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History of the Human Sciences in France: From Science de l'homme to Sciences Humaines et sociales

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Abstract

Focused on the phrases used to name these sciences, this chapter gives an historical sketch of the development of modern human and social sciences in France. It highlights the importance of discipline formation and growing specialization, as well the recurrence of unifying projects counterbalancing this trend. Its central argument is that a moment of crystallization took place between 1770 and 1810, when the phrase “*science de l'homme*” took a new meaning. This founding moment for the human sciences coincided with the genesis of the political fundamentals of modern France. The convergence of these large-scale processes conferred on the project of building a body of scientific knowledge about man intellectual and political dimensions that have proved non-dissociable. It bestowed specific characteristics on the “*science de l'homme*” or “*sciences humaines et sociales*”, which marked its fate in France and have persisted to the present day.

Key words

“*science de l'homme*”, discipline formation, specialization, unity of the human and social sciences, science/politics relation.

Introduction

This chapter gives an historical sketch of the founding and development of modern human and social sciences in France. It is organized in chronological sections and focuses, from the 18th Century onwards, on the phrases which were chosen in order to designate these sciences, as a whole or in part. This history is determined by major trends, such as the demise of the medieval and early modern distinction between sacred and profane, and the rise of new dividing lines between nature and culture, “moral” (mind) and “physical” (body). This history is also strongly impacted by the formation of the modern disciplines and the specialization process going with it. These major evolutions created ongoing tensions, which still shape the

field of the human and social sciences in the present days. One aim of this chapter is therefore to demonstrate that history is relevant to understand the present state of these sciences.

History is also relevant to point out and try to explain the differences of the human and social sciences in the Francophone and the Anglophone worlds. Many French phrases used to name and classify these sciences do not translate easily into English. A central argument in this chapter is that this difference is due to the special relation the human and social sciences have with politics, and to the specificity of French political history in which they developed. Indeed, modern human and social sciences emerged in France shortly before, during and after the 1789 Revolution. So that there is a strong convergence between the intellectual process of shaping a new field of knowledge, and the political process of forging a new nation-state.

The historical roots

Although it is usual to locate the intellectual origins of modern humanities and social sciences in the 18th century (Moravia 1970; Gusdorf 1973; Fox, Porter, Wokler 1995; see Christie 1993), the phrases “human sciences” and, less frequently, “science(s) of man” have a longer history. In France and in the French-speaking world as early as the 16th century, many humanists used the terms (Bruter 2006). Guillaume Budé mentioned the “*scientias humanas*” in *De studio literarum recte et commode instituendo* [*On the Proper Institution of the Study of Letters*], 1532), as did Jean Calvin in his *Ordonnances ecclésiastiques* [*Ecclesiastical Ordinances*] of 1541. The expression “science of man” was used by Polycarpe de la Rivière in his treatise on moral theology, *Angélique. Des excellences et perfections immortelles de l'âme* ([*Angelic : On the excellences and immortal perfections of the soul*], 1626), whose first discourse was entitled “Que l'homme est la vraie science de l'homme” (« That man is the true science of man »).

Yet, within the humanist culture, the opposition was not between the human and the natural sciences. It pointed to a partition of the sacred and the profane, and to the dichotomy between the human sciences (or the sciences of man) and the divine sciences (or the sciences of God). Man then was not the object of the human sciences, but the knowing subject, whose flawed reason and uncertain knowledge contrasted with the perfect wisdom of God and the certainties derived from faith. This primary significance of the phrase lasted at least until the 18th century, when it gradually faded away (Vidal 1999). While the Catholic abbot Nicolas-Sylvestre Bergier still used the phrase in its old meaning in the article “*sciences humaines*” of

the *Encyclopédie méthodique* dictionary of *Théologie* (1788-1790; Masseau 2006), a new signification had already emerged in Nicolas Malebranche's work in the early years of the century. A frequently reproduced quotation indeed superimposed the two meanings. The Catholic philosopher wrote, "of all the human sciences, the science of man is the most worthy of man", thus defining the science of man as a science in which man was both the object to be known and the knowing subject. For this reason, Malebranche has been credited, along with Descartes, with having contributed to the secularization of the science of the human mind in the French tradition (Vidal 2006). Malebranche, endorsing the hierarchy of forms of knowledge inherited from Renaissance Humanism, nevertheless distinguished between human self-knowledge and true "revealed" knowledge. He specified that "science of man", was "only an experimental science, which result[ed] from the reflection that one makes on what happens in oneself", whereas "the knowledge of God [was] not experimental" (*La Recherche de la vérité* [*The Search for Truth*], "Foreword", 1712; Carbone 2007).

