

Further Remarks about Early Uses of the Term "Social Science"

Author(s): Georg G. Iggers

Source: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jun. - Sep., 1959), pp. 433-436

Published by: [University of Pennsylvania Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2708121>

Accessed: 09/09/2013 23:51

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of Pennsylvania Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to
Journal of the History of Ideas.

<http://www.jstor.org>

FURTHER REMARKS ABOUT EARLY USES OF THE TERM "SOCIAL SCIENCE"

BY GEORG G. IGGERS

In a note, "The Earliest Use of the Term 'Social Science'," which appeared in this *Journal*,¹ Prof. Peter R. Senn observed that the reference in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which places the first use in English of the term "social science" as occurring in 1846 in George Herbert Lewes' *Biographical History of Philosophy*, is inaccurate. Prof. Senn pointed out that John Stuart Mill had previously used the term in an article which appeared in October 1836, while in French Sismondi had used "social sciences" (*sciences sociales*) in the title of a book which also appeared in 1836. Although Prof. Senn believes that there is "some possible doubt that the Mill references were the earliest in English," he concludes that "the evidence now indicates that the Mill and Sismondi references . . . are the earliest both in English and in French and that they occurred in the same year,"² that both writers arrived at the term independently, and that the Sismondi reference marks the earliest established use of the term in any language.

Prof. Senn was correct in suspecting that the term had been used earlier. Indeed, far from being used for the first time in 1836, both the term and the concept appear to have been fairly well known in both the French and English languages by that time.

In French, Charles Fourier used the term as early as 1808 in the Introduction to his *Théorie des quatre mouvemens et des destinées générales*. Maintaining that the "moral and political sciences," whose theories "were incompatible with experience," had been discredited in 1793, Fourier offered in their place "a still unknown social science (*une science sociale encore inconnue*)."³

Among the Saint-Simonians the concept of a science of society was considerably older than the term. Beginning with his first book, *Lettres d'un habitant de Genève* (1803), Henri de Saint-Simon was concerned with the application to the study of society of laws similar to those of the physical and biological sciences. All sciences, Saint-Simon observed, had passed from a conjectural through a semi-conjectural to a positive stage. He insisted that the physiologists must follow suit and expel the metaphysicians from their ranks. Saint-Simon coined various terms which either included or designated the study of society, "the physics of organized bodies" as against "the physics of brute bodies,"⁴ "the moral and political sciences,"⁵

¹ XIX (1958), 568-570.

² *Ibid.*, 569.

³ (Leipzig, 1808), 2-4. See also the expression "la science dite sociale" used by Fourier in *Sommaire du Traité de l'Association domestique-agricole* in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris, 1841-48), II, 204.

⁴ See, e.g., "Introduction aux travaux scientifique du 19^e siècle," in *Oeuvres choisies* (Brussels, 1859), vol. I and "Travail sur la gravitation universelle (1815)," in *Oeuvres choisies*, II, 179, 180, 182.

⁵ See, e.g., "Des Bourbons et des Stuarts (1822)," *Oeuvres choisies*, II, 431.

and particularly "social physiology"⁶ and the "science of man."⁷ Yet the first use of the precise term "social science" occurs not in Saint-Simon's own writings but in 1822 in an extended essay, "Système de politique positive," by the young Auguste Comte, Saint-Simon's secretary at the time, which was published as the "Troisième Cahier" of Saint-Simon's *Catéchisme des industriels*. Comte warns that "social science" (*la science sociale*), a term which he uses apparently interchangeably with "politics" (*la politique*) and "political science" (*la science politique*), must not be considered as a mere application of mathematics or physiology.⁸

The term reappears in *Le Producteur*, a journal projected by Saint-Simon but published by his disciples in 1825 and 1826 after his death. Auguste Comte, who by now had broken with Saint-Simon and the Saint-Simonian school, nevertheless contributed two articles. Although Comte did not use the term *la science sociale* in these essays, he defined *la physique sociale* as "that science which occupies itself with social phenomena, considered in the same light as astronomical, physical, chemical, and physiological phenomena, that is to say as being subject to natural and invariable Laws the discovery of which is the special object of its researches."⁹ Philippe Buchez in a series of articles in which he developed Saint-Simon's concept of "social physiology,"¹⁰ and for the most part used Saint-Simon's terminology, attempted to find the positive steps for the passage from the "science of the individual to social science."¹¹ Saint-Amand Bazard, who later became one of the two Fathers of the Saint-Simonian Church, complained in another essay that "social science" had been excluded from education.¹²

