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Western and/or universal social sciences?

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Abstract

Since several decades there is a critical debate, if social sciences are Euro-centric resp. Western. For sure, modern social sciences have emerged since the Renaissance foremost in Europe. The U.S.A. have become since a century also within the social sciences a hegemon. Nevertheless, social sciences as such are not an invention of the West. All cultures had and have some kind of social theory, which was resp. is often embedded within a religious context and framed via legal regulations. Culture is about values, and all science is part of a given culture. Probably the biggest influence on modern social sciences came from the Greek philosophy, transmitted by the Romans and the Arabs. Actually Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) can be regarded as the first social scientist, long before Machiavelli, Erasmus from Rotterdam or Hobbes, Thomas Morus et al. Humanism was the outcome.

In regard to our topic Zygmunt Bauman makes a pertinent differentiation between global vs. universal. Modern globalisation is a process, which certainly dates back to early modern times, which was coined by a fundamental value change. That leads us to the question: Where do values, ethics come from? From religion, ideology, metaphysics, Enlightenment, common sense, mythology, tradition or/and science? Are there competing values? Postmodernists declare that there are no common values anymore: Everything goes! (Wittgenstein, Feyerabend, Derrida, Foucault ...) But then, what about the responsibility of scientists for their writings and actions? When we discuss therefore the issue of Western versus universal structures these are always related to value systems. And we have to concede that 'universal' is an ideal, which will never be reached. Today's increasingly globalized world is dominated by the capitalist mode of production since more than 200 years, and it dominates all sciences as well. Globalisation is driven by capitalism and imperialism. Technology (namely military) allowed Western Europe to dominate nearly the whole world since, although other parts of the world were already more developed in many domains. But this is not a unilinear process, as dialectics set counterforces free.

Keywords: Social sciences, Eurocentrism, Universalism, Cognitive dissonance, Cultural hegemony, Enlightenment

Abstrakt

Seit einigen Jahrzehnten wird eine kritische Debatte darüber geführt, ob Sozialwissenschaften euro-zentrisch bzw. westlich seien. Sicherlich sind modernen Wissenschaften seit der Renaissance zuvörderst in Europa entstanden. Die U.S.A. sind seit hundert Jahren auch in den Sozialwissenschaften seit einem Jahrhundert zur Hegemonialmacht geworden. Nichtsdestotrotz sind die Sozialwissenschaften keine Erfindung des Westens. Alle Kulturen hatten und haben eine Art von Sozialtheorie, die in einen religiösen Bezugsrahmen eingebettet und durch gesetzliche Bestimmungen reguliert ist bzw. war. Bei Kultur geht es um Werte, und alle Wissenschaft ist Teil der Kultur. Wahrscheinlich hat die griechische Philosophie - vermittelt über die Römer und Araber - den größten Einfluss auf die modernen Sozialwissenschaften. Tatsächlich kann Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) als erster moderner Sozialwissenschaftler betrachtet werden - lange vor Machiavelli, Erasmus aus Rotterdam oder Hobbes, Thomas Morus et al. Humanismus war das Ergebnis. In Bezug auf unser Thema macht Zygmunt Bauman eine wesentliche Unterscheidung zwischen global und universal. Moderne Globalisierung ist ein Prozess, der zweifelsohne auf die Frühe Neuzeit zurück geht, der von einem fundamentalen Wertewandel geprägt wurde. Dies führt uns zu folgender Frage: Woher kommen Werte, woher kommt Ethik? Von der Religion, Ideologie, Metaphysik, Aufklärung, dem gesunden Menschenverstand, der Mythologie, Tradition oder/und Wissenschaft? Gibt es einen Wertestreit? Die Postmodernen erklären, dass es keine gemeinsamen Werte mehr gäbe: Alles geht! (Wittgenstein, Feyerabend, Derrida, Foucault ...) Aber wie steht es dann um die Verantwortung der Wissenschaftler für ihre Veröffentlichung und ihr Handeln?

Wenn wir also die Frage nach den westlichen bzw. den universellen Strukturen diskutieren, sind diese immer auf Wertesysteme bezogen. Wobei wir zugestehen müssen, dass es sich bei dem Begriff 'universell' um ein Ideal handelt, das wohl niemals zu erreichen sein wird. Die heutige zunehmend globalisierte Welt ist seit über 200 Jahren durch die kapitalistische Produktionsweise bestimmt. Diese dominiert alle Wissenschaften ebenfalls. Globalisierung wird durch Kapitalismus und Imperialismus angetrieben. Technologie (insbesondere im Militärbereich) ermöglichte es Westeuropa, fast die gesamte Welt zu beherrschen, obwohl andere Weltteile teilweise weiter entwickelt waren. Jedoch ist dies kein unilinear Prozess, denn dank der Dialektik entwickeln sich Gegenkräfte.

Therefore myself to magic I give,

In hope, through spirit-voice and might,

Secrets now veiled to bring to light,

That I no more, with aching brow,

Need speak of what I nothing know;

That I the force may recognise

That binds creation's inmost energies;

Her vital powers, her embryo seeds survey,

And fling the trade in empty words away.

Goethe's *Faust I* (von Goethe 1808: 34)

"Sociology is the Enlightenment of Old Europe about itself in the light of the consequences of Enlightenment."

(Baier 2000: 9)

Introduction

Since several decades there is a critical debate, if social sciences are Euro-centric resp. Western. For sure, modern social sciences have emerged since the Renaissance, i.e. the fifteenth century, mainly in the Italian City Republics and Western Europe. And with the increasing hegemony of the U.S.A. since a century they have become dominant, and largely hegemonic (Kuhn and Yazawa 2012; Simpson 1998). Nevertheless, social sciences as such are not an invention of the West. All cultures had and have some kind of social theory, which was resp. is often embedded within a religious context and framed via legal regulations. Culture is about values, and all science is part of a given culture (Nisbett 2005). It is not the space here to elaborate on all these emanations. Just to cut short, probably the biggest influence on modern social sciences came from the Greek philosophy, transmitted by the Romans and the Arabs. Actually Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) can be regarded as the first social scientist (Freely 2009), long before Machiavelli, Erasmus from Rotterdam or Hobbes, Thomas Morus et al. Humanism was the outcome (Comte 1969).

Since the age of Enlightenment, i.e. about 1600, Reason against unfounded prejudice and faith came to the fore and led to the bourgeois revolutions (Kant 1977). However, often it remained a limited reason, i.e. *techne*, as religion never died out, and on the contrary knows even a renaissance nowadays. This Reason embodied itself in rationality, of which Max Weber distinguishes between the rationality of *means* versus those of *targets* (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972). Rationality not only in industry, military and bureaucracy is a power relationship (Flyvbjerg 1998).