In this long-term process of secularization and redefinition of the limits of human rational knowledge, which is not specific to the French-speaking world, the Enlightenment was a key period. Historians have emphasize the diversification in topics of inquiry as well as the expansion of the fields of investigation (for instance: Auroux 1991, 2003; Besse, Blais, Surun 2010; Blais, Laboulais 2006; Duchet 1995; Kaufmann, Guilhaumou 2003). In the works of well-known philosophers and natural scientists (such as Denis Diderot, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, Maupertuis, Condillac, and Buffon, etc.) and of more specialized scholars such as the antiquarians Bernard de Montfaucon and Antoine Court de Gébelin (Mercier-Faivre, 1999), human language, society, customs, religions and their diversity in time and space became the focus of secular analysis. Part of this new knowledge was synthetized in Diderot's and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* [*Encyclopedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Crafts*] (1751-1772) (Groult 2003, part III). Historians have also depicted the Enlightenment as a change in epistemological perspective, highlighting the deleting of the partition between the human and the divine sciences and the promotion of a new boundary between the human and the natural sciences. This new boundary was drawn on the base of the differing nature of the objects of the two kinds of sciences, although the former could partly borrow their methods from the latter, as suggested by the expression "natural history of man" adopted by the naturalist Buffon (Blanckaert 2006). Indeed, regarding the proper method of the human sciences, two options emerged in this period. Following Buffon and the naturalists-

philosophers, the first option emphasized observation and linked the study of man to the natural sciences and to medicine. The second option tied the science of man to philosophy by focusing on the specificity of self-knowledge. It emphasized the self-observation of the internal operations of body and mind. This supported the advocacy of philosophical introspection as a method, appearing, for example, in the work of Pierre-Jacques Brissot, leader of the *Girondin* faction during the French Revolution (*De la vérité, ou méditations sur les moyens de parvenir à la vérité dans toutes les connaissances humaines* [On truth, or meditations on the means of arriving at the truth in all the forms of human understanding], 1782; Coursin 2018).

In France, a moment of crystallization took place between 1770 and 1810. This founding moment for the human sciences coincided with the genesis of the political fundamentals of modern France. The coincidence of these large-scale processes conferred on the project of building a body of scientific knowledge about man intellectual and political dimensions that have proved non-dissociable. It bestowed specific characteristics on the “*science de l’homme*”, which marked its fate in France and have persisted to the present day.

The political crucible of “la science de l’homme”.

A number of studies have pointed out the importance of the last decades of the 18th century in the constitution of the modern human sciences in France. They differ in the emphasis they place on the continuity of a long evolution or on the abrupt change from one epistemic regime to another, as canonically illustrated by the contrasting visions of Georges Gusdorf and Michel Foucault (Gusdorf 1960; Foucault 1966; see Blanckaert 1999).

The singularity of the French case is due to the political context in which these developments took place. Crucial political and ideological changes and major reconfigurations in the human sciences tightly intermingled in France. As several authors have pointed out, the discourses on the reform of science were also discourses on political reform (Chappey 2006; Gauchet, Swain 2007; Staum 1980). In 1773, Helvétius’ *De l’homme* [*Treatise on Man*] marked an important step in the setting of this new agenda (Duchet 1995: 377-406). The science of man as he understood it would not be limited to the study of the human understanding, as Malebranche had suggested and as Hume had advocated (Jones 1989) but would place at the heart of its program the study of the relationships between the mental faculties and the physiological organization of man. The emergence of the expression “*science de l’homme*”,

used in the singular, in the title of works published in French between 1770 and 1800 was indicative of this redefinition. The purpose of this epistemic operation was primarily methodological. Helvétius was a materialist, and he refocused his science on the relation between the physical and the moral. To study this new subject, he advocated re-founding the knowledge of man on more reliable methods, borrowed from anatomists and physiologists, in order to establish a more valid science. However, the goals assigned by Helvétius to this new science were not merely intellectual. By providing a more solid knowledge of man, the “*science de l’homme*” was expected to improve humanity, and indeed, to be the very engine of progress. Thus, the science of man was also a “science of government”, as Helvétius formulated it. In the years before 1789, this political-scientific project was at the core of the struggles between the promoters of the Enlightenment and the anti-Enlightenment. Faced with criticism by Catholic apologists, such as Bergier, the “*science de l’homme*” became a banner (Chappey 2006: 47), fostering the rise of the new figure of the physician-expert among its defenders, as illustrated by Paul-Joseph Barthez (*Nouveaux Eléments de la science de l’homme* [New Elements of the Science of Man] 1778; Carbone 2017; Williams 1994).