When in December 1828 the Saint-Simonians resumed their public teachings after a silence of two and a half years with the series of lectures known as *Doctrine de Saint-Simon. Exposition*, the term *la science sociale* replaced the other terms used by Saint-Simon, Comte, or Buchez to designate the concept.¹³ Similarly the Saint-Simonian periodical, *L'Organisateur*,

⁶ See, e.g., "De la physiologie sociale appliquée à l'amélioration des institutions sociales," *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon et d'Enfantin* (Paris, 1865-78), XXXIX, 175-197.

⁷ See, e.g., "Mémoire sur la science de l'homme," *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon* . . . , XL.

⁸ "Système de politique positive," *Catéchisme des industriels, troisième cahier in Oeuvres de Saint-Simon* . . . , XXXVIII, 169, 179, 181. See also Auguste Comte, *Système de politique positive* (Paris, 1854), *Appendice générale*, 121, 123, 124.

⁹ "Considérations philosophiques sur les sciences et les savans," *Le Producteur, journal philosophique de l'industrie, des sciences et des beaux arts* (Paris, 1825-26), I, 465. Cf. *Système de politique positive, App. gén.*, 150. Quoted here from H. D. Hutton's translation in *System of Positive Polity* (London, 1875-77), IV, 599.

¹⁰ Philippe Buchez, "De la physiologie," III, 122-134, 264-380, 459-479; "Physiologie. Des termes de la passage de la physiologie individuelle à la physiologie sociale," IV, 416-433. ¹¹ IV, 73.

¹² "De la nécessité d'une nouvelle doctrine générale," III, 541.

¹³ *Doctrine de Saint-Simon. Exposition, Première année, 1829*, ed. by C. Bouglé and Elie Halévy (Paris, 1924), 343, and the definition of the term on page 166n. One reference does occur to "de la science de l'humanité, de la physiologie sociale," 242. Cf. *The Doctrine of Saint-Simon. First Year, 1828-1829*, trans. with notes by Georg G. Iggers (Boston, 1958), 32, 156.

published from 1829 to 1831, made general use of the term *la science sociale*.¹⁴ The term *la science politique* was used in the narrower sense as referring to the study of government or institutions rather than in the broader sense as the study of society.¹⁵ In 1834, Jules Lechevalier, a Saint-Simonian convert to Fourierism, published a book entitled *Études sur la science sociale. Année 1832. (Théories de Charles Fourier)*.¹⁶

Sismondi, too, used the term "social science" considerably earlier than 1836. In 1803, in his *De la richesse commerciale*, and in 1819, in the first edition of the *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique*, he had spoken of the "human sciences" (*sciences humaines*).¹⁷ But already in 1827, in the preface to the second edition of the *Nouveaux principes*, Sismondi speaks of "social science, the most important of the sciences."¹⁸ Interestingly, Sismondi reflects in 1837 that "for forty years, indeed, I have participated in all the discussions about the social sciences."¹⁹

After 1829, the term "social science" recurs frequently among English writers. John Stuart Mill used it repeatedly before October 1836.²⁰ Robert Owen spoke of the "science of society" in a pamphlet published in 1830²¹ and of "social science" in 1836.²² Similarly John Gray, who had not employed the term in 1825 in *A Lecture on Human Happiness*²³ used it in *The Social System. A Treatise on the Principles of Exchange*, published in 1831.²⁴ The Introduction to the second volume of Bentham's *Deontology*, published posthumously in 1834 and edited and partly written from the manuscripts by John Bowring, refers to the contents of the book as a development of "the theory of the social science."²⁵

Prof. Senn attaches significance to the fact that Mill spoke of "social science" while Sismondi referred to the "social sciences."²⁶ Although the use of the singular or plural can, of course, imply basic differences in writer's conception of the nature of social science, Mill used the plural elsewhere,²⁷

¹⁴ August 29, 1829; December 20, 1829; February 24, 1830.

