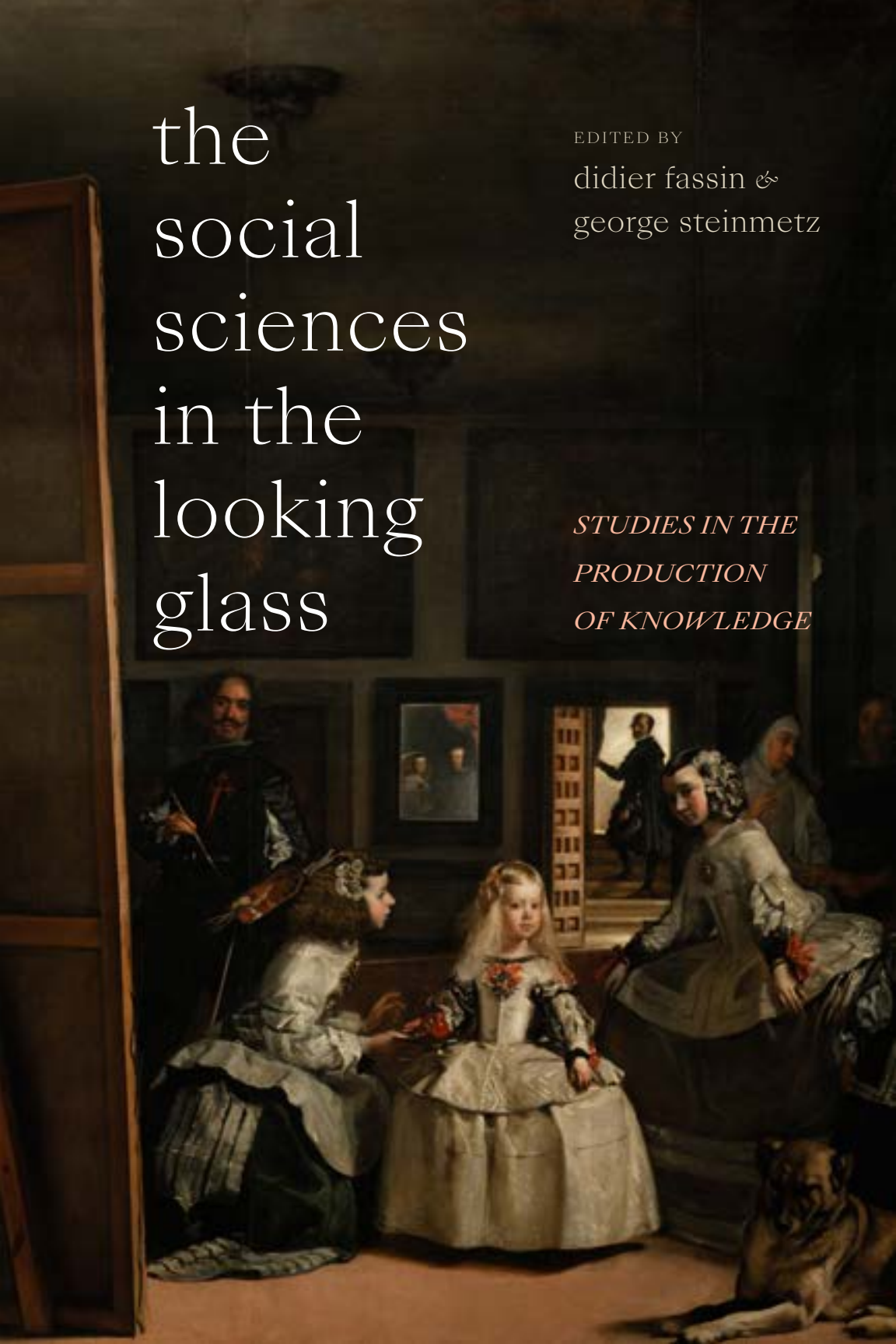
the social sciences in the looking glass

EDITED BY
didier fassin &
george steinmetz

STUDIES IN THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE



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DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS durham & london 2023

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Project Editor: Bird Williams
Designed by Aimee C. Harrison
Typeset in Portrait Text and SangBleu Kingdom by
Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cover art:

