these ideas to be too abstract, and decide that this project of a single social science is undoubtedly too complicated, unrealistic and doomed to fail. It would be good, then, to mention that the natural sciences are by no means unified either. In a fascinating article about "trading zones", Peter Gallison showed that physicists do not belong to a homogeneous community. Theoreticians, researchers and engineers who build instruments all form subcultures and share neither way of life nor the same demonstration modes. Even though they all work in physics, they use different ontologies, theories and concepts. Yet if their science is to keep moving forward, they have to coordinate their actions and their language.

²³ In observational astronomy, an **asterism** is a popularly-known stationary pattern or group of stars that are recognised in the night sky as viewed from Earth. This colloquial definition makes it appear quite similar to a constellation, but they differ mostly in that a constellation is an officially recognised 2-dimensional area of the sky, while an asterism is a visually obvious collection of zero-dimensional points (i.e., "stars") and the 1-dimensional lines used to mentally connect them; as such, asterisms do not have officially determined boundaries and are therefore a more general concept which may refer to any identified pattern of stars. This distinction between terms remains somewhat inconsistent, varying among published sources. An asterism may be understood as an informal sub-group of stars within the area of an official or defunct former constellation. Some include stars from more than one constellation (from the Wikipedia page).

²⁴ CAILLÉ and VANDENBERGHE 2016, chapter 5 (on the idea of constellation): 61-62. The metaphor of the constellation was first suggested by HENRICH D. 1991. See also MUSLOW 2009: 81-109.

Finding inspiration in anthropological research on cultural contacts, and most notably on intertribal commerce, P. Gallison points out that, in order to communicate, groups have to invent hybrid languages:

Two groups can agree on rules of exchange even if they ascribe utterly different significance to the objects being exchanged; they may even disagree on the meaning of the exchange process itself. Nonetheless, the trading partners can hammer out a local coordination despite vast global differences. In an even more sophisticated way, cultures in interaction frequently establish contact languages, systems of discourse that can vary from the most function-specific jargons through semi-specific pidgins, to full-fledged creoles rich enough to support activities as complex as poetry and metalinguistic reflection.²⁵

This applies equally to communities exchanging goods and to scientific communities exchanging ideas. What matters most to us is that ideas flow, mix, and that each community gains thereby more reflexivity and more generosity.

In this context, the unbearable and undesirable image of social science unified by the subjection of all disciplines to a supreme discipline or to a single dominant paradigm, crystallised in one grand, overarching theory, becomes moot. The awareness of the unity of the social science should not be at the expense of existing disciplines and of the various paradigms that thrive within them; it should be to their benefit. They feed each other, nourish each other. It is therefore implied, though it is not at all certain, that disciplines refuse to close themselves off and keep everything else at bay. Their acceptance must be practical, and not just rhetorical. In fact, somehow, the ritual calls to interdisciplinarity almost always end up with the violent rejection of all that is foreign to the discipline.

Linguistic, Cultural and National Difficulties

Thus, the outline appears of a mode, or maybe several possible flexible and epistemologically feasible modes of coordination between the disciplines. Epistemologically feasible, provided (which is not easy) that the language is specified, that it is known within which cultural space(s) a fertile dialogue is most likely to take place.

Let us now try to synthesise the results achieved so far. All we have is a negative outline agreement and a common denominator: anti-utilitarianism. The social science that we want is normative and political, perhaps even, for some, existential and spiritual. To build the social sciences on new

²⁵ GALLISON 1999: 137-160.

foundations, we must open them up, let them deal openly with each other. Our reflexions must reach a new and superior level, and bring together once more science and political and moral philosophy. For French sociology after Bourdieu, defined more today by its fields than by its thoughts about its own philosophical foundations, going back to the source of the social sciences can only mean regressing from the sciences to social philosophy. We should take responsibility. If the social sciences are to move forward, if they are to build new foundations, anti-utilitarian or not, then French sociology must leave its provincial ways and internationalise itself.

However, that just brings about a new problem. We may all agree on the basic points, but we still have to define the contours of this possible anti-utilitarian unified social science. In the social sciences, there are at least three different concepts that we can identify: 1) the social science as encyclopaedia (the French language version); 2) as society theory (German language version); 3) as social theory (English language version).

1) The social science as encyclopaedic knowledge, as a systematisation of social knowledge from all disciplines that have social, cultural and historical objects, is a mainly French-speaking project. The idea of organising all the disciplines of the social sciences within a reasoned and unitary system comes not only from Comte, but also from his successors, from Durkheim and the crew of *Année sociologique*, the School of the *Annales*, Elias, Bourdieu, and the MAUSS.