¹⁵ April 26, 1830.

¹⁶ (Paris, 1834).

¹⁷ *De la richesse commerciale ou principes d'économie politique appliquée à la législation du commerce* (Geneva, 1803), xix; *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique ou de la richesse dans ses rapports avec la population* (Paris, 1819), I, 17.

¹⁸ (Paris, 1827), xvii.

¹⁹ *Études sur l'économie politique* (Brussels, 1837–38), I, ii.

²⁰ See, e.g., letter of Mill to Gustave d'Eichthal (October 8, 1829) in *Cosmopolis*, VI (April–June 1897), 29; *The Spirit of the Age* (Chicago, 1942), 16 (written in 1831); "Professor Sedgwick's Discourse on the Studies of the University of Cambridge," in *Dissertations and Discussions* (New York, 1832), I, 138 (first published in the *London Review* in April 1835). See also J. H. Burns, "J. S. Mill and the Term 'Social Science'," pp. 431–2 above.

²¹ *Outline of the Rational System of Society* (London, 1830), 6.

²² *The Book of the New Moral World* . . . , 61; "the moral science of man" is identified here with "the science of society, or social science."

²³ (London, 1825).

²⁴ (Edinburgh, 1831), 1, 2.

²⁵ Jeremy Bentham, *Deontology; or the Science of Morality*, arranged and edited by John Bowring (London, 1834), II, 1.

²⁶ Page 570.

²⁷ *The Spirit of the Age*, 16; Mill speaks here of "the moral and social sciences."

while Sismondi at times used the singular. In the opening paragraph of the Introduction to the *Études sur les sciences sociales*, Sismondi explains that "the term 'social sciences' has been given by us to that division of the human sciences which relates to the establishment and preservation of societies," and then refers to "social science" (*la science sociale* in the singular) as "divisible into a large number of branches," such as education, religion, military science, jurisprudence, and history.²⁸

Finally, although the development of the concept and the term are related to an extent, the concept of a social science (or of social sciences) appears clearly older than the term. Gouhier's and Hayek's studies of the Saint-Simonians and Halévy's work on Philosophic Radicalism in England²⁹ have thrown light on the development of the concept. What is still needed is a comprehensive study of the emergence of the concept (or concepts) out of the intellectual framework of the eighteenth century.

Dillard University.

²⁸ *Études sur les sciences sociales*, I (Paris, 1836), 1, 2.

²⁹ H. Gouhier, *La Jeunesse d'Auguste Comte* (Paris, Lille, 1933-41), 3 vols.; F. A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science. Studies on the Abuse of Reason* (Glencoe, Ill., 1952); Elie Halévy, *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, trans. by Mary Morris (New York, 1928).

MIND

July, 1959

Innovation and Philosophy: J. P. CORBETT.

Birth, Suicide and the Doctrine of Creation: An Exploration of Analogies:
W. H. POTEAT.

The Paradox of the Liar: R. C. SKINNER.

De Somniis: F. B. EBERSOLE.

Ascriptive and Prescriptive Responsibility: S. STOLJAR.

On the Elimination of Singular Terms: MANLEY THOMPSON.

Discussions:

Determinism and Rational Behaviour: A. G. N. FLEW.

On Explanation in History: C. B. JOYNT & N. RESCHER.

The Necessity of Kant: G. H. BIRD.

On a Recent Account of Entailment: J. BENNETT.

Mr. Warnock on Ordinary Language: C. H. WHITELEY.

Prior's 'Time after Time,' Further Considerations: J. GIBBS.

Mr. Danto on Expressions of the Referring Sort: R. AMMERMAN.

Mr. Copi on Objects, Properties and Relations in the *Tractatus*:
G. E. M. ANSCOMBE.

New Books

Notes

Thomas Nelson & Sons, 36 Park Street, London W 1