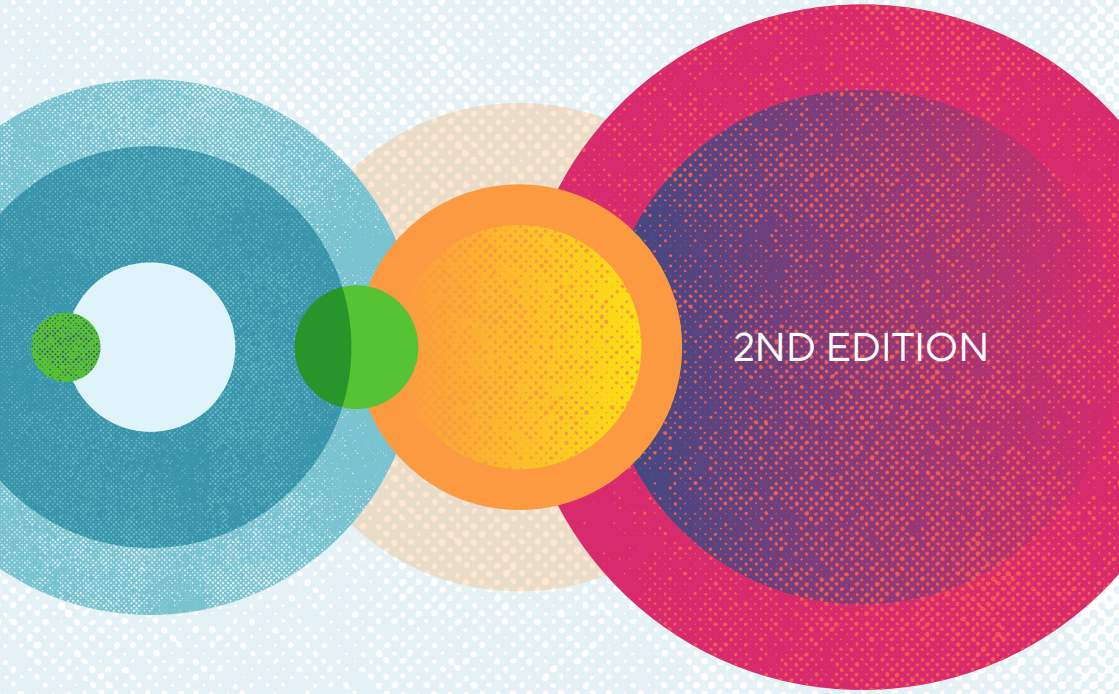
WHY THE SOCIAL SCIENCES MATTER

MORE THAN EVER

ACADEMY of SOCIAL SCIENCES



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Why the Social Sciences Matter

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More Than Ever

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Foreword

The post-war American social scientist, C. Wright Mills, once wrote of the obligation to turn 'private troubles' into 'public issues'. He was referring specifically to the discipline of sociology, but this aphorism applies to the social sciences more generally.

It seems strange, therefore, that at the present time social science is under such virulent political attack in the United States, where federal research funding has to meet extraordinarily restrictive—and politically motivated—criteria relating to short-term utility and national security. And this is aimed at the most prestigious and influential social science research community in the world.

These things go in cycles (Wright Mills himself suffered from the McCarthyite witch hunts of the 1950s) and the counter-veiling civilizing impulses of American society will doubtless see the cycle turn once more. But in the aftermath of the post-2008 global financial crisis, it is scarcely surprising that segments of American public and political opinion have fastened upon the economics discipline in particular, and the social sciences more generally, as a convenient scapegoat.

One can observe distant, and muted, echoes of this in comments in the press and media in this country—and of course we witnessed the attempt to abolish the (then) Social Science Research Council in the 1980s. But no one seriously proposes the abolition of the Economic and Social Research Council today—and if that signifies a kind of progress, it

is equally the case that the public acceptance of the importance of the social sciences cannot be taken for granted.

In the UK, the history of many social science disciplines emerges out of Wright Mills' distinction. Private troubles became public issues by virtue of detailed empirical enquiry providing both the evidence for public reform and a realisation that there were causes of private troubles which lay beyond the purview of the individual either to understand or remedy them. This was the classic Fabian agenda. Although it was never quite as simple as this, it at least provided a role for social science which remains a component of public discourse up until the present.

So it does no harm, from time to time, to reassert the importance of social science in building a civilised and civilising society. If we look at the so-called research 'grand challenges' of UKRI or the European Commission—climate change, sustainable resource utilisation, food security, public health, and so on—can anyone seriously claim that they do not have a social science dimension? And neither are we referring to consequences just of scientific and technological innovation, but also of the socio-economic conditions which foster, or inhibit, such change.

Social science is about evidence, but not only this. It is also about ideas, insight, understanding, and, crucially, debate when there are no simple solutions to our collective private troubles. As a community we should not be over-defensive but it behoves us to demonstrate our value. The following chapters do just that.

Howard Newby

Preface to *Why the Social Sciences Matter*

As humanity develops, with enhanced technologies to support us, and our global community progresses over time, with reductions in global poverty, we might expect the world's problems to now be diminishing. Instead, we face a tsunami of global crises. The climate crisis threatens the future of human life on earth. Pandemics are predicted to become more common and potentially more deadly. Antibiotic resistance also poses devastating threats. Current migration crises will get worse rather than better as a result. The causes of the 2007–2009 international financial crisis and global recession have not been solved; on the contrary, the increased inequality of income, wealth, geography and power have intensified. Scientific advance, on which we might rely, is creating artificial intelligence and robotics that seem out of control, from threatening the world of work to taking over military conflicts—with potentially devastating thermonuclear war, should the control systems pass to machines, which the increasing speed of nuclear missiles may provoke. The systems of education and democracy on which we might rely in face of such crises are themselves being undermined by austerity, fake news, and the rise of the demagogues. Not surprising, perhaps, that we also face a mental health crisis, particularly amongst the young.