In regard to our topic Zygmunt Bauman makes a pertinent differentiation between global vs. universal (Bauman 1997, 1998). Globalisation is a process, which certainly dates back to early modern times (Széll 2005a), whereas universalism corresponds to values. That leads us to the question: Where do values, ethics come from? (Zagzebski 1996) From religion, ideology, metaphysics (Staudinger 1987), Enlightenment (Zafirovski 2010), common sense, mythology, tradition or/and science? Are there competing values? Postmodernists declare that there are no common values anymore: Everything goes! (Wittgenstein, Feyerabend, Derrida, Foucault ...) But then, what about the responsibility of scientists for their writings and actions?

To understand the issue of Western versus universal social sciences at least four different approaches are necessary: 1. Theory of science, sociology of knowledge (Mannheim 1936), 2. sociology of science (Dubois 1999; Latour 1987; Heilbron et al. 2013), 3. the methodology of social sciences (Galtung 1977; Morin 1977-2013, 1992), and 4. also epistemological

questions have to be raised (Baehr 2011; Széll and Yazawa 1993; Goldman 2010; Greco 2002; Kvanvig 1992).

To compare over time and different units, we need common notions and a common methodology (Széll 1985). Intercultural communication is based on equivalent notions. Theories provide the coherent structure via its notions and methodology. Since the beginning of science there were always competing theories. Radical changes for scientific progress are linked with the change of paradigms. A good overview on our topic can be found in volumes like the *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* by Smelser and Baltes (2001), in William Outhwaite's *The Blackwell Dictionary of Modern Social Thought* (Outhwaite 2003), and as well in George Ritzer's *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* (Ritzer 2004) (cf. also for general overviews: Wikipedia 2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2017d, 2014a; Smelser 1994).

When we discuss the issue Western versus universal structures these are always related to value systems. And we have to concede that 'universal' is an ideal, which will never be reached. Today's increasingly globalized world is dominated by the capitalist mode of production since 200 years, and it dominates all sciences as well (Marx 1989; Braudel 1992; Sachsenmaier 2011; Wallerstein 1974–1989). But this is not a uni-linear proces, as there work dialectics too (Polányi 1957). Globalisation is driven by capitalism and imperialism (Hardt and Negri 2000). Technology (namely military) allowed Western Europe to dominate nearly the whole world since, although other parts of the world were already more developed in many domains. Before I try to answer the question, if today's social sciences are Western or universal, I will ask some more questions:

What is science?

Science is the systematic search for new knowledge according to criteria, which allow to control and eventually repeat the experiments. Traditionally its target is 'truth'¹. Generally accepted criteria are: *validity, reliability, objectivity and comprehensiveness*. However, this understanding is with researching on the Nano-level and the universe more and more questioned, even in natural sciences. E.g. the question: What was before the Big Bang some 15 billion years ago? The natural laws discovered in the last couple of centuries do not function anymore at the Nano-level. And what about the Fifth dimension? The presence of humans and the way experiments with their machines are handled, are influencing the outcome. Science developed with humankind since its first civilizations some 10,000 years ago. However, Knowledge is not yet science (cf. Fig. 1).

There were from the very beginning 'hard' as well as 'soft' sciences (Bernal 1969, 1971). Science was needed and was useful for production and with it for power. Therefore mathematics and astronomy were the first sciences (Bernal 1969; de Solla Price 2009), quickly joined by astrology. The Indians invented the Zero '0', without which no computer could have been developed. Abstraction and generalization are unique human features. With them virtual realities come into play. An essential tool is writing. With printing, the

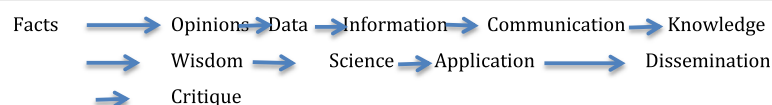


Fig. 1 Process of scientific discoveries

so-called *Gutenberg revolution* (although moving letters/signs already existed earlier in Korea e.g.), a qualitative break-through could be realized for humanity, as knowledge and science could be spread to large parts of society and with it democratization of knowledge and science is possible. Nevertheless even today the majority of humanity is analphabetic,² and has therefore no access to science.

All economic and technological progress is coupled with science. Huge advances were performed with the 'scientific-technological revolutions' over the last 500 years (Shapin 1996). The industrial revolutions since 200 years were major accomplishments, leading to the industrial society, later to knowledge-based, information, network societies (Castells 1996-1998).

The success of natural sciences is largely based on their mathematisation and their impact on technologies. These structures date back to the Greek antiquity, where *episteme* and *techne* were the main scientific approaches and are regarded as *universal*. The accumulation of data led to new theories via *induction*. Their determinism and the causal relationship of scientific research remain their main characteristics. The power of science is its capacity of forecasting. The military was one of the major driving forces of scientific and technological progress since the antiquity. As Heraclitus already wrote some 2500 years ago: "War is the father of all and king of all, who manifested some as gods and some as men, who made some slaves and some freemen." (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2017: DK22B53).

As scientific and technological knowledge is quite often linked to power and wealth, quite early secrecy was implemented, especially when this knowledge questioned existing power relationships, which were based on religious power (Foucault 1980; Fricker 2007). Those questioning this power via scientific research were often forced to negate (Galileo Galilei), imprisoned, exiled or burned (Bruno Giordano). As rightly Rosa Luxemburg already said more than 100 years ago: "Knowledge is power." (Luxemburg 2006).

Since Enlightenment a kind of 'communism of knowledge' (Merton 1965) existed for many decades, or as Karl Marx phrased it in regard to economics as a 'free productive force' (Marx 1989). But secrecy is also relevant in the capitalist mode of production to gain advantage over competitors. Property rights, patents are means to prevent the spreading of knowledge. Scientific Social Darwinism can also be observed as a kind of struggle for survival in the scientific community (Lemaine et al. 1969; Djerassi 1989; von Lutterotti 2003). The driving force in the scientific communities is since several decades the pressure on output, expressed in the slogan "Publish or perish!" (Queisser 2002) The temptations to falsify results increases with the honours, money and power linked to it (Foucart 2011a, 2011b; Gegenworte 1998; Heller 1986; Mirowski and Sent 2002; Broad and Wade 1984; Mirowski and Sent 2002). One third of US scientists confessed that they have falsified results (Witthuhn 2005). Even attempted murder has been testified in Germany (Wormer 1999). Also various fashions and styles can be observed (Galtung 1988). By the way, most studies fail, but mostly are never reported or documented (Koschorke 2004; von Lutterotti 2003). And is it not by wrong methodologies that we produce quite a few research *artefacts*? (Kriz 1980, 1985).