Challenged by other formulations such as “social art” and “social science” (Baker 1973; Audren 2006), the phrase somewhat faded away during the first years of the French Revolution, only to re-emerge at the forefront of the intellectual and political stage later, when the revolutionary regime was facing internal and external threats and was radicalized under the Jacobins’ rule. Several authors promoted the “*science de l’homme*” as a tool capable of reducing misconceptions in public opinion and in fighting the enemies of the Revolution (Chappey 2006). The *Idéologues* [Ideologues] represented the high point of this evolution. They were the artisans of the success of the “*science de l’homme*” after the fall of Robespierre in 1794 and the establishment of the Directoire (Moravia 1974). Represented in particular by Antoine Destutt de Tracy and by Georges Cabanis (Goetz 1993; Staum 1980), the Ideologues were the architects of the moderate and conservative republican turn of the French Revolution. They played an important role in drafting the new Constitution of Year III, and their influence was reflected in the creation of new scientific institutions, including the new Academy of “Moral and Political Sciences”, actually a section of the *Institut de France*, in 1795 (Azouvi 1992). As a whole, the *Institut*, which took over from the *Académies royales* [Royal Academies] abolished after 1789, was designed as the main institutional concretization of the scholarly project of the Ideologues. Its promoters conceived the *Institut* as a “living encyclopedia” (Cabanis, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l’homme* [On the relations

between the physical and moral aspects of man], 1802). Within this new institution, all sciences would join and contribute to a better understanding of the world and humanity. Based on this sounder knowledge, the *Institut*'s ultimate goal was to "civilize" men, in order to reduce the savagery that had manifested itself from within during the Terror, and which, according to the Ideologues prevailed outside France in all countries which had not endorse the principles of the Revolution.

The 1800 "Ideological moment" (Blanckaert 2000; Citton, Dumasy 2013), with its intellectual content unfolding, for example, in the columns of the magazine *La Décade philosophique* (Boulad-Ayoub 2004), permanently tied the links between a scientific enterprise and a universalist and moderate republican project which was to become the destiny of the "*science de l'homme*" in France. Yet this golden moment was short-lived. Finding the Directoire ineffective in setting up the administrative structures necessary for reform, the Ideologists rallied to Napoleon Bonaparte and supported the coup of the 18th Brumaire (1799). The outcome, however, saw their expectations unfulfilled, and their ambition to bring about reform opposed by the Napoleonic regime, as manifested by the suppression of the Moral and Political Sciences section when the *Institut de France* was restructured in 1803. Thus, the 1800 moment, regarded as fundamental in the re-composition of the sciences in France, is of great complexity. On the one hand, it was indeed the time when the science of man "consecrated the alliance of the physical sciences and the arts of government" (Blanckaert 2000) and seemed triumphant. On the other hand, Bonaparte's rise to power marked an inflection from the revolutionary spirit. The intellectual and political reformist ambition of the Revolution had remained largely unfulfilled, and the new regime undertook the partial realization of some reform projects, albeit in a more conservative and technocratic way. As a result, the Consulate and the Empire started the demise of the unifying project projected by the Ideologues, and marked the end of the revolutionary reformist utopias with which this project was associated, ushering in a sense of loss and nostalgia constitutive of French political modernity (Knee 2014). From 1802 onwards, there was a re-organization of the academic system under strict State control, and the promotion of an increasingly specialized and professional scientific expertise in the service of the state (Fox, Weisz 1982; Fox 2013). The complexity of this inaugural period can be appreciated in the conflicting interpretations formulated about the *Société des Observateurs de l'Homme* [Society of Observers of Man] (1799-1804). Once considered as home of the Ideologues, this learned society proved to be, in reality, one of the places where the unified science of man was dismembered along several

lines – between body and mind, reason and faith, science and literature, professionals and amateur scientists – as well as according to the new relations between state and experts (Chappey 2002, 2019). Burdened by the constitutive ambiguities of in which it had come into existence, the “*science de l’homme*” unfolded along dividing lines that both caused its fragmentation and ensured its success, since various groups could claim to be the upholders of its legacy in 19th-century France.

Dismembering “*science de l’homme*” in 19th-century France.

The breakdown of the “*science de l’homme*” in the 19th century is reflected in the disappearance of the expression and in the diversification of the terms used to designate it as a whole or in parts. The words anthropology, psychology, sociology, and history took precedence. This change in vocabulary revealed several lines of partition.

The first divide concerned the method of the human and social sciences and their position in the cartography of the sciences. After 1800, the two ways of conceiving the science of man which had emerged in the 18th Century coexisted. On the one hand, the naturalistic and medical lineage gave birth to phrenology (Renneville 2020) and anthropology (Blanckaert 1989, 2009), which subordinated the knowledge of the mind to the study of the anatomical and physiological characteristics of the body. On the other hand, a tradition developed emphasizing self-observation and the proximity between the human and social sciences and philosophy. It sometimes focused on the relations between internal organic sensations and the mind, as in the work of Pierre Maine de Biran (Azouvi 2000; Vigarello 2016). It also refocused on the analysis of mental functions alone, giving rise to a strong French tradition of philosophical (introspective) psychology, which included Theodore Jouffroy and Victor Cousin among its founders (Antoine-Mahut 2020; Goldstein 2005). Leading to the assertion of transcendence, this dualistic and spiritualist tradition, called eclecticism, dominated the humanities in French University until the beginning of the 20th century (Brooks 1998).