2) The social science as society theory (*Gesellschaftstheorie*) comes from the German-speaking world. Here, the purpose of social science is not the encyclopaedic project but the elaboration of general theory of society, that does indeed take into account the knowledge accrued in closely related disciplines (economics, law, political science, etc.) but only in order to examine what unites and what creates differences in society, by seeing how social sub-systems (religion, the state, the economy, the law, etc.) relate to one another. The general sociologies of Parsons, Habermas and Luhmann are good examples of this concept of the social science.

3) The social science as social theory, coming from the English-speaking world, stands at the border between sociology and philosophy. Unlike the encyclopaedic or systematic projects, social theory aims to unify the social sciences by pointing out the fundamental concepts (action, institution, structure, identity, etc.) and transversal issues (action, order and social transformations, power, discourse, praxis, etc.) that science presupposes, and by linking them to each other in an abstract conceptual system. The theories of Bourdieu, Freitag, Giddens and Latour are good examples of theories developed by linking and integrating concepts, and that reach such a level of generality that they transcend the concepts unique to each discipline.

Each of these visions of the social science finds its roots in their respective national historical traditions. Just like the languages in which they are written (French, German and English), each tradition has its accents and its particular dialects. As the social science must be multilingual and cosmopolitan, we can already affirm that a synthesis will be necessary, as long as it remains open. It must be done, and it must be done again.

It must be done, even if this was not the main point of this conference, because it is essential that our reflexion take into account “non-Western” sociological traditions – besides, many differences exist between each of these, and their specific characteristics, national or regional, must consequently be included. Sergio Costa and Romain Bertrand, in their chapters, show that not all alternative concepts of modernity are necessarily nativist: some are not looking to “get away” from the West, but rather aim to confront the Western version, or versions, to other points of view, in order to obtain a better grasp of socio-historical realities. To become universal, the social sciences must certainly become global, meaning that the worldwide presence of these disciplines must not be limited to the importation of Western theories, references, authors and paradigms.

And it must be done again, because even if it were imaginable that sociologists, anthropologists and philosophers manage to sketch out the boundaries of a new classical social science, against utilitarianism and as an alternative to classical economics,²⁶ it still remains true that the social sciences are only a part of what is called in French the “human sciences”. The conversations with historians and geographers (as well as psychologists, linguists, jurists and other disciplines who were not present at the conference in Cerisy) have shown where lie the limits of a unified social science.

²⁶ There is another issue, which may seem secondary but is in truth quite crucial: the name that should be given to this unified and general social science, and to those who practice it. In English, one can use the term *social scientist*, but that doesn't work in French. “Social scholars”, “social theoreticians”? None of this will do. “Sociologist” either, as we saw earlier. In an article (“De la philosophie sociale à la sociologie: science, normativité et politique”, *Année sociologique*, n. 2, vol. 67, 2017), François Vatin establishes a very useful list of all the authors who claimed to be “social philosophers” from the end of the 18th to the beginning of the 20th centuries; this list clearly shows that “sociology did not invent the social, nor the discourse about the social” (p. 308). And F. Vatin reminds us that the inventor of the word “sociologie” was not Auguste Comte, but rather the abbé Sieyès. It would be tempting to go back to the origins and say that the social science and social philosophy are one and the same. But that would mean owning up to its decidedly anti-utilitarian foundations and thus mark its differences with political philosophy, as Elena Pulcini suggests. It would also mean getting rid of the excessively normative bias that appears in some recent uses of the term, by Axel Honneth or Franck Fischbach for example, and fully accept the empirical demands of sociologists, historians, geographers or ethnologists, and the modelling tendencies of economists. Under these conditions, maybe all of the former would accept being called “social philosophers” *as well*, even though the term is in no way pejorative. But that is a practical, and institutional, issue.

It may be that, in the future, the debate will have to move on to the wider field of the human sciences, and ask once again the old questions: what sort of animals are humans? What kind of humanity do we want to be? How can we think about men and women and the whole of humanity in this global society that we cannot comprehend?