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introduction

Toward a Social Science of the Social Sciences

DIDIER FASSIN AND
GEORGE STEINMETZ

One cannot talk about such an object without exposing oneself to a permanent mirror effect: every word that can be uttered about scientific practice can be turned back on the person who utters it. Far from fearing this mirror - or boomerang - effect, in taking science as the object of my analysis I am deliberately aiming to expose myself, and all those who write about the social world, to a generalized reflexivity.
—PIERRE BOURDIEU, *SCIENCE OF SCIENCE AND REFLEXIVITY*

OVER THE PAST HUNDRED YEARS, social scientists have conducted research on multiple social worlds of science and technology, even developing a prolific subdiscipline. But remarkably, their interest, which has covered a wide range of disciplines and practices, from physics to biology, from laboratories to scientific controversies, has largely avoided a similar exploration of their own knowledge and practice. Indeed, the history of science, and later the social studies of science, broadly speaking, have been primarily focused, since the creation of the journals *Isis* and *Osiris* in the early twentieth century, on the natural sciences. In recent decades, however, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and others have begun to examine various aspects of the

social sciences, including their politics and ideologies, their epistemologies and methods, their institutionalization and professionalization, their national development and colonial expansion, their heterogeneous globalization and local contestations, and their public presence and role in society (e.g., Scott and Keates 2001; Porter and Ross 2003; Steinmetz 2005; Vom Bruch, Gerhardt, and Pawliczek 2006; Fassin and Bensa 2008; Backhouse and Fontaine 2010; Danell, Larsson, and Wisselgren 2013; Rollet and Nabonnaud 2013; Backhouse and Fontaine 2014; Randeria and Wittrock 2019). Strikingly, this trend has been concomitant with a reconfiguration of the scientific landscape in which the social sciences are inscribed, a reshaping of their borders with neighboring fields such as literary studies and cognitive science, to take extreme examples, and a radical questioning of their very foundations, by feminist, postcolonial and posthumanist studies, as well as, from a symmetrical viewpoint, so-called analytical approaches (e.g., Connell 2007; Joas and Klein 2010; Moyn and Sartori 2013; Kennedy 2015; Fassin 2017). It is therefore an interesting and challenging time to engage in what could be called a "social science of the social sciences." The object of this volume is to offer current social scientific perspectives (defined broadly) on this reflexive moment in which the social sciences begin to examine themselves in the mirror or looking glass—hence our volume's title.

As was famously formulated by Norbert Elias, the originality of the social sciences within the wider scientific field is that the observer and the observed belong to the same category, even when the latter is described in terms of professions, networks, ethnic groups, religious practices, or social fields: both are human beings. In contrast, in the natural sciences, the two are distinct, as human beings study black holes, tectonic plates, algae, genomes, or bosons. It is therefore easier for historians and sociologists of the natural sciences to distance themselves from their object of study. Not that natural scientists are entirely dispassionate in their research: the controversies around climate change are a reminder of how emotional certain topics may be. But in general, they are more committed to their discipline than to their object as such. On the contrary, social scientists are always caught in a tension between involvement and detachment, especially when their research deals with questions that have a moral or political dimension.[1] Working on abortion, inequality, democracy, terrorism, crime, or debt entails some form of personal "involvement," which can be referred to as belief, value, conviction, prejudice, ideology, or subjectivity, even when scholars feel committed to scientific "detachment," using surveys, statistics, models, theories, or fieldwork to approach objectivity. It might even be argued that the more

they try to achieve perfect detachment the more they are blind to their own involvement.

The project of a social science of the social sciences heightens this tension. It supposes that human beings study human beings who are themselves studying human beings. It should therefore not be a surprise that social scientists would have been reluctant to conduct such program, which renders detachment even more difficult and involvement even more hazardous. This reluctance should indeed be understood in light of the fact that research on the social sciences is inscribed in the same social space to which the researcher belongs. The ethnography, sociology, or history of a given domain of the social sciences supposes an investigation among colleagues, or scientific "ancestors," or, at least, within a scientific space characterized by competition and rivalry, friendships and allegiances, anxieties of influence, and inherited ideas of obscure provenance. These complications come at a cost for the student of this domain. Yet how could we defend the idea of a critical social science when the only area that would escape our inquiry would be precisely our own disciplines? Like others before us,[2] we therefore call, in this book, for a critical epistemology that applies to the social sciences the same principles and rigorous methods that are used to study other sciences as well as the other domains of social life beyond science.