By 1850, however, influential authors were criticizing philosophical introspection, and giving new orientations to the science of man. This evolution took place under the influence of positivism and the new methodological requirements that Auguste Comte (Bourdeau, Pickering, Schmaus 2018; Petit 2003,) and John Stuart Mill (Guillin 2017; Guillin, Souafa 2010) set up for the sciences taking human behaviour and society as their objects. The most notable of the scholars taking lessons from positivism but transforming it for the purposes of

the human sciences was Ernest Renan. He reasserted dualism and the partition of the physical sciences and the sciences of the mind, which he named “*sciences de l’humanité*” [sciences of humankind]. While not giving up philosophical psychology, he proposed to refound the study of the human mind on the observation of historical and social (i.e. “positive”) “facts”, mainly languages and religions. Bringing the German philological tradition and biblical criticism to France, Renan gave an unprecedented influence to the new positive science of religions thanks to the huge scandal caused by his *Vie de Jésus* [*Life of Jesus*] in 1863 (Richard 2015). Other authors rejected Renan’s dualism as well as philosophical introspection. They argued that introspection was a legitimate method for the human sciences, because it was not a mere philosophical tool and could achieve the same level of objectivity as observation within the natural sciences or medicine. It could have an experimental dimension, when self-observation focused on altered states of consciousness, in which drugs or sleep modified mental functions. Alfred Maury, who held the Chair in History and Morals at the *Collège de France* and was the author of one of the most famous books on dreams in the 19th century (*Le Sommeil et les rêves* [*On Sleep and Dreams*] 1861), was an eminent promoter of this new science of man (Carroy 2012; Carroy, Richard 2007). Yet its most influential advocate was Hippolyte Taine, whose 1870 book *De l’intelligence* [*On Intelligence*] stands out as seminal in the history of French scientific psychology. In this book, Taine described the human mind’s relation to the brain. He argued that psychology, like physiology, should rely on positive facts, which were provided by self-observation in experimental conditions and by the alienists (psychiatrists). Psychologists could also gather positive facts regarding the functioning of the human psyche in literary sources and in history. Taine’s entire work, from literary criticism to the history of the French Revolution, therefore built a science of man centred on scientific psychology, in which psychological factors explained all human behaviour (Richard 2013). Renan, Maury, and Taine differed from eclecticism by referring to positivism. Yet they shared with Victor Cousin and his disciples the conception of the science of man as part of philosophy. They identified themselves as philosophers and considered that the human sciences were the driving force in a global reform of philosophy. They did not mingle with the anthropologists gathered in the *Société d’anthropologie de Paris* [Society of Anthropology of Paris] created in 1859 by Paul Broca, and they did not endorse the scientific agenda centred on anatomy and physiology.

In 19th-century France, another major dividing line, grounded in differing political traditions, ran through the “*sciences de l’homme*”. Many works, to be sure, fell within the revolutionary

and republican heritage, though with multiple nuances. Some authors identified themselves with the heritage of the Radical Enlightenment, as did some 1848 utopian socialists and, after 1860, anarchists, such as Elisée Reclus (Bourdeau, Macé 2018; Rignol 2014). But the majority of authors were more moderate and claimed a 1789 legacy after making an inventory compatible with the extension of the voting franchise and constitutional monarchy. Such was the case, in a paradigmatic way, for Victor Cousin, whose philosophy served as a quasi-official ideology during the July Monarchy (Goldstein 2005; Vermeren 1995). During the Second Empire, Taine and Renan joined the ranks of the opponents to Napoléon III's authoritarian regime, and their secular scientific worldview was perceived as being at the forefront of the battle against the union between the State and the Catholic Church. Although Renan and Taine criticized universal suffrage and distanced themselves from the new regime of the Third Republic, they received recognition and honors during its first decades. Ernest Renan, indeed, whose course on the history of Christianity at the *Collège de France* had been discontinued during the Second Empire, became the powerful administrator of that very institution. In 1903, the inauguration of his monument in his native town of Tréguier, in Brittany, provided an opportunity for the public authorities to stage the confrontation between the Republican state and the Catholic Church, at a time when the Separation Bill of 1905, which established the complete separation between the French State and religions, was planned (Priest 2015).

Most proponents of the human sciences in 19th-century France endorsed the principles inherited from 1789, but a counter-revolutionary science of man also existed. Opposed to belief in free-will and individual liberties, it promoted belief that social bounds and tradition are primeval in human identity. This counter-revolutionary trend, which was reminiscent of German romanticism, could be found in Louis de Bonald's work, and was perhaps as influential in shaping French sociology as its liberal republican counterpart (Heilbron 2015; Moreau 2020).

After 1870 and the establishment of the Third Republic, the full range of these political positions remained visible among the promoters of the human and social sciences. Within sociology, for example, Emile Durkheim and his disciples, promoters of a university-based sociology, were companions to the Socialists and inspired Solidarism, a more moderate vision of Socialism, which became the central political ideology of the new regime (Blais 2007). The Durkheimians' theoretical and political ideas opposed those of Gabriel Tarde, whose sociological irrationalism was based on belief in the power of imitation and charisma, and

inspired the anti-republican royalist extreme right. The Durkheimians also opposed the followers of Frédéric Le Play, who promoted a sociology committed to social reform led by a paternalist and Christian elite (Mucchielli 1998; Kalaora, Savoye 1989). Thus, the French “*science de l’homme*” saw the political project with which it was originally associated splintered into multiple, and often enough opposing, trends.