In the 1990s there was a 'science-war' between the 'hard' and 'soft' sciences, which became to be known as the *Sokal scandal*. Alan Sokal, a well-known natural scientist, faked a social science article, which he was able to place in a serious social science review.

His intention was to demonstrate that social sciences are not serious and any non-sense is accepted (Sokal and Bricmont 1999; Sokal 2009; Gross 1997; Renn 1997; Flyvbjerg 2001).³

With the development and success of the natural sciences a kind of ‘scientism’ emerged (Feyerabend 2011; Renan 1995; Wallerstein et al. 1996), and some time later *anti-scientism*, expressed today in post-modernity on the one hand and religious fundamentalism, e.g. creationism, on the other. Science can also be used for obscuring findings, which do not fit vested interests. Examples for the tobacco (Foucart 2011b; Proctor 2011) and petrol industries are given by Proctor and Schiebinger (Proctor and Schiebinger 2008; cf. also Foucart 2011a), and they call this phenomenon rightly *Agnotology*.

What are social sciences?

“Welcome in the universe of sociology! This treatise is written to present one of the most important and fascinating scientific disciplines.”

(Gabler and Trémoulinas 2013).⁴

That is how the book *La sociologie pour les nuls* (The sociology for the stupid) is announced. Well, definitely social sciences are much more demanding than natural sciences as their object is permanently changing, and the scientist is “part of the problem or of its solution” (slogan of the *Black Panthers* movement in the USA in the 1960s). Humanity with the *Homo sapiens* developed some 1,000,000 years ago in Africa. So, all human beings are descendants from them. Today some 6000 languages remain, which came out from two main language structures.⁵ If we look back into history over the past 10,000 years we discover quite diverse roots (Table 1).

There are some basic features of humanity, which are universal and which are reflected in all social sciences: birth, marriage, death, economy, socialization, education, arts, music, fashion, decoration, religion, criminality, power, distinction, gender, and age (cf. Table 2). As always some categories are overlapping. So, e.g. migration may be an individual decision, however, whole societies migrate too. In regard to cooking this is often an individual activity, but the invention of fire, the recipes are cultural phenomena, which are shared by a group. Decoration distinguishes whole cultures, even if it is applied by individuals.

Evidently the macro, meso- and micro levels are not exclusive, but complementary. Apparently in contrast to natural sciences the repeatability of studies, e.g. in a laboratory, is mostly not feasible in social sciences, although psychologists try sometimes to do it. Economists operate occasionally with the *clausula rebus sic stantibus*, i.e. they try to control the circumstances to allow comparisons – in time or between different units (Heller 1984). Figure 2 presents a continuum from diverse hard to soft sciences.

Let me start with some theses to further structure my arguments:

- Social sciences are by principle universal, however, due to their historical and cultural origins are always context-bound and specific in their concretization.
- According to Karl Marx (Marx 1989) the analysis has to climb from the general to the specific and return back to the general in a permanent *oscillation*, as the object and the subject in society is always changing.

Table 1 Roots of social sciences

Year	Period	Discipline
2000	Globalization, Fundamentalism	Media sciences, cognitive sciences, cultural studies, future studies
1900	Imperialism, Really existing Socialism, Fascism, Decolonization	Psychology, Racism, Marxism-Leninism, ethnology, ecology
1800	Industrialization, Abolition of Slavery	Sociology, anthropology
1700	Encyclopedia, Enlightenment, French Revolution, American Independence	Economics, pedagogy, statistics
1600	Nation-building, English Revolution	Political science
1500	Humanism, Colonialism	Natural Sciences
1400	Renaissance	Medicine, Law
1200	First modern universities, capitalism, Bourgeoisie	Theology, business administration
1000	Islam	Social Sciences
500	Christianity	Universalism
0	Roman Empire	Law, libraries
–500	Greek antiquity, Confucianism, Buddhism	Philosophy, Mathematics
– 1000	Judaism	Universalism
– 3000	Ancient Egypt, China	Bureaucracy
– 5000	Indus culture	Mathematics, Astronomy, Astrology, Medicine
– 8000	Mesopotamia	Writing, History, Geography, Law

- Therefore there are no laws of society – against the dream of the fathers of modern social sciences in the nineteenth century (Comte 1969).

The social sciences cover a large variety of disciplines, which are represented in the following figure (Fig. 3):

But they are not all equal. There is a hierarchy within them (Fig. 4).

And looking back into history we find different degrees of internationalization (Fig. 5):

However, there are three axioms, which are basic for any social analysis: Without *history*, without *economy*, and without *dialectics* we do not understand and cannot explain anything. The target of all social science should be the sustainable improvement of the quality of life for all human beings, in Greek *Phrónêsis*, i.e. the ‘Good society’ (Aristotle 1984; Eikeland 2008; Nussbaum 1992). Philosophy is the mother of all social sciences and humanities. In the Renaissance, when the ancient Greek culture was reintroduced – via the Arabs – to Europe *Phrónêsis* was forgotten. Only *episteme* and *techne* were transmitted. This neglect is leading to the under- respectively wrong development in social sciences (Frank 1971). The rediscovery of this tradition is fundamental for really *universal*, *non-hegemonic* social sciences (Flyvbjerg 2001).

Table 2 Fundamentals of human societies

Level	Form
Micro	Birth, Death, Sex, Marriage, Children, Emotions, Illness, Accidents, Migration
Meso	Gender, Family, Kinship, Clan/Tribe, Distinction, Housing, Cooking
Macro	Fire, Community, Socialization, Education, Language, Knowledge, Power, Religion, Mythology, Rituals, Tradition, Clothing, Economy, Rules/Law, Education, Medicine, Technology, Weapons, Decoration, Arts, Music.

<i>Hard</i>		<i>Soft</i>	
<i>Natural sciences</i>		<i>Social Sciences</i>	
	Cognitive sciences		Cultural studies
Physics		Philosophy	Future Studies
Chemistry	Biology	Medicine	Pedagogy
Geology		Geography	Political Science
		Economics	Sociology
Mathematics		Statistics	Theology

Fig. 2 Sciences

In the West, i.e. Western Europe, given unique historic and cultural circumstances, modern social sciences emerged and became dominant over the last 500 years (Delanty 2005). This emergence builds on the contributions from other cultures and civilizations over thousands of years. However, if we speak of ‘Western’ social sciences, we have to admit that there are substantial differences between European and US-American societies and their social sciences (Herpin 1973; Martinelli 2008). And within all social sciences, including the Western ones, the main differences are those between *Enlightening* and *Obscuring* social sciences.