This critical epistemology takes various methodological forms and can adopt diverse theoretical frameworks. In a time when, as the coronavirus pandemic has shown, sciences in general and the social sciences in particular are disputed, we have privileged in this volume a discussion respectful of epistemological diversity and attentive to distinct theoretical foundations. It is our endeavor here to bring together multiple scientific traditions—history of science, intellectual history, sociology of knowledge, political sociology, cultural anthropology—so as to illustrate the richness and diversity of the research being conducted in an emerging domain, rather than proposing or imposing a unitary paradigm—a temptation that has sometimes led to unfruitful disputes and divisions in the social studies of the other, "exact" sciences. This being said, we must acknowledge that the very foundation of our collective endeavor—the critical reflexivity of the social sciences, expressed through the metaphor of the looking glass in the title—has a clear affinity with the historical sociology of knowledge developed by Pierre Bourdieu and his colleagues, of which it is possible to find variable degrees of presence across the chapters. All of us consider that the social sciences tend to be constituted as fields and institutions and are embedded in national contexts and inscribed in historical moments, and that they can therefore not be apprehended without taking

into account these multiple dimensions. All of us agree that it is important to study social scientific practices in relation to both the form and content of the research produced and to study social scientists' positionality not only from an intellectual but also from a social and political perspective. These elementary principles are however freely applied by each author.

The social science of the social sciences and the humanities emerges at an interesting juncture for these disciplines, and from this viewpoint, it is without doubt timely. On the one hand, these arenas have come increasingly under fire from several directions, particularly political and scientific ones. In the political realm, social science has been attacked on three fronts. First, neoliberal criticism judges them unproductive, considering that the only useful social sciences are those that contribute to the wealth of nations. Second, authoritarian criticism deems them too critical, especially in their analysis of power relations and hidden interests. Third, an ad hoc criticism that has recently flourished on both sides of the Atlantic accuses the social sciences of finding excuses for deviance and crime, because they analyze the structural causes underlying these phenomena. In the scientific domain, they have been attacked by two important currents composed of two distinct sets of disciplines that nevertheless share a similar vision of science, according to which science can only talk about facts that can be established through empirical evidence, allowing us to formulate objective and verifiable truths. The first set of critiques comprises mainstream economics, much political science, and large segments of sociology, using modelization and mathematical formalization, quantification, and experimental designs grounded in rational-actor theory. The second set encompasses cognitive sciences broadly speaking, including experimental psychology, analytic philosophy, evolutionary theory, and neuroimaging, which have in common strong universalistic claims about the functioning of the brain and its implications for social life. The former represents a form of social science positivism inherited from the twentieth century but with increasingly potent tools. The latter illustrates a form of neopositivism of the twenty-first century mobilizing increasingly sophisticated technologies from the life sciences. Beyond their differences, these strands tend to question inductive, interpretive, qualitative, and critical social sciences as unscientific, ideological, or flawed.

At the same time, these latter approaches have experienced in the past decades a renewal and enrichment of their objects, approaches, methods, theories, and one might even say: paradigms. The scope of interest among social scientists has expanded beyond human beings to the study of animals, nature, life, infrastructures, cyborgs, and the planet. Feminist studies, race

studies, and postcolonial and decolonial studies have shaken well-established approaches to social knowledge in all domains. Political scientists and legal scholars have begun to practice forms of ethnography. Just as artificial intelligence has become a method for some, it is also now an object of study for others. In sociology, actor network theory coexists with the new institutionalism and the social field approach, while cultural and historical sociology flourishes aside economic sociology. In anthropology, ontological, structuralist, historical, neo-Marxist and neo-Foucauldian strands cohabit in conflictive but often productive ways. In philosophy, the divide between analytic and continental branches remains, but with some bridges being built between them. In sum, there is no homogenous field of social sciences and humanities but a bountiful and turbulent intellectual space of analysis and reflection about human beings and beyond.