By 1900, the Ideologues’ unified science of man was fragmented along several lines, which did not always overlap. In addition to the methodological and political oppositions mentioned above, there were also significant debates about the relative capacities of science and literature to provide legitimate knowledge about humankind. As early as 1800, men of letters advanced the claim for the distinctive power of literary creation against the claim of scientists and philosophers to be the sole provider of knowledge about man. These debates traversed the *Société des Observateurs de l’Homme* and were constitutive of the modern direction of literature in France. Germaine de Staël and François de Chateaubriand, Bonald and Cabanis, among others, intervened (Citton, Demasy 2013; Zekian 2013). Throughout the century, the territories of literature and human sciences morphed or merged according to institutional evolutions and individual trajectories. During the Second Empire, political adversity shut the path to academia for Taine and Renan. They were therefore forced to live by their pen, and they published both academic and literary works, novels, autobiographical texts and plays, some of which, such as Renan’s *Souvenirs d’enfance et de jeunesse* [*Recollections of my youth*] (1883), became part of the national literary canon. In this context, literary criticism gained a special importance, as it became the cradle where a discourse reunifying literature and human sciences could emerge (Lepenies 2002; Richard 2013). At the end of the century, the competition between science and literature was re-enacted in an extremely confrontational political climate marked by the Dreyfus Affair. A number of authors, often connected to the anti-republican right, not accepted for university positions, and publishing in influential cultural magazines, claimed for literature the exclusive prerogative of telling the truth about human beings, opposing materialist academics who, they held, jeopardized the moral and Christian foundations of society. The novelist Paul Bourget, for example, called himself a psychologist. In *Le Disciple* [*The Disciple*] in 1889, he portrayed a scholar reminiscent of Taine and denounced the dangers of a deterministic psychology, capable of manipulating individuals into committing crimes. Other writers asserted their identity as sociologists, and made similar claims against Durkheimian sociology, while pointing out its compromise with the republican ideology (Mosbah-Natanson 2017; Sapiro 2004). These debates durably

blurred the distinction between professionals and amateurs in the area of human studies, a distinction which does not exactly coincide with the academic/non-academic separation.

Shortly before 1900, the largely dismembered project of the “*science de l’homme*” may appear to have met its end under the impact of the academic reform (1896) which created, in France, the modern universities and specialized curricula. Combining teaching and research more closely, these new curricula consolidated disciplinary identities, based on specific skills and practices. Thus, the 1800 moment contrasts with a second founding moment, the 1900 moment of the birth of the humanities and social sciences in the form of separate and professionalized disciplines, with the university as their institutional basis (*Les débuts...* 1992; Noiriél 1990; Mucchielli 1998).

“Science de l’homme”, “sciences humaines”, and “sciences sociales” in the 20th century.

Nevertheless, the ideal of a synthetic science of man inherited from the 18th century and later embodied in the works of Taine or Renan still shaped a horizon of expectation. It generated a series of unresolved tensions within the disciplines now called “*sciences humaines et sociales*” [the human and social sciences].

The first tension concerns the place of philosophy among these disciplines. If in France sociology and psychology usually assume closeness and critical, reciprocal links with philosophy, the relations between history and philosophy have been less peaceful. The two disciplines have recurrently competed for the domination of the academic hierarchy of the humanities and have produced rival claims about their ability to train republican citizens (Fabiani 1988). A second tension concerns differing views about the legitimate settings for the institution and dissemination of the human and social sciences, and about the social role of their practitioners. The institutional platform for professional historians, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, and so forth, certainly became the universities and academic journals. However, the figure of “the Author”, a figure capable of borrowing from several disciplines, acting in the public arena, and publishing in the general press, as embodied at the time of the French Revolution by Cabanis or Destutt de Tracy, and then again later by Taine or Renan, continued to haunt 20th-century human and social sciences. In the wake of the political controversies of the Dreyfus Affair, this character was renamed “*Intellectuel*” [Intellectual], a difficult to translate label that further underlines the distinctiveness of French humanities and social sciences (Charle 1990; Ory, Sirinelli 1986). A third tension concerns

the balance and contrast between the technical and literary nature of styles of writing within the human and social sciences and, as a result, the closeness or distance of writing in these fields from literature. While university training promotes the ideal of a technical and stylistically neutral manner of writing, justified by the scientific objectivity at which these sciences aim, an injunction to achieve a more elegant style, which is the trademark of the “intellectual/author”, remains. The writings of Foucault, whose style attracted many comments (for example Favreau 2012), and the tradition of the “two books” – the scholarly monograph and the literary travelogue – in French ethnology, illustrate this tendency (Debaene 2010).