The main change in regard to the subject and object of social sciences is the (re-) discovery of the individual (Kupiek 2008; Libera 2014; Martucelli and de Singly 2012). This was partly linked to Christianity, where the individual had a prominent role in his relationship to God, notably in Protestantism. In Western social sciences this focus on the individual had a pertaining influence, developing individualism at its centre (Bajoit 2013; Le Bart 2008, 2013). Nevertheless all great religions, i.e. Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism, had the individual at their centres, but did not develop an appropriate social theory. For sure every individual is unique (genes, fingerprints, eyes etc.), but what repercussions has this on social theory (Weinberg 2014)? Do we remain on the descriptive level? Then no social theory – Western or universal – is possible (Széll 2005b).

Multicultural societies are not a result of modern globalization; on the contrary they were even the rule before, not only in the Roman, Chinese, Ottoman, Russian, British and Habsburg Empires, but in the USA from its very beginning, and certainly in the Soviet Union too. However, it is true that modern social sciences and humanities developed first mainly within the nation-state (Delanty and O’Mahony 2002; Henry 2005). Although this is not completely true. As well Karl Marx’ and Max Weber’s contribution covered much more than the national level, just to take the two as the most prominent examples. Western Europe dominated social sciences until the Second World War. The roots were French and Germany philosophy as well as British political economy. Talcott Parsons, who was a great name in the 1950s and 1960s, did nothing else than to combine – in his own words – Durkheim (1964). And although Immanuel Wallerstein from the USA has reached some notoriety, especially due to his presidency of the International Sociological Association/ISA from 1994 to 1998, his contribution is more or less a spin-off of Fernand Braudel’s approach, as he is rightly giving his own research centre the name of the latter. Nevertheless in the last couple of decades substantial differences have emerged between Europe and the USA, especially if we include some quite original French, Italian and Spanish evolutions (e.g. Castells, Foucault, Bourdieu et al.). On this background Yoshimichi Sato asks: Are Asian sociologies possible? (Sato 2010) Today we find a large scope of social science theories (Table 3).

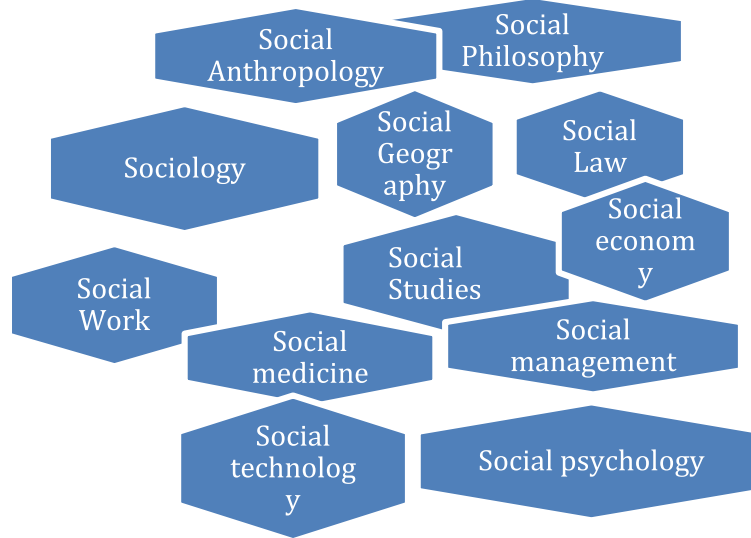


Fig. 3 The social sciences in all its variations

In Table 4 I differentiate between closed and open theories. Open theories are in my eyes those, which are not dogmatic, flexible and self-reflective (Bourdieu 2001). Each theoretical approach has its own methodology, although in praxis there is no clear-cut direct relationship (Bourdieu 1990). And most social scientists apply a mix of methodologies and methods (Morin 1977-2013, 1992, 2008⁶; Széll 1985). The following table gives an overview of the main social methodologies. They are universal (Table 5).

Grand social theories

The Norwegian sociologist Bjørn Gustavsen named those theories, which have a universal character, 'Grand theories' (Gustavsen 1983). In these theories there is no West-East or North-South dichotomy (Snow 2012). Grand theories (e.g. Marx, Weber, Popper, Parsons, Luhmann are all Westerners) are concerned with the universal elements of humankind and have by this a quasi-anthropological dimension. Religion is – as mentioned above – a universal phenomenon, but has again local, regional, national etc. variations. This explains

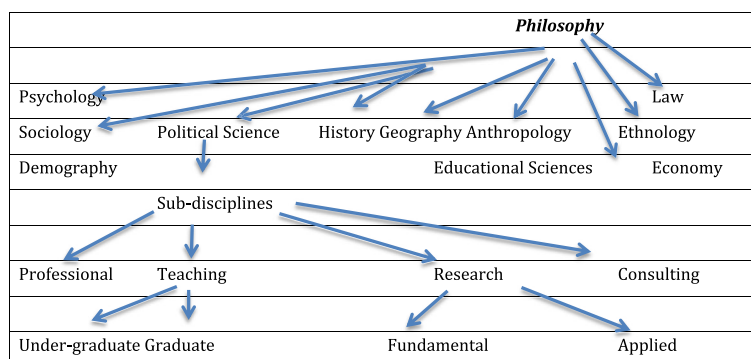
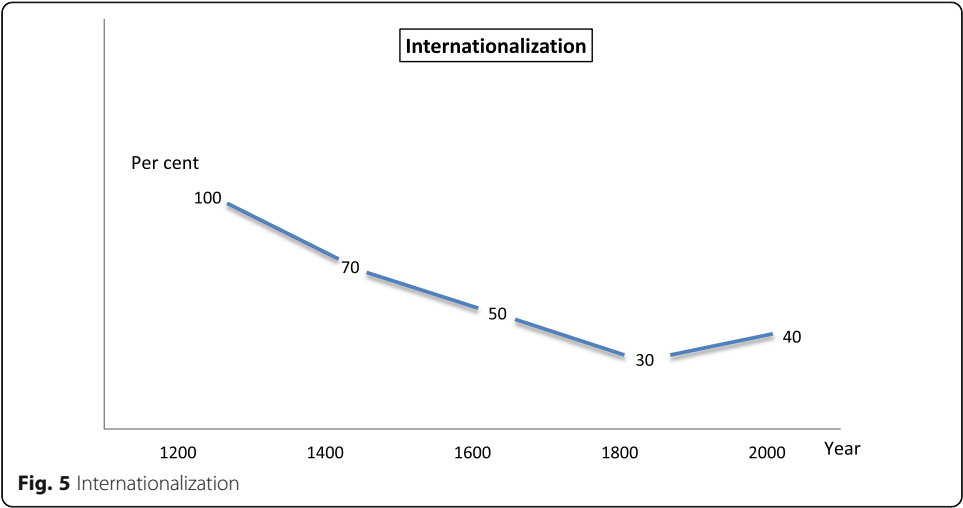


Fig. 4 Hierarchy of disciplines



the large number of sects, and divisions, which often lead since thousands of years to violence (Sen 2007), although producing without any doubt great art and music at the same time. There exist Buddhist, Christian, Hindu and Islamic social theories. A fundamental question to be asked remains: Which are driving forces in this world: idealism or materialism? Or both in a dialectical relationship?!