It is at this juncture that we inscribe our book, as a "defense and illustration" of a critical social science, to paraphrase Joachim Du Bellay's famous sixteenth-century essay on language and poetry. Beyond their diversity of themes and contexts, the common thread of the book's contributions is a critical approach to the politics and practices of the social sciences. This does not simply mean that it is critical of social science, as with works that uncover the history of eugenics, counterinsurgency research, colonial social science, or social science under authoritarian regimes (e.g., Strauss 1952, 22–37; Klingemann 1992; Kojenikov 1999; Carson 2007; Rohde 2013; Steinmetz 2013, 2022; Mastnak 2015; Morcillo Laiz 2016; van Eekelen 2016). It means above all that this reading of the social sciences can contribute critically to the politics and practice of social science itself, and beyond that, to the understanding of social processes. In particular, it can unveil the hidden genesis of currently accepted concepts and languages; disinter forgotten works that remain valuable in the present; and question the foundations of our thinking about societies and about the specific place occupied by human beings in our comprehension of the world. And since the social sciences are thoroughly entangled in the social facts they describe and analyze, only by singling out the former can we understand why our world looks the way it does.

Such critical endeavor is significantly facilitated in this volume by two elements. First, the confrontation between authors from various social sciences allows for a multiplication of perspectives, while it is more frequent to have scholars from a single discipline represented.[3] The chapters have for their object history, sociology, anthropology, legal studies, cognitive sciences, animal studies, and religious studies, and in some cases, interdisciplinary spaces or the social sciences as a whole. Second, the geographical scope of

the chapters covers five continents, and the movements of ideas, scholars, and scientific resources among them, whereas many existing studies have focused on a single country or on nation-state comparisons.[4] Our scope thus generates two complementary results. On the one hand, the examination of similarities and differences between national traditions from various continents leads to a critique of the epistemological and conceptual self-evidences of the social sciences. On the other hand, the study of the internationalization, globalization, and hegemonization of theories and methods underscores the dynamics of encounters, exchanges, appropriations, and contestations in various historical periods.

Our collective work is the result of a one-year collaboration. Indeed, an international group of scholars from across continents as well as disciplines of the social sciences and humanities gathered at the School of Social Science of the Institute for Advanced Study during the academic year 2017–18 to explore a variety of topics such as the constitution and transformation of scientific fields, their national specificities and asymmetric forms of internationalization, their material and epistemological conditions of production, the crises and controversies they go through, and the relationships they have with society at large. Our book is thus the outcome of regular exchanges and multiple interactions generated by this long-term residence.

THE VOLUME IS divided into three parts, exploring successively the temporal, spatial, and liminal dimensions of the social sciences. The first section deals with the making of disciplines from a historical perspective, combining theoretical, epistemological, and material angles. Indeed, these disciplines as we know them today are the product of social, political, financial, and intellectual contexts. The chapters therefore bring together studies of the evolution of the history of the social sciences, the ambiguous role of private donors, the emergence of scientific concepts, the interactions among neighboring disciplinary fields, and the reassessment of methodological approaches. The second section examines how the social sciences are shaped by national contexts and affected by supranational institutions and global transformations. They are thus analyzed in the contexts of postwar socialist Poland, in Japan at the time of the 1968 protests, and in India during the long period following its independence, as well as under the constraints of European programs and in the unequal conditions of world competition. The third section explores the connections of the social sciences with bordering disciplines and knowledge constellations. More specifically, the chapters focus on the influence of the critical humanities and subaltern studies, the frictions between the

social and cognitive sciences, the debates on animal cultures, and the infinite expansion of the social scientific field beyond the human.