The very phrase “*science de l’homme*” did not disappear after 1900. It was used, for example, by the Parisian publisher Payot to name a new collection launched in 1963. Created within the famous series “Bibliothèque scientifique”, which had existed since 1925, this collection was alive until the beginning of the 2000s. But its evolution reveals the uncertainties of the fate of the expression “*science de l’homme*” in the 20th century, since the series was progressively narrowed down until only psychoanalysis remained. In the same years, other publishers chose other expressions, such as Gallimard’s “Bibliothèque des sciences humaines” in 1965, which published Foucault’s books (Chaubet 2012). After 1900, the phrase “*science de l’homme*” therefore competed with others terms such as “*sciences sociales*” (social sciences), “*sciences humaines*” (human sciences) (Reubi 2020), or “*synthèse*” (Biard, Bourel, Brian 1997). Each of these labels referred to the totality of disciplines that, in the English-speaking world, fall within the relatively distinct fields of the humanities, the social sciences and the behavioral sciences, so that their translation into English is fraught with misinterpretation.

These proliferating expressions disclosed the presence of a still lively ambition to go beyond disciplinary specialization; but they also exposed conflicting agendas. The use of one of these phrases may have denoted the intention of ranking the sciences that have “man” as their object and of subordinating the various academic disciplines to one that would encompass the others by virtue of the reach of its more globalizing explanations. The expression “social sciences” thus sometimes conveyed the intention, made explicit by Emile Durkheim and his disciples at the beginning of the 20th century, to place the other sciences of man under the heading of sociology, establishing a hierarchy of disciplines that institutionalized a conception that social determinants, above all, are capable of explaining humankind. On the other hand, some uses reflected the intention to strengthen interdisciplinary collaborations between disciplines conceived to be of equal standing, focused on an object (“man”) whose specificity

called for multiple viewpoints. Such was the “synthesis” agenda launched by Henri Berr from 1900 onwards, through the *Revue de synthèse* (founded 1900) and the *Centre international de synthèse* [International Synthesis Center] (1929), an innovative forum for the confrontation of disciplinary points of view in the inter-war period (Biard, Bourel, Brian 1997). A further novelty of the interwar period was the arrival of American foundations (Tournès 2011). The Rockefeller Foundation promoted the “social sciences” in France and turned them into a tool of soft power, giving to the phrase a strong connotation of applied sciences, so that a new opposition between “*sciences sociales*” (applied) and “*sciences humaines*” (less strictly subordinated to political application) developed (Reubi 2020).

The political divisions present in the 19th century persisted. Many projects in the human sciences remained associated with republican agendas. Some of them were conservative in tendency, as with Charles Rist's *Institut de recherches économiques et sociales* [Institute for Economic and Social Research] (1933) (Tournès 2006), while others were more left-wing, as illustrated by the *Encyclopédie française* [The French Encyclopedia]. This publication, the first volume of which was published in 1935, was coordinated by the historian Lucien Febvre and by Anatole de Monzie, who was Minister of Education several times during the interwar period. Its editorial team brought together representatives of the scientific community and politicians and was a forum for discussion of the institutional reform of the sciences, including the humanities. The volume, *La civilisation écrite* [The Writing Civilization], which appeared in 1939, clearly established a connection between the promotion of the humanities, the republican ideal and resistance to authoritarian regimes (Lucien Febvre et l'*Encyclopédie française* 2002; Reubi 2020). Other projects lent towards the extreme right, as the right became redefined by the rise of fascisms in the inter-war period. This was the case, for example, for George Montandon's “anthroposophy”, which put physical and cultural anthropology at the core of the human sciences. Montandon was a physician from Geneva, who had studied ethnology and had joined the Swiss communist party before moving to Paris in the 1920s. In the early 1930s, he was granted the chair in ethnology at the Ecole d'anthropologie de Paris and his work then fell into the racist tradition of French physical anthropology. At the end of the decade, he endorsed fierce anti-Semitism, and he contributed to the French anti-Semitic policy after 1940 (Reynaud-Paligot 2010).

From the 1930s onwards, the French “*sciences de l'homme*” found new institutional foundations. There were new national institutions that defined the human sciences as a whole or divided them into several categories. The *Caisse nationale des sciences* [National Science

Fund] was founded in 1930 with the purpose of awarding scholarships and grants to young scientists. It was divided into two sections, organizing the sciences into the “mathematical and experimental sciences” and the “*sciences humaines*” (Sonnet 2019). In 1933, the *Conseil supérieur de la recherche scientifique* [Higher Council for Scientific Research], a body designed to implement a proper policy of research, abandoned the expression and differentiated between the “historical and philological sciences” on the one hand and the “philosophical and sociological sciences” on the other, embodying the competition mentioned above between “*sciences humaines*” and “*sciences sociales*”, and between history and philosophy. In 1935, the two agencies merged and the new *Caisse nationale de la recherche scientifique* [National Fund for Scientific Research] reverted to use of the label “*sciences humaines*”. It supported existing research, but also helped found new laboratories in fields located at the interfaces of established disciplines, such as genetic editing (the critical edition of texts taking into account the different phases of writing and rewriting of the manuscript in order to understand the process of creation), for which the *Institut de recherche et d’histoire des textes* [Institute for Textual Research and History] was created in 1937.

