

Comte, W. E. B. Du Bois—actually saw themselves as working in the fields of philosophy, history, and law, whereas others (such as Karl Marx) had no academic foothold at all. Although toward the end of the nineteenth century, a few figures were beginning to argue for the need for a distinctive social science—for instance, the French champion of sociology, Emile Durkheim—these individuals remained few and far between.

Andrew Abbott (2001b) has drawn attention to the significance of “fractal divides,” whereby apparently new forms of knowledge actually reproduce older axial divisions. The new is drawn from the seeds of the past. In this manner, as the social sciences took on organized disciplinary forms from the early twentieth century, they reproduced older tensions between the sciences and humanities. The two earliest disciplines, economics and anthropology, took their intellectual models from the sciences and the humanities, respectively. Thus they came to institutionalize the split between naturalist and hermeneutic perspectives. These two disciplines have proved to be most cohesive and internally closed among the social sciences. The fields of political science (sometimes referred to more amorphously as “government”) and sociology developed somewhat later, and became caught in these fractal oppositions. They were characterized by endemic bitter disputes among their ranks between those championing quantitative and qualitative perspectives, a situation that has often led to chronic infighting and introspection.<sup>8</sup> A further twist was that social psychology increasingly abandoned its location in the social sciences and became more closely allied to the medical and natural sciences, while economic history largely folded back into the broader discipline of history.

The paradox of this disciplinary formation was that whereas social life was generally seen as necessarily embodying exchange, interaction, reflexivity and open systems, the social science disciplines themselves were singularly unable to articulate such principles between (or sometimes even among) themselves. Each discipline deferred to its own canonical thinkers, its own preferred methodological tools, and operated largely independently of one another. Each sliced the social world in its own image: economists defined, measured, and analyzed the economy, operating independently of other circuits of social life; political scientists addressed the dynamics associated with political institutions; and sociologists competed with anthropologists to address more diffuse analyses of social and cultural relations.<sup>9</sup>