Opening the first part with an extensive review of the corresponding literature, George Steinmetz argues that the history of the social sciences has not been a smooth and linear one but has evolved via major theoretical jolts, which he calls "concept-quakes" in reference to Friedrich Nietzsche's phrase. The first shift was the move from the classical history of sciences to the Marxist understanding of science as being intimately connected with its socioeconomic context. The second caesura was the invention of the sociology of knowledge, which looked beyond the capitalist contexts of knowledge emphasized in Marxist accounts to include everything from the state to religion. The sociology of knowledge, largely the heir of idealism, gave rise to a sociology of science that was attentive to historical and cultural contexts while also informed by content-oriented approaches, thus combining externalist and internalist readings of science. Several different strands appeared after the sociology of knowledge., including the Mertonian sociology of science, the French historical school of epistemology, and the cluster of approaches known as science and technology studies (STS), the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK), and Actor-Network Theory (ANT). With respect to the *social* sciences, however, the third shock was the passage from the social studies of science, dominated by the Actor-Network Theory developed by Bruno Latour, to the historical sociology of the social sciences, which received a decisive impulse through Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. Steinmetz argues that several of the tenents of Actor-Network Theory and science and technology studies can be internalized by a neo-Bourdieusian field theoretic approach, while others are incompatible. the range and depth of knowledge generated by studies of social science using Bourdieu's approach is the best indicator of its usefulness.

Rarely able to finance themselves through the market, the social sciences rely on public and private funding to exist. Focusing on the contribution of the Rockefeller Foundation in the development of international relations at the Colegio de México during the time of the Cold War, Álvaro Morcillo Laiz analyzes the role of philanthropy in the development of the social sciences. To do so, he uses the method of the counterfactuals, imagining what would have happened in the absence of this private patronage. This allows Morcillo Laiz to argue against "internalists," who believe that scientists follow their own intellectual logic independently of the support they receive. In the case examined here, the Rockefeller Foundation was decisive: first, in allowing the Center for International Studies to flourish, while the Center for Social

Studies, deprived of such funding, ended up closing; and second, in separating international relations from political science in Mexico. Beyond this specific example, it is undeniable that major private foundations from the United States have played a significant role in the fate of the social sciences in Latin America and beyond (Turner and Turner 1990; Tournès 2010; Krige and Rausch 2012).

Like money, ideas and the words that represent them circulate across space and time. Using as a case in point the notion of "creativity," which is overwhelmingly present today in the public sphere as well as the scientific domain, Bregje van Eekelen shows that such concepts have a history from which much is to be learned. Thus, the theme of creativity appeared in the United States at the heart of the industrial and military complexes in the middle of the twentieth century, that is, in a time of intense competition with the Soviet Union in terms of economic influence and armaments race. But beyond these immediate strategic implications, creativity was also regarded more broadly as an alternative to the utilitarian approaches predominant in the economic and bureaucratic realms at the time. Indeed, brainstorming seemed more exciting and promising than traditional methods for generating innovations in the system of production. Creativity soon became a keyword at the interface of the corporate and academic worlds, with the enlisting of social scientists to legitimize it as a concept via the multiplication of "creativity studies" and "creativity experts." It would be wrong however to view the social life of such concepts as linear, since there have been numerous variations and inflections in the meanings, connotations, and uses of the word.

The same can be said of theories, as shown by Carel Smith in his analysis of the critique of legal theory and legal practice by the social sciences. The dominant view within legal studies has been for more than one hundred years that law was a rule-governed activity, either in its European form, "legalism," or in its US variation, "case law method." However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, this dogma was questioned by the Free Law Movement in Europe and Legal Realism in the United States, which considered that judging resorts to forms of knowledge that exist beyond the system of rules and that involve politics. The social sciences therefore became an indispensable complement to legal scholarship, and were used to unveil the hidden ideologies behind adjudication. The balancing of interests came to be viewed as an attempt to take into account the conflicting viewpoints involved in any case. Such "social scientific" approaches were in turn criticized as irrational by scholars who continue to see law as a self-sufficient discipline. Beyond the specific example, the outcome of this battle shows that deductive reasoning

continues to be understood as the neutral and universal "gold standard" in science, whereas other forms of reasoning, which are context-sensitive, always remain second best from a positivist perspective.

Yet the formation of social science is very much dependent on the contexts of its genesis as Amín Pérez shows in his consideration of the fieldwork conducted by Pierre Bourdieu with Abdelmalek Sayad in Algeria at the time of the war of independence. This research was pivotal in the later development of the Bourdieu's thinking. In this troubled context, ethnography, pragmatically combined with interviews, census, mapping, and photography, allowed Bourdieu to refine his analysis of social change and his critique of domination. It also made him realize, through a comparison of his personal experience and his early works in Béarn, that peasants on both sides of the Mediterranean were facing some similar issues and were responding to them in analogous ways. Moreover, the political tensions and military conflict at that time made Bourdieu acutely conscious of the inherent commitment of scholarship, thus avoiding both "academism" and "revolutionarism," and providing instead a practice faithful to the principles of science while not eluding social responsibility.