Middle range or meso social theories

Middle range or meso theories are concerned with historic and cultural specificities. To explain social phenomena, we have to climb from the general (grand theories) to the specific, i.e. middle-range and micro theories. Social life is always culture-specific, i.e. the knowledge of the context is essential. Language structure incorporates a worldview via its grammar or notions. We have quite a number of social theories – as the tables above show – and most are certainly Western by origin. Even globalisation produces its cultural specific variations (Heintz 1982; cf. for China e.g. He 2010; or for

Table 3 Types of social science theories

Level	
Meta-theories	Transcendentalism
Anti-theories	Post-modernism, Anti-sociology
Grand theories (universal)	Structuralism
	Action theory
	Critique of Political Economy
Middle-range/meso theories (culture-bound)	Differentiation theory (Luhmann)
	Communication theory
	Life-world (Lefebvre, Habermas)
	Tianxiaism (Huang)
	Group (Homans)
Micro-theories	Group (Homans)
	Rational Choice
	Role theory

Table 4 Main social science theories

Closed theories

1. Positivism (Comte)
2. Empirism (Durkheim)
3. Circulation of elites (Pareto)
4. Hermeneutics (Weber)
5. Functional-structural (Parsons)
6. Systems theory (Luhmann)
7. Reflexive modernisation (Beck)

Open theories

1. Critique of political economy (Marx)
2. Critical Rationalism (Popper)
3. Life-world (Lefebvre, Habermas)
4. Social/symbolic capital (Bourdieu)

Japan Yazawa 2013). Let us take one concrete example: Modern concentration camps exist since about a century, actually they started in South Africa at the beginning of the twentieth century. They have spread unfortunately all around the world, but have different reasons, forms and structure. They cannot be explained by any grand theory. Anthony Giddens – as many authors before and certainly also after him – relates action and structure in society, i.e. middle-range and micro levels. In the centre of middle-range theories is the civil society, including social movements (Széll 2013).

Micro social theories

Each individual, community has its own practical social theory, which is not scientific, it is a *Weltanschauung*, often based on religion. It helps to differentiate between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, and by this may give orientations. Micro social theories should be able to explain the differences in behaviour in time and space.

Each subject has a name, which relates to other subjects in society and refers to individual responsibilities (Arino 2007). Apparently there exist many dialectics between individual and society. On the micro level we can also allocate groups, families and other forms of social life. Since the very beginning of modern social sciences deviant behaviour (Merton 1961) stood at the centre of many studies. Very famous on this issue is Émile Durkheim’s one on suicide from 1897 (Durkheim 1951). Psychoanalysis – although sometimes contested – is probably the most popular micro social theory (Freud 1979). Definitely, concepts like ‘homo oeconomicus’ (Kirchgässner 1991) or ‘homo sociologicus’ (Dahrendorf 2006) are very

Table 5 Main social science methodologies

Hermeneutics

Deductive/inductive

Dialectics

Intentionist

Phrônesis

Action research

Activist research

Western, as they suppose rational behaviour. In the same line lies the theory of Rational Choice (Schneider 2002). Eric Robertson Dodds, however, rightly points to the irrational dimension of European antique philosophy (Dodds 1962).

Who is dominating?

All social relations at the end are power relations. In relation to that phenomenon some fundamental questions have to be asked: For what is research good? Who needs social sciences for what purposes? Science today is in general organized and practised in more or less large institutions, organisations and associations (Clark 1972). The *Privatgelehrte* (single researcher) of the 19th and early twentieth century is dying out. Who speaks of science institutions, has to speak also about hierarchy, i.e. power relations. There is a double hegemony: inner and outer. Social sciences are mainly part of the dominating relations of production.

Which social sciences dominate? Within the sciences themselves, and in the public? Certainly economics, and psychology are dominant, whereas e.g. ethnology remains marginal. Adam Smith's theory of the market's 'Invisible hand' (1776; originally 1776) is certainly still today as powerful as Malthus' population studies (Malthus 1798). Ideologies like Humanism, liberalism, neo-liberalism, conservatism, fascism, socialism, communism, anarchism etc. are all influenced by diverse social theories. Karl Polányi in his famous book *The Great Transformation* (Polányi 1957) argues that economics had more influence on modern societies, i.e. capitalism, than the productive forces, because they delivered the main ideology of our times. This is in line with Karl Marx' analysis. The French author Viviane Forrester calls this hegemony *The economic horror* (Forrester 1999). Max Weber's protestant ethics, as another explanation for the rise of capitalism, had and has quite an impact as well.

Economists do not only enter banks, governments, and consulting companies, but via scientific councils, and assessment via commissions they control largely the public debate. Economic growth and the argument for jobs to pacify unions has become the dominant mantra in public life. In our realm it is all about 'cultural hegemony' (Gramsci 1971).

Sociology had a great time in the 1960s/1970s (Kilminster 1998) – since then neoliberalism and egotism (de Tocqueville 1965) became again much more influential (Gurvitch 1945; Mendras and Étienne 1996; Smelser 1994). Since then quite a number of sociology departments have been closed down, although there is some renaissance in the Third World (Oommen 1991; Kendall 2009). A critical self-assessment is a precondition for the liberation of social sciences from vested interests and their critical role in society. With this we arrive at another fundamental question:

What is the impact of social sciences?

How to measure the impact of social sciences on society? (Bastow et al. 2014; Weingart and Schwechheimer 2010) To answer the question, we have to differentiate between the type of knowledge and the different audiences. Building on Burawoy et al. (2000), former president of the *International Sociological Association*, we arrive at the following division of labour within social sciences, which varies according to different cultures and nations (Tables 6 and 7).

Table 6 Division of labour in social sciences

Knowledge		Audience		
Academic		Extra-acad./open	Private	Government
Instrumental	Professional	Policy/Consulting	Business	Military, spying
Reflexive	Critical	Public	NGO	

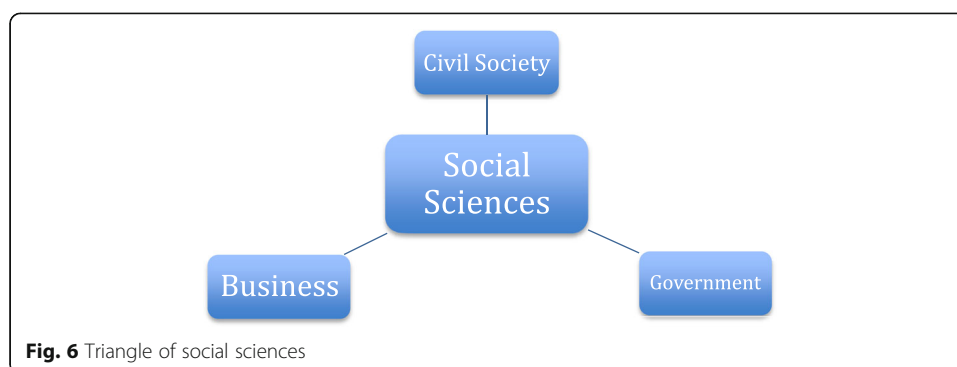
Actually in practice – as nearly always – many theories have a double-use perspective, and their authors are implied in both worlds. Is this universal? I guess so. But what about the more essential question, i.e. the impact on society, politics, policies? (Heilbron et al. 2013; Meyer 1997) (Figs. 6 and 7).