The *Caisse nationale* became the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* ([National Center for Scientific Research] CNRS) in 1939. It pioneered a research policy that is still partly relevant today, with the promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration and the provision of support to niche disciplines, whereas university curricula fostered disciplinary specialization. On the eve of the war, the CNRS divided its activities between “pure sciences” and “applied sciences”, but after 1945, it reverted to the distinction between mathematical, physical-chemical, biological, and natural sciences on the one hand, and “*sciences humaines*” on the other. The “*sciences humaines*” thus became established on a long-term basis in France. They are now part of the *Institut des sciences humaines et sociales* [Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences] whose primary ambition is to “promote the emergence of new research topics, multi-disciplinarity within the humanities and social sciences, and inter-disciplinarity with other sciences” (<https://inshs.cnrs.fr>). Though sometimes more as a proclaimed ideal than as a reality, the label “*sciences humaines*” was also imposed on universities, when a 1958 decree renamed the old faculties of letters as “faculties of letters and human sciences”. But the labels that were imposed with a strong orientation towards interdisciplinary collaboration still retained their ambiguity. This was well illustrated by the first *Maison des sciences de l’homme*, established in Paris in 1963. In the mind of its sponsors, this institution embraced a structuring interdisciplinary ideal (Bruhns, Nettelbeck, Aymard

2018; Tournès 2011), but, in reality, it was chaired by the historian Fernand Braudel for more than 20 years and served to effect the intellectual and institutional domination of history over the humanities and social sciences (Dosse 2010).

Although not easily translatable into English, the label “*sciences humaines*” was also adopted in post-war international institutions under the influence of French delegates. In 1945, the Preparatory Commission for the creation of UNESCO drafted a report that included a chapter devoted to “*sciences humaines*” (“humanistic studies” in the English version). In 1949, the International Council for Philosophy and “*sciences humaines*” (Humanistic Studies) was created, and in 1963, social sciences and humanities were combined into a single sector of “*sciences humaines et sociales*” (“social and human sciences”) (Conil-Lacoste 1968).

Reflexivity

The success of the terms “*sciences humaines*” and “*sciences humaines et sociales*” in the 1960s did not eliminate scientific competition between disciplines and political tensions. The post-war history of these sciences was marked in France by two new factors, the academic institution of psychoanalysis and the rise of Marxism.

Psychoanalysis developed in France after the First World War, with well-known promoters such as Marie Bonaparte (Amouroux 2012) and as a clinical tool in child psychiatry. The first psychoanalytical associations were created during this period (*Société psychanalytique de Paris* [Paris Psychoanalytical Society], 1926). But a new step was taken after 1945, when psychoanalysis entered the universities. At the *Université de Paris* (the Sorbonne), Daniel Lagache made psychoanalysis important in the new psychology department created in 1947 (Ohayon 2006). After 1968 and the separation of the Sorbonne in many universities, a department of “*Sciences humaines cliniques*” [Clinical human sciences] was established at the *Université Paris 7* (founded 1969). Juliette Favez-Boutonnier strongly oriented it towards psychoanalysis (Ohayon 2006). At the same university, Jean Laplanche created the first diploma of advanced studies (DEA, *diplôme d'études approfondies*) in psychoanalysis in 1970, as well as an academic research laboratory, the *Centre de recherches en psychanalyse et pathopsychologie* [Research Center in Psychoanalysis and Pathopsychology].

Psychoanalytical tools became central in the training of most psychologists and were important in the theoretical research on pathopsychology. Jacques Lacan was a central figure in this post-war development of French psychoanalysis. His seminars, given between 1953

and 1979 at the Sainte-Anne Hospital in Paris, then at the *Ecole normale supérieure* and the Sorbonne, became a world famous forum of discussion of Freudian concepts (Roudisnesco 2010). This academic platform gave psychoanalysis an unprecedented audience among students and the general public in France, as illustrated by the journal *Psyche* (1946-1963) founded by the journalist and feminist Maryse Choisy. It made psychoanalysis one of the most visible disciplines within the humanities, before the radical critique of the 2000's unsettled this prominent situation with the publication of *Le livre noir de la psychanalyse* [The black book of psychoanalysis] (Catherine Meyer ed. 2005).