In the second part, several national and historical contexts come under scrutiny. Using the case study of the University of Łodz, Agata Zysiak analyzes the fate of sociology after the Second World War under the Communist regime. Following the interwar period of institutionalization of the new discipline with towering figures such as Florian Znaniecki, the postwar period was one of Soviet-style reform in academia, according to which higher education had to be oriented toward the advent of state socialism. Characterized as "bourgeois" despite its progressive engagement for the most part, classical sociology was banned from universities and replaced by forms of knowledge more closely aligned with the Stalinist project. Interestingly, however, the disappearance of sociology from academia was mostly nominal, as former sociologists created, or found refuge in, departments with different names and continued their research and more broadly their professional activities in universities. The discipline thus demonstrated its resilience even under ideological and political hardships, which explains why it had less difficulty than was the case in other Eastern and Central European countries to recover during the post-Stalinist thaw. Thus, while Polish sociology shares certain features with sociology emerging from the rest of the Soviet bloc, it is also unique in strong identity and its capacity to withstand.

In the case of Indian anthropologists, there is an apparent paradox, since they have long avoided a reality that was overwhelming society: violence. As

the Partition was accompanied by extreme brutalization, as Sikh and Muslim minorities were assaulted, as Naxalites were rebelling, anthropologists, in the tradition of their colonial predecessors, remained focused on tribal groups and the caste system, traditional themes that also constituted the main interest of their British and French colleagues. As Chitralekha argues, the anthropology of violence became a major theme of research some time later, notably with Veena Das, who examined the painful legacies of the Partition; Dipankar Gupta, who explored the militancy of the Sikhs; and Rabindra Ray and Bela Bhatia, who analyzed the Naxalite revolt, among others. Working on these contentious topics was not without risks for their authors, she reminds us. In the present context of exacerbated nationalism, social scientists who do so are exposed to threats and sanctions.

The development of the social sciences in Japan, as recounted by Miriam Kingsberg Kadia, has been no less influenced by their inscription in the national history and also by their transnational conversation with the United States. During the first half of the twentieth century, Japanese social scientists increasingly participated in Western-dominated international networks, a trend that was not reversed by the defeat of Japan and its occupation by the United States military. But the positivist orientation of Japanese researchers left them impervious to the flourishing of critical thinking in the West, whether in relation to the imperialist dark side of their own history or regarding the problems of their own society. The student movement of 1968 led to substantial transformations, particularly with the replacement of the older scholars by a younger generation. Paradoxically, however, many among the latter embraced the conservative idea of Japanese exceptionalism linked to an essentialization of the nation and its culture, which was only abandoned recently with the decline of the Japanese economy.

Moving to a supranational level, that of the European Union, Kristoffer Kropp shows that, contrary to expectations, apparently transnational research instruments may in fact be very locally produced, thus reflecting parochial ideas. Such is the case of the European Values Study, an important moral and political survey designed for the most part by members of two Catholic universities, one in Belgium, the other in the Netherlands, with a conservative agenda based on the idea that European Christian values were being corroded by individualization. Catholic sociology had connections with Christian Democratic parties, and under the veil of its apparent neutral approach, the opinion poll on European values essentially promoted certain moral and political ideas. With time, the survey was modified in an effort to give it a more solid theoretical basis and scientific credibility, but its reli-

gious legacy and conservative affinities never entirely disappeared. Far from depoliticizing the social sciences by removing possible nationalist excesses, supranational institutions can thus repoliticize them in other ways.