The biggest public impacts come from Marxism, psychoanalysis, neo-liberalism, and existentialism. We can therefore rightly speak of an ‘economisation’ (Heredia 2014) and the psychologisation of the world. Let us take Lorenz von Stein – who may not be well known outside Germany – but is in my eyes an excellent example of public impact of social sciences. He invented the ‘state sciences’ (*Staatswissenschaften*) (Quesel 1989; Roth 1963; von Stein 1970). They are in the tradition of building up the nation-state top-down, namely for latecomers. The principles proclaimed there, were the ‘carrot and stick’ strategy of the (authoritarian) Prussian state against the rising proletariat.⁷ This strategy was followed nearly one by one by Prussia in the late nineteenth century, and certainly was – on the one hand – one of the reasons of the strengthening of Prussia, catching up with Britain as the leading nation and Empire. But on the other hand also the reason for its decline and disaster of the First World War. It may be not a surprise that Lorenz von Stein was most successful, besides Prussia, in Japan.

Political sciences in its modern form (main stream) developed mostly in the USA. It has become a real business, where scientists easily move between academia, companies and government. However, social scientists as *politicians* failed mostly: e.g. Max Weber, Ralf Dahrendorf, and Fernando H. Cardoso. Apparently it is not so easy to implement one’s own ideas into practice. Probably the most popular political scientist remains Niccolò Machiavelli, who wrote in the early sixteenth century works, which are steadily republished and his name is even associated with a kind of politics (Machiavelli 2013).

Table 7 Types of scientist

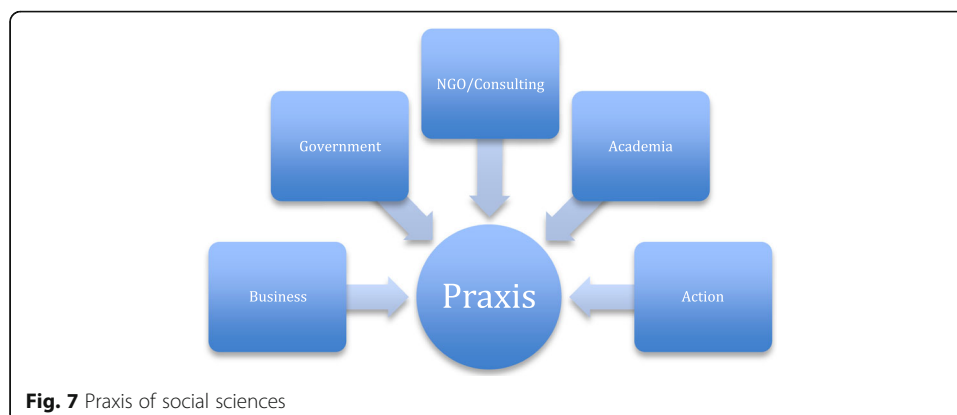
1. “Explorer
2. Investigator
3. Developer/Translational
4. Service provider/operational
5. Monitor/regulator
6. Entrepreneur
7. Communicator
8. Teacher
9. Business/Marketing
10. Policy maker” (Garnham 2013)
We may even add some more:
1. Manager
2. Archivist
3. Collaborator
4. Ermite
5. Exegetist
6. Empiricist
7. Theoretician
8. Translator
9. Colporteur (my own list).



Other affirmative theories, i.e. those which confirm or support existing power relations, are in general all *applied* social sciences, e.g. development theories, legal sciences, demography, psychology, family sociology etc. But as in life, where there is a position, there is always also a counter-position. In the case of development theories this was expressed by the dependence theory, which had quite an impact on social movements, notably in Latin America (Frank 1969, 1971, 1978). The workers' movements and trade unions are largely influenced by Karl Marx' class and alienation theories (Lukács 1971). As a counterstrategy, very quickly the 'end of class society' was proclaimed (Schelsky 1965; Braun 1989).

Bureaucratisation was defined by Max Weber (1978) and many others as a mega-trend.⁸ Michael Young invented the term 'meritocracy' (Young 1958), to describe the new phenomenon of social hierarchy according to merits instead of heritage etc. He had a broad public success. Maslow's 'pyramid of needs' is another example of a widespread theorem (Maslow 1954). Whereas the famous *Frankfurt School* with prestigious names like Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Walter Benjamin had definitely much less impact for the general public than within the scientific community. However, with one exception, i.e. the study on the *Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950). The situation is similar for Karl Raimund Popper's *Critical Rationalism*, who is for sure one of the most prominent social philosophers, namely with his *The open society and its enemies* (Popper 1949). He had some public impact on politicians like the late German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.

History is definitely one of the most influential sciences, not only because it is one of the main subjects in schools. The impact goes back thousands of years. How scientific is history, or is it largely biased (Orwell 1996)? A new sub-discipline as 'applied history'



is emerging. The debate about the responsibility for war, e.g. the First World War, is highly emotional and basis for nationalism. Authors like the German Oswald Spengler in his *The Decline of the West*, written after the First World War (Spengler 2006, first 1919), or the US-American Samuel P. Huntington with his *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (Huntington 1996), and Francis Fukuyama with his *The End of History and the Last Man* (Fukuyama 1992), both after the break-down of the Soviet Union, sold millions of copies.

The public sphere (Habermas 1989; Jeffries 2011) is a central element to constitute society and democracy. So, the impact of social sciences via the media, as the fourth pillar of a democratic society is essential. In a world, which becomes more and more virtual, it seems that we live in a global village (McLuhan and Powers 1992). The newest global tendency is characterized by the US-American George Ritzer as *The McDonaldization of Society* (Ritzer 1995, 1997). The German author Ulrich Beck became quite prominent with his book *The Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (Beck 1992), arguing that a second, reflexive modernization is in the making (Beck and Lau 2004; Beck and Bonß 2001). However, the risk is that this argument is historically not enough reflected and too sociologistic, neglecting the economic dimension (Széll 2001). Actually the theory of 'Self-fulfilling prophecies' might be one of the most influential in daily life (Merton 1968). Coping with the issue of universality I would like to mention two more, rather neglected approaches: Franco Ferrarotti proposes the notion of 'Polycentric Society' (Ferrarotti 1992) and Wolfgang Iser 'Omnilateralism' (Iser 2009). However, religion, astrology, mythology, literature, arts and oracles had and have so far more impact on history and society than all social sciences together (Cipriani 2000; Colonos 2013; Esquerre 2013).

