

# History of Social Sciences Cursors

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## Abstract

The history of the social sciences has origin in the common stock of Western philosophy and shares various precursors, but began most intentionally in the early 19th century with the positivist philosophy of science. Since the mid-20th century, the term "social science" has come to refer more generally, not just to sociology, but to all those disciplines which analyse society and culture; from anthropology to linguistics to media studies.

The idea that society may be studied in a standardized and objective manner, with scholarly rules and methodology, is comparatively recent. While there is evidence of early sociology in medieval Islam, and while philosophers such as Confucius had long since theorised on topics such as social roles, the scientific analysis of "Man" is peculiar to the intellectual break away from the Age of Enlightenment and toward the discourses of Modernity. Social sciences came forth from the moral philosophy of the time and was influenced by the Age of Revolutions, such as the Industrial revolution and the French revolution. The beginnings of the social sciences in the 18th century are reflected in the grand encyclopedia of Diderot, with articles from Rousseau and other pioneers.

The development of social science subfields became very quantitative in methodology. Conversely, the interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary nature of scientific inquiry into human behavior and social and environmental factors affecting it made many of the natural sciences interested in some aspects of social science methodology.

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## Early modern

Near the Renaissance, which began around the 14th century, Jean Buridan and Nicole Oresme wrote on money. In the 15th century St. Antonine of Florence wrote of a comprehensive economic process. In the 16th century Leonard de Leys (Lessius), Juan de Lugo, and particularly Luis Molina wrote on economic topics. These writers focused on explaining property as something for "public good".

Representative figures of the 17th century include David Hartley, Hugo Grotius, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Samuel von Pufendorf. Thomas Hobbes argued that deductive reasoning from axioms created a scientific framework, and hence his Leviathan was a scientific description of a political commonwealth. In the 18th century, social science was called moral philosophy, as contrasted from natural philosophy and mathematics, and included the study of natural theology, natural ethics, natural jurisprudence, and policy ("police"), which included economics and finance ("revenue").

## Late modern

This unity of science as descriptive remains, for example, in the time of Thomas Hobbes who argued that deductive reasoning from axioms created a scientific framework, and hence his Leviathan was

a scientific description of a political commonwealth. What would happen within decades of his work was a revolution in what constituted "science", particularly the work of Isaac Newton in physics. Newton, by revolutionizing what was then called "natural philosophy", changed the basic framework by which individuals understood what was "scientific".

While he was merely the archetype of an accelerating trend, the important distinction is that for Newton, the mathematical flowed from a presumed reality independent of the observer, and working by its own rules. For philosophers of the same period, mathematical expression of philosophical ideals was taken to be symbolic of natural human relationships as well: the same laws moved physical and spiritual reality. For examples see Blaise Pascal, Gottfried Leibniz and Johannes Kepler, each of whom took mathematical examples as models for human behaviour directly. In Pascal's case, the famous wager; for Leibniz, the invention of binary computation; and for Kepler, the intervention of angels to guide the planets (citation needed).

In the realm of other disciplines, this created a pressure to express ideas in the form of mathematical relationships. Such relationships, called "Laws" after the usage of the time (see philosophy of science) became the model which other disciplines would emulate.

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## 20th century

In the first half of the 20th century, statistics became a free-standing discipline of applied mathematics. Statistical methods were used confidently, for example in an increasingly statistical view of biology.

One of the most persuasive advocates for the view of scientific treatment of philosophy would be John Dewey (1859–1952). He began, as Marx did, in an attempt to weld Hegelian idealism and logic to experimental science, for example in his *Psychology* of 1887. However, he abandoned Hegelian constructs. Influenced by both Charles Sanders Peirce and William James, he joined the movement in America called pragmatism. He then formulated his basic doctrine, enunciated in essays such as "The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy" (1910).

This idea, based on his theory of how organisms respond, states that there are three phases to the process of inquiry:

- Problematic Situation, where the typical response is inadequate.
- Isolation of Data or subject matter.

- Reflective, which is tested empirically.
- With the rise of the idea of quantitative measurement in the physical sciences, for example Lord Rutherford's famous maxim that any knowledge that one cannot measure numerically "is a poor sort of knowledge", the stage was set for the conception of the humanities as being precursors to "social science."

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## Conclusion

This change was not, and is not, without its detractors, both inside of academia and outside. The range of critiques begin from those who believe that the physical sciences are qualitatively different from social sciences, through those who do not believe in statistical science of any kind, through those who disagree with the methodology and kinds of conclusion of social science.

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