Moving one step further, Johan Heilbron examines the meaning and implications of the globalization of the social sciences. Cautioning against a Western and presentist perspective, he reminds us that since antiquity there have been multiple centers of production of knowledge and numerous forms of circulation among them. Concentrating on the specificity of the recent period, Heilbron argues that it is characterized by a shift from the "international" level, marked by the creation of disciplinary associations, to the "global" level, with a more systematic interconnection across the planet facilitated by new media of communication. But far from the hopes of democratization raised by this evolution, Heilbron shows that the core-periphery structure remains and has become even stronger, as revealed by the mapping of citations. Euro-American dominance continues, even if it is challenged here and there by scholarship from the periphery. Moreover, the expansion of transnational circulation has not reduced but rather augmented the hegemony of the United States. For example, the American Sociological Association has three times more members than the International Sociological Association. In the end, instead of enriching the social sciences, their globalization is weakening the weakest among social scientific cultures, by impoverishing local knowledge, imposing dominant models and debilitating public presence. The universalizing of a single scientific language and the homogenizing of publication norms marginalize other modes of expression and reflection. This realist analysis invites social scientists to a engage in a more critical reflexivity on their own practice.

Introducing the third part, Jean-Louis Fabiani wonders precisely whether such critical forms of reflexivity do not often come from outside the social sciences. Mentioning Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Edward Said, among many others, he suggests that philosophers, literary scholars, and postcolonial and gender students have shaken the self-evidences of social sciences in past decades. To address this bold question, Fabiani presents three configurations of knowledge, each corresponding to a particular structuration of agents, positions, objects, concepts, methods and social practices in a given moment. Focusing on the French social scientific arena, he examines the making of critical sociology in the 1960s, the triple heritage of Georges Canguilhem, and the critique of the critique of Orientalism. While each case is singular, all of them call for a recognition of the external influence of critical humanities on the social science.

From that perspective, India has been one of the most interesting sites of renewal of the social sciences. As analyzed by Peter D. Thomas, subaltern studies has recovered the voices and experiences of subaltern groups, particularly peasants. The influence of this approach has reached far beyond the domain of South Asian studies, opening up new research programs sensitive to oppression and domination as well as resistance and consciousness. But as Thomas demonstrates, this exceptionally fertile movement, initiated by Ranajit Guha, has not entirely done justice to what had been its intellectual inspiration: Antonio Gramsci's theory of subalternity. Returning to this source via a fresh reading of the latter's works allows us to account for the greater complexity and present relevance of the concept. From this perspective, subalterns are neither positioned against nor outside hegemony or the state; subalternity is the complement of the hegemonic and an integral part of the modern state. This opens new ways of considering subalterns not from the viewpoint of their exclusion, in Partha Chatterjee's words, or incapacity, as argued by Gayatri Spivak, but as one of the realizations of the condition of citizen. Returning to Gramsci thus revives the promise of subaltern studies.

The chapter by John Lardas Modern examines the cognitive science of religion, an extension of an evolutionist theory according to which animals have an adaptive inclination to presume the presence of intelligent agents such as predators even when they are not visible, therefore adopting a behavior of prudence. This capacity of "agent detection" is a survival strategy also among humans, leading them to imagine ghosts, spirits, and gods, according to the anthropologist Pascal Boyer. Religion thus represents an "evolutionary advantage," with humans thinking of these supernatural beings in anthropomorphic terms, yet also as being endowed with superpowers. This model is subsequently mobilized to apprehend the resurgence of religious fundamentalism and combat jihadist terrorism on the basis of a cognitive understanding of their "apparently absurd beliefs." By inscribing religion in the brain, cognitive science therefore annihilates not only its spiritual experience but also its sociological and anthropological interpretation.

With primate sociology, it is the very human subject of the social sciences that disappears. As Nicolas Langlitz notes, this is a particularly fascinating domain, since primate sociology is situated at the interface of the natural and social sciences—indeed, it questions the very existence of this divide. Thus, the discipline's "prosocial turn," which affirmed the preeminence of solidarity and cooperation over selfishness and competition, was essential not only for the understanding of animal life but also for the establishment of common ground between animals and humans. Yet, as shown by the dispute between

a comparative psychologist, Michael Tomasello, and a field primatologist, Christophe Boesch, who belong to the same institution, the debate is still ongoing. It continues between those who consider, like Tomasello, that altruism is what ultimately distinguishes apes and humans, and those like Boesch, who think that both species are capable of sharing and caring. The disagreement is both ideological and methodological, since one of the researchers works in the confined conditions of a lab while the other studies primates in their natural forest environment.