But, how to measure the impact of given authors? Within the scientific communities e.g. citation indices, bibliometrics etc. are practiced (Forschungskommission Niedersachsen 1994; Kaube 2008). Let us take the examples of the following rankings: In a list of the 102 most cited works in sociology (2008–2012; Caren 2012), Bourdieu comes first, and none from outside the West. (Pereira 2017)⁹ However, there is not just one type of scientist, but at least 10 different ones (Table 8).

So, their impact depends very much on the role social scientists are taking. To end this part on an easier note (Lourau 1977), we should address ourselves to some of the most popular social theories. They had quite often a much bigger impact on the public than most 'serious' theories. Let us take e.g.:

- The 'Peter principle', i.e. that somebody climbs up the hierarchy, until s/he reaches her/his level of incompetence (Peter and Hull 1969),
- 'Murphy's laws', i.e. everything goes wrong, which can go wrong (Wikipedia 2014c), and
- 'Parkinson's law', i.e. the permanent growth of bureaucracy (Parkinson 1957).

Challenges

What were and which are the challenges for humanity? (Markl et al. 1995) Progress? Which progress has been realized? Are humans living better now than 200 years ago? Since 1948 exists the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. How far has it promoted social justice, social, political, cultural, and economic rights? (Széll and Cella 2002) For sure the abolishment of slavery is one of the most substantial progresses – although

Table 8 Social science theories

Enlightening (Open, optimistic)	Obscuring (closed, pessimistic)
Self-reflexive	non-reflexive
Wide	narrow
Coherent	speculative
Critical	dogmatic
Process-oriented	pragmatist
Interdisciplinary	sub-/disciplinary
Non-hegemonic	hegemonic
Non-hierarchic	hierarchic/authoritarian
Non-personal	personal
Non-formalistic	formalistic
Multi-methodological	single methodological
	particularistic
	Ivory-tower
	self-immunizing
	traditional
	opportunistic

there are still some 30 million still today, and modern forms of slavery, bondage, selling of humans, mainly girls have developed. We are far away from global peace, which is proclaimed by all religions and humanism (Galtung 1996), although the study by Steven Pinker *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (Pinker 2011) seems to prove that there is progress in this regard. And fortunately arms-spending after several decades of permanent increase has been slightly reduced since 2013, however, starting again to increase in 2016.

Although colonialism has been largely overcome, neo-colonialisms still continues (Fanon 1968; Prakash 1999). Hunger, misery, poverty, lack of proper drinking water are for billions of people daily challenges (Datta 2013), although life expectancy in average has increased, creating new problems for the social security systems. And inequality and discrimination have grown again. Two hundred companies rule nearly the whole world economy (Clairmont 1997; Soros 1998). And the diverse Mafias control an increasing part of it – about 20%. Do they share capitalist, i.e. universal values?

Definitely, social and environmental sustainability is the biggest challenge of all (Brundtland et al. 1987; Bourdieu 1999). Since 1988 the *International Panel on Climate Change* raises awareness on the issue, after many global conferences the break-through has finally been realized in Paris in 2015. However, in 2017 the U.S.A. stepped out of the agreement. Also the famous Stern report had nearly no effect (Stern 2007, 2009). Also the *International Social Science Council*, a real global, interdisciplinary institution, addresses the problem (ISSC 2013; Hackmann et al. 2011; Hackmann and St. Clair 2012; Crowley 2012; Platt 2002).

Probably the irrational in the rational and the rational within the irrational as universal phenomena are amongst the biggest challenges for humanity and especially Enlightenment.¹⁰ It manifests itself within all social units, i.e. politics, democracy, organisations, and even within science, but not at least in gambling and drugs. One explanation of the

persistence of irrationality may be, what Leon Festinger has named ‘cognitive dissonance’ (Festinger 1957), i.e. that we only accept those informations, which fit our own *Weltanschauung* and interests. This pertinent social theorem is certainly the reason, why Festinger ranks as fourth most cited author (N.N. 2002). The social world is full of contradictions and paradoxes (Handy 1994; Dahrendorf et al. 2000),¹¹ which are amongst the most serious challenges for social theory. One of the most prominent is in regard to Enlightenment, that humanists thought they could/should be able to overcome superstition, of which all religions are the most elaborate forms (Osborne 1998). But not at all, religion is resurging strongly in the twenty-first century all over the world, often in very violent and fundamentalist forms. Actually, concerning any religion, if an individual is formulating these ideas, s/he will be regarded as crazy. And even most scientists and also social scientists are religious (Gottlieb 2004). This can only be characterized as schizophrenic. The same holds true for racism and nationalism,¹² which are largely based on obscuring social sciences.

Conclusion

Social sciences have failed to predict the environmental crisis, the breakdown of the Soviet Empire (except perhaps Wallerstein et al. 2013), the diverse economic and financial crises, terrorism and the crisis of democracy. Is there any progress over the last couple of decades? (Aron 1976; Bell 1981; Deutsch 1982; Danell et al. 2013; Genov 2004) So, it is quite doubtful what relevance social sciences had in the past and have today, or will have in the future. We are speaking permanently of the crisis of society and with it of social sciences (Széll 2002). So, how to treat the declaration by Michel Foucault of the end of theories, and Richard Sennett’s ‘End of sociology’ (Foucault 1994)? Or the end of Enlightenment at all? (Széll 2001, 2008a, 2009; Claußen 2003). There are different scenarios possible:

- Disappearance of social sciences
- Social sciences are completely subdued to capital
- Fundamentalist social sciences: Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Marxist, neo-liberal ... dominate
- Esoteric social sciences
- Niche social sciences
- Social repair institutions
- Localist social sciences or/and a
- Second Enlightenment.