The post-war period also witnessed the rise of Marxism in France. Already between the two world wars, Marxism became a pole of interest for intellectuals of diverse background in search of a new unifying paradigm for humanities and social sciences. Such was the case, for example, of the historians Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, the founders of the journal *Les Annales* (Gouarné 2013). The cold war context polarized and radicalized the political tensions in the humanities and social sciences, as illustrated in the opposition between two leading “intellectuals” of the time Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aron who became eponymous figures of the opposition between two ideological sides. No synthesis is available on this topic, and historians tend to speak of “marxisms” or “uses of Marx” in the plural form (see for example Barbe 2014). Marx’s philosophy itself was subject to various interpretations, and could even be split between the young and the older Marx’s ideas, following Louis Althusser’s analysis in his best-seller *Pour Marx* ([*For Marx*], 1965). Increasing references to Marx in all the human and social sciences could therefore point to different theoretical and political standpoints, depending on the emphasis put on a dialectical or on a materialist analysis of human and social phenomenon. Some scholars used Marx in a purely theoretical or philosophical manner. Others interpreted their endorsement of Marxism as the necessity to link intellectual and activist commitments. This trend however was divided into many groups, with various attitude towards Stalinism and the French Communist Party. The group and magazine *Socialisme ou barbarie* [Socialism or Barbary] for example, founded in 1948 (1949 for the magazine) by the philosophers and human scientists Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort, represented an anti-stalinian Marxist trend. In the wake of the 1968 events in France, these theoretical and political tensions became more radical (Orain 2015).

The success of the terms “*sciences humaines*” and “*sciences humaines et sociales*” in the 1960s did not settle either the question of their unity. Is it a matter of similarity between the sciences themselves, united in the same category by the similarity of their methods, and thus

appropriately classified together in an encyclopedic order of the sciences? Or does their unity lie in the unity of their object? Debating the balance between encyclopedism and humanism has marked the history of the human sciences since the end of the 18th century (Vidal 1999). The debate was reactivated in France in the critical, political, and philosophical context of the 1960s through confrontations that combined historiographical options and philosophical-political postures regarding the definition of man. It was most notably embodied in the conflicting points of view of Michel Foucault and Georges Gusdorf. The latter developed a long-term history that described the progressive establishment of the human sciences on the basis of the unity of their object, with modern humanism as their ideological core. In contrast, the former intentionally adopted a discontinuous perspective, which interpreted the discourses creating an object affirming the unity of “man” – humanism – and of the disciplines of knowledge about it, as an ideology in the Marxist sense of the term (Blanckaert 1999).

These debates, which were not and probably cannot be settled, have had the structuring effect of shedding light on reflexivity understood in a double sense. On the one hand, Foucault's perspective has underlined the structural relation between the scientific discourses and their objects. This represents the beginning of an epistemological reflection on what could create the unity of the humanities and social sciences: the existence of a reflexive circle between co-occurring discourses and objects. The contributions of Ian Hacking (1999) and Roger Smith (2007) are, in their respective ways, in line with these perspectives. On the other hand, competing historiographical options have emphasized the importance of studying the history in order better to understand the human and social sciences. Reflexivity in this case refers to the capacity of these disciplines to develop a critical view on themselves by intertwining historiographical, methodological, and epistemological considerations (Blondiaux/Richard, 1999, Smith 1997).

In France, this line of inquiry has developed particularly as a result of the work carried out by the *Société française pour l'histoire des sciences de l'homme* [French Society for the History of Human Sciences]. Founded in 1986, this academic society has promoted collective research on topics bridging different disciplines, in a spirit of methodological open-mindedness. In the name of this association, the word “*pour*” had a double meaning. One aim of the *Société* was to resist over-specialization and to provide a platform for interdisciplinary cooperation on reflexive topics. Its other aim was to promote the history of human and social sciences as a professional activity, which could not be delegated solely to their practitioners, and had to be tackled with specific historical and epistemological tools (Blanckaert 1993,

2006). Since 1986, following a similar agenda, there has been a seminar at the *Ecole des Hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS), and a scientific journal, *La Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines*, dedicated to the same topics (founded 1999, <https://journals.openedition.org/rhsh/>).

Conclusion

Gradually supplanted by the phrase “*sciences humaines et sociales*”, the expression “*science de l’homme*” is not very common in French today, but it has not totally disappeared. Its use is then a deliberate choice.

To refer to the “*science de l’homme*” entails to question the designations more frequently used nowadays and to emphasize that the current configuration of disciplines, as well as the institutions in which they are implemented, is a historically recent construction. At least until the interwar period, the disciplinary specialization that is now prevalent in French universities was not so fixed, and the boundaries between psychology and philosophy, sociology and ethnology, for example, remained porous. Choosing the expression “*science de l’homme*” thus makes it possible to look to the past while avoiding the “tunnel-vision” – i.e. the tendency to consider that the disciplines that exist today have always existed – denounced by Stefan Collini (Collini 1988).

The phrase, with its outdated character, thus underlines the historicity of the humanities and social sciences, and the importance of taking their history into account in order to understand their present state. This statement applies to France, but also to any other national context. However, the expression “*science de l’homme*” also points to the particularity of the history of disciplines that take man as their object in France. This chapter argues that the main reason for this particularity is political, an argument that, again, could be made about the history of the human sciences in other contexts.

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