The most recent critique of the social sciences, posthumanism, is also the most deliberately radical, since it undermines the foundations not only of the social sciences but also of what is sometimes designated more broadly as the human sciences so as to include the humanities. Although it is an extraordinarily heterogeneous movement, in which little commonality can be found between the idea of the extension of the human via biological mutations, bodily prosthesis, or artificial intelligence, and the defense of the nonhuman world, be it animals, plants, nature, objects, or the planet, the core of posthumanism, according to Didier Fassin, has two components. First, it is a rejection of anthropocentrism, understood as both an epistemological and a moral critique of the centrality and superiority of human beings. Second, it is a dismissal of a series of dichotomies that have nourished a long tradition of thinking, such as subject/object, self/other, culture/nature, or mind/body. While it has been initially developed within literary, gender, and animal studies as well as philosophy, anthropology is a latecomer to what is designated as its "ontological turn." Within a particularly complex and disparate field, it is possible to distinguish a soft posthumanism, whose ethical dimension invites humans to care for nonhumans, and a hard posthumanism, which renounces the principle of a common humanity or even speculates a dehumanized world. In both cases, the ambitious posthumanist project is at risk of relinquishing history and politics at the very moment when their importance has to be recognized to address the numerous threats that human beings, the most vulnerable in particular, are facing.

There are thus many reasons why a reflexive and critical—but sympathetic—inquiry into the social sciences is not only important but also timely. The world is rapidly changing, with deepening inequalities, political uncertainties, demographic instabilities, and environmental perils, as well as ever more invasive forms of surveillance and subject formation, which renders the sorts of critical knowledge produced by the social sciences all the more essential. It is just as essential that scholars continue to investigate the ways in which social science emerges from and sometimes contributes to social pathologies. The

social sciences have once again come under internal and external pressures—from cognitive sciences broadly speaking and from reinvigorated positivist social sciences, on the one hand, and from politicians who reject the very idea of studying, analyzing, interpreting, or explaining human social existence. As the scientization of the social proceeds apace, in multiple new forms, it remains as crucial as ever to understand the scientific as well as the social aspects of this relationship, which calls for the critical awareness that can be provided by a social science of the social sciences.

Notes

The Institute for Advanced Study has generously provided the space and time to develop the fecund and friendly exchanges from which this volume stems. In particular, we want to thank Donne Petito, for having facilitated our work all year long; Laura McCune, for organizing our final workshop; and Munirah Bishop, for her careful copyediting of the manuscript. The two anonymous reviewers have provided invaluable comments that have been critical to the revision of the manuscript, and we are grateful to them for their engagement with our collective work as well as to Kenneth Wissoker for his early expression of interest in it.

1 See Elias 1956. According to him (1956, 227), involvement and detachment "seem preferable to others which like 'subjective' and 'objective' suggest a static and unbridgeable divide between two entities 'subject' and 'object.' . . . A philosopher once said, 'If Paul speaks of Peter he tells us more about Paul than about Peter.' One can say, by way of comment, that in speaking of Peter he is always telling us something about himself as well as about Peter. One would call this approach 'involved' as long as his own characteristics, the characteristics of the perceiver, overshadow those of the perceived. If Paul's propositions begin to tell more about Peter than about himself the balance begins to turn in favor of detachment."

2 Foundational studies by Wagner and his collaborators (Wagner 1990; Wagner et al. 1991, focused on relations between the social sciences and states or policy-making.

3 Camic, Gross, and Lamont 2011, for example, has sociologists as editors and as the majority of its contributors. It is more common to focus on a single discipline—e.g., Stocking 1968; Fabiani 1988; Mirowski 1989; Park Turner and Turner 1990; Hands 2001; Calhoun 2007; Herman 2009; Heilbron 2015; Dayé and Moebius 2015.

4 For studies of the human and social sciences that break with methodological nationalism, see Pollak 1979; Gerhardt 2007; Heilbron, Guilhot, and Jeanpierre 2008; Steinmetz 2010; Pérez 2015; Baring 2016; Boldyrev and Kirtchik 2016; Kropp 2017).

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