Many do despair in the face of these seemingly intractable problems, some being reluctant to have children when this is the future in which the next generation would have to live and die.

Great work is being done to tackle these crises. Vaccines were developed against COVID-19. Agreements have been reached to limit climate change, and ways are being developed to extract carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it. Scientific advance remains crucial, but on its own is not enough. As well as scientific methods of extracting and storing carbon, we need the political agreements, the legislation and regulation, the change in human behaviours, the shift in managerial decision making; in short, we need the social sciences. In tackling pandemics, we need the vaccines, but we also need trust in government, and appropriate social responses. Migration is here to stay and needs to be understood and managed. The causes of global financial crises need to be tackled, as does inequality of income, wealth, geography and power. All this depends on the social sciences—economics, politics, sociology, geography, psychology and the study of behavioural change in society and of companies.

We need scientific advance. But the AI, robots, driverless cars and the rest need to be adopted for social benefit; this requires the social sciences.

As the then President of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Anne McLaren, argued:

> There is a growing realisation that much of social science relies heavily on the backing of natural science, and much of natural science only makes sense in the context of social science.[1]

The social sciences are vital for tackling the world's problems. As social scientists we need to make this case more effectively than we have succeeded in doing thus far.

But we also need to put our own house in order. As Queen Elizabeth II asked at the London School of Economics, after being given an explanation on the origins of the international financial crisis, "Why did nobody notice it?".[2] We social scientists need to do a better job than we have so far at avoiding international financial crises; at preventing unwarranted inequalities of income, wealth, geography and power; and in playing our part in tackling all the crises we now face.

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[1] Anne McLaren, 'That's interesting, science is exiting', *The Independent*, 4 September 1994.

[2] 4 November 2008.

That last point leads onto another: what's needed is often collaboration across and between disciplines. We need multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary working. That means working across the social sciences—and also beyond the social sciences. This is not easy. It requires listening and learning, and as a result adapting how we ourselves conceptualise problems. It is a skill that needs to be taught.

When it is blindingly obvious that what is needed is interdisciplinary working, it is frustrating to hear politicians promoting only the 'STEM' subjects of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. This demonstrates that work is still needed, in explaining the need for social science alongside other disciplines. Perhaps in certain extreme situations it might be right to focus on the STEM subjects to the detriment of others, for example, during the Second World War at Bletchley Park when Alan Turing and colleagues were trying to break codes, and were developing the world's first electronic programmable computer—Colossus—to assist in these endeavours. Perhaps then one would focus solely on STEM subjects. Fortunately for us, in those days they were not so narrow minded. They hired the best people from across the disciplines.

This need to draw on the full range of academic disciplines is greater than ever. In this new edition, leading social scientists turn to face the above crises, and explore how they can be tackled. Some of the issues were just as important at the time of the first edition, such as migration, economic crisis, and crime. Others have become of much greater significance, such as the threat of pandemics, and unregulated AI, which are referred to across a number of the chapters. And many of the chapters have been commissioned newly for this second edition, such as those on the theory and practice of diversity and decolonisation, and the issue of plastics pollution and regulation. Together, they demonstrate the importance of social science in analysing and understanding the current threats and opportunities facing society. As the range of problems facing us seems to grow, so does the need for the social sciences.

Jonathan Michie
Sir Cary L. Cooper

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Mike Hough is Emeritus Professor at the School of Law, Birkbeck, University of London and was University of London Professor of Criminal Policy from 2003 until 2016. He was previously a researcher in the Home Office for 20 years, leaving as Deputy Director of Research. He founded and directed the Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research, based at King's College London and then at Birkbeck, University of London until his retirement in 2016. His research interests include policing, sentencing and procedural justice theory. He has around 350 publications.

Will Hutton is a journalist and author, and is President of the Academy of Social Sciences. He was previously editor-in-chief of *The Observer* newspaper, before becoming Principal of Hertford College at the University of Oxford. He still writes a regular column for *The Observer*, and co-chairs the Purposeful Company. He was co-founder of the Big Innovation Centre, an initiative from the Work Foundation (formerly the Industrial Society), having been chief executive of the Work Foundation from 2000 to 2008. He is also an Associate of the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics.

Joshua Lincoln, PhD is a Visiting Fellow of Kellogg College, University of Oxford, and a Senior Fellow at the Centre for International Law and Governance at the Fletcher School of Global Affairs, Tufts University. His current research interests and advisory work span multilateral processes, international organizations, and the geopolitical and global governance challenges related to the Net Zero transition and pollution issues. He has engaged in four rounds of the INC negotiations on the plastics treaty. Between 2000 and 2013, he worked at the United Nations in various capacities and served between 2013 and 2019 as Secretary-General of the Bahá'í International Community.

Jonathan Michie is Professor of Innovation and Knowledge Exchange, and Pro-Vice-Chancellor, at the University of Oxford, where he is also President of Kellogg College. Before returning to Oxford in 2008, he was Director of the Business School at the University of Birmingham, and before that, he held the Sainsbury Chair of Management at Birkbeck College, University of London, where he was Head of the School of Management & Organisational Psychology. Previously, he was at the

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Camilla Toulmin has worked on different aspects of African development for the last 40+ years, especially agriculture, land rights, climate change, and energy. Her recent book *