The very reason of modern, universal social sciences is the realization of the project of Enlightenment. However, as can be seen during the French Revolution of ee, if Reason becomes absolute, it can be transformed into terror afterwards – as any other idea (Elkana 1986). Nevertheless the project of Enlightenment continued during the two centuries afterwards. The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies was drawn between rationalism and Enlightenment (Bickel 1991). Ralf Dahrendorf saw in the USA the practice of Enlightenment (Dahrendorf 1965), however, this has much to be questioned today in regard to fundamentalist and religious hegemonies, and the lection of Donald Trump as president. Niklas Luhmann put much of his effort in implementing sociological Enlightenment

(1974–1995; Bolz 2012). Ulrich Beck speaks of *Ecological Enlightenment* (Beck 1995). Some authors build on evolution as the basic structure (Gilgenmann et al. 2013; Stichweh 2007). The German Günter Ortmann sees *contingency*, *recursivity* and *path-dependency* at work over millions of years (Ortmann 1995). That brings us to the issue of biologism (Lemerle 2013; Weingart 2000), which may lead to a kind of Social Darwinism. Neurosciences question more and more the freedom of action, because they argue that every human action is determined by our biological condition (Roth 1996; Singer 2004; Brédart and van der Linden 2012). But is uncertainty not freedom? (Berthelot 1995) There is another attack on social sciences from the opposite side as well: Postmodernity (Foucault, Baudrillard, Lyotard) and de-constructivism (Wittgenstein, Feyerabend). Perhaps as no surprise an US-American, Philip Wexler, launches *The Mystical Society* (Wexler 2000, 2003; Liesner and Rohde 2002). Another issue in this context is the *scientific non-knowledge* (Wehling 2006). One other attack came from one of the most prominent German sociologists of the twentieth century, Helmut Schelsky, who declared himself an anti-sociologist (Schelsky 1981; Gallus 2013). So we have the choice between two kinds of social theories:

At the end, to answer my initial question, there are Western *and* Universal Social Sciences. Which one is hegemonic? Finally, I am not against hegemony, but in the sense of, i.e. cultural hegemony for a peaceful, not-exploiting, humanist world. Actually that is in my eyes for which enlightening versus obscuring (main-stream) social sciences are striving for.¹³ And this is not an issue of West vs. East, North vs. South, global vs. local, but for the 'liberation of man' (cf. e.g. Vanek 1975). Western social sciences have deep structures (Gurvitch 1945) like all social entities, and build on the progress made over thousands of years and many civilizations (Elias 1978–1982; Merton 1965, 1993). It is fortunately not the end of history – against what Francis Fukuyama proclaimed in Fukuyama 1992, because we do not live in the best possible world. In Max Weber's trilogy of dominance, i.e. traditional, charismatic and bureaucratic, there is no place for democracy. The same holds true for Niklas Luhmann's system theory. Neil Postman sees the entertainment – like in ancient Rome with its *panem et circenses* – as *the* challenge for Enlightenment (Postman 1985). Is this the end of democracy as well? (Crouch 2004) But democracy and freedom are preconditions for science, especially social sciences (Sen 1997; Széll 2008b) (Table 9).

Is this the end of democracy as well? (Crouch 2004) But democracy and Freedom are preconditions for democratic, public science, especially democratic social sciences (Sen 1997; Széll 2008b). For a 'good society' we have to overcome the dominant capitalist mode of production and with its four forms of alienation. However, China is just copying it. On the other hand China could contribute to a real universal tool for international communication: If the world would adopt the several thousand year old Chinese system of writing, at least we could all understand the writings in any language. That would be a huge step forward for universal knowledge and by it of non-hegemonic social sciences.

Is Wikipedia not a universal approach for sciences? Actually, the diverse versions are not only in 29 different languages, but express on the same topic quite different approaches. At the same time we have to overcome the 'disciplinization' as it has developed over the last century with Western hegemony. Reality is not divided into disciplines. Yazawa Shujiro and myself have already pleaded for 'The Re-Integration of Social Sciences' (Széll and Yazawa 1993; cf. also Smith 1998).

Table 9 Parochial vs. universal social sciences

Parochial	Universal
Political Science	Business Administration; Future Studies
Law	Military Studies; Economics; Pedagogy; Sociology
Ethnology	Culture Studies; Psychology; Anthropology; Religious Studies
History	Gender Studies; Media Sciences; Demography

The challenges are great to make the world better, to create a ‘Good society’ (Phrónêsis). This is in my eyes the main task of universal social sciences. We need for this purpose a *Second Enlightenment* (Postman 1985; Strydom 2000)? Or a Post-Enlightenment? (Gubrium and Silverman 1989) Definitely a lot of *Sociological Imagination* (Mills 1959) and social innovation are necessary (Harrisson et al. 2009; Franz et al. 2012). The French Edgar Morin is sketching a way (Morin 2008). He differentiates between *Homo sapiens* and *homo demens*, by this referring to the contradictory and at the same time complementary nature of humanity. His main contribution is, however, his insistence on complexity of all life – in contrast to Niklas Luhmann, who argues that the role of social sciences is to reduce complexity. Finally, we may ask with Max Weber: Is science a vocation? (Weber 2004; Lassman et al. 2014) The universal answer for a Second Enlightenment may be: “Everybody is a scientist!” (Széll 1992, 2012)¹⁴ This in the line with the famous German artist Joseph Beuys’ slogan “Everybody is an artist!” (Beuys and Bodenmann-Ritter 1972).

Endnotes

¹Interestingly also all religions are searching for or proclaiming ‘truth’.

²Even in the G8-countries, the richest and most developed countries, some 10% of the population is still analphabetic.

³Fortunately natural scientists can make also joke on themselves since many years, cf. *Annals of Improbable Research*.

⁴Translation from French by G.S.; cf. too Neumann 1995.

⁵Through globalization every year dozens of languages disappear.

⁶Unfortunately this most eminent contribution to universal social sciences, embedding them into the whole process of nature and life since its beginning has been translated so far only into Spanish and Italian; the first volume into English and German.

⁷According to Hegel the Prussian State was the emanation of the *Weltgeist* (world spirit).

⁸Chinese bureaucracy already developed more than 4000 years ago (Aschmoneit 1980).

⁹Similar rankings can be found for economists, as well for countries and states within the U.S.A., and for names (Ideas/Repec 2017), for psychologists (N. N 2002), for philosophers (Leiter Report 2015), and for all others (Thomson Reuters 2014).

¹⁰Buddhism uses the notion of Enlightenment as well, however, in a completely unscientific, mystical way.

¹¹Charles Handy, who has sold more than one million copies of his books, argues in his *The Age of Unreason* to be ‘unreasonable’ to be innovative. This argument goes, however, more into the direction of undogmatic, non-traditional thinking.

¹²As a side-remark it sounds strange to speak of ‘American,’ ‘German or ‘French’ sociology. These simply do not exist. We should only speak of ‘sociology in the U.S.A., in Germany or in France.

¹³As we can see in the case of David Horowitz, authors are changing over time between Enlightening and Obscuring positions (Horowitz 1967, 2009).

¹⁴In the same vein Antonio Gramsci’s “All men are intellectuals, but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals.” (Gramsci 1971) may be understood.

Availability of data and materials

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

Authors’ contributions

The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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