Institutional Difficulties

But the true obstacles to the unity of the social science are most likely practical and institutional in nature. And we can bet that, if they were overcome, many epistemological uncertainties that we mentioned would cease to exist. Indeed, at the heart of the problem lies the training process of students, young researchers and professors and in the fact that their careers will have to take place within the very strict framework of a single discipline. Within that framework, the dominant force leads to an ever-stronger constriction around the (mostly imaginary and fantasied) core of the discipline's identity. If this identity is somewhat blurred, then the discipline will have to borrow from others: concepts, processes, methods. It will also have a tendency, in its recruitment and hiring procedures, to require unwavering allegiance to the totems of the tribe. This explains the multiplication of incomprehensible jargons, of theories or methodological demands that nobody believes in, not even the purists: they chase away all possible intruders, foreigners and migrants. Immense efforts will be required if this incredibly heavy machinery is to evolve.

We might as well admit it. Most of the professors and scholars who met in Cerisy and wrote in this book are of a certain age and are not getting any younger. This is not surprising, since a long time is required to achieve a bit of fame in one's own discipline. But what is most interesting here is that it seems one must have reached a certain age to understand the limits of one's original discipline, that there are just as fascinating, or more fascinating discoveries to be made elsewhere. And one must have reached a certain age to dare say these things out loud. To do so before nearing the age of retirement is to run the risk of being relegated to the margins or the prison cells of academia, of seeing one's career hopelessly delayed, of being systematically set aside. The violent reaction of the standard economists, who hold all the power within institutional economics, towards heterodox economists belonging to the AFEP²⁷ last year in France shows the force of the passions and interests that are involved. Heterodox economists

²⁷ The Association française d'économie politique has over 500 members at the university level. It asked for the creation of a new discipline in economics ("Economie et société") that would bring economists together with philosophers and sociologists.

were called “economic negationists”, words chosen to stigmatise. In fact, those who do not strictly conform to the canons of the discipline are always called negationists, be it at a philosophical, sociological, ethnological or historical level.

And yet, we say it again: we have great need of generalists. What would happen to medicine if there were only specialists? It would be dehumanised and highly inefficient. What must we do, then? If we do not want to resign ourselves to pluridisciplinarity (i.e. to know just a few simple words in many languages), if we do not really believe in transdisciplinarity (that is, speaking one form or another of a universal language), then the only solution is interdisciplinarity, which alone fully respects the legitimacy and complexity of the languages of the various disciplines. Experience shows that it is not impossible to be truly competent in two or three disciplines at once. Currently, in France, we are witnessing the creation of a great many bi-disciplinary programs, and the best students flock to them.²⁸ But this bi-disciplinarity stops, most the time, at the end of the bachelor’s degree. In a way, this is to be expected: when students reach a certain level, they have to specialise. Yet, why shouldn’t there be bi-disciplinary programs, that would train economists-philosophers, historians-sociologists, anthropologists-linguists, etc.? All that would be needed is bi-disciplinary programs and recruitment.

As far as programs go, it is absolutely incomprehensible that, in France, there are economics and sociology programs in high school, but as soon as students reach university, they have to choose between one or the other, and cannot, moreover, take classes in political philosophy or history. An economics and sociology doctoral program would draw many excellent students and would have the advantage of training economists who would be a little more aware of social realities and a little less inclined to rely solely on formal models.²⁹ Professors would also benefit from seeing their qualities recognised in several disciplines:³⁰ they would be the ones teaching bi-disciplinary programs.

²⁸ The model to follow would be the Modern Humanities Masters program at the université de Nanterre, created in the late 1990’s, and that gave out double B.A.’s and double Masters in sociology and economics (and even in econometry) or in sociology and history.

²⁹ The Association française d’économie politique and the 500 professors, researchers and scholars that belong to it, refuse to accept the monopoly of standard economic models in economics and are fighting for the creation of a new discipline in French universities that would be called “Economy and society”. Sociologists and philosophers could belong to this section. This is a good initiative, albeit too timid: the disparities would be too great. In effect, recruitment has to become plural, complex, while keeping to the course set by the teaching of economics and sociology in high school.

³⁰ If a discipline refused to open itself up, the possibility of finding new ways of recruiting could be considered. This is what the AFEP has to do, since orthodox economists block all avenues.

It is highly improbable that this development could take place only in a single country. If the social science created by bi-disciplinary or even tri-disciplinary scholars is to produce actual results, all those who yearn for it need to be aware of its necessity, in all the universities of the world, and they need to get together to demand it. Coordinating everyone should not be an impossible task. However, the authors of this book neither have the time nor the strength. They just hope this collection will serve as a beacon to younger scholars. Young interdisciplinarians of the world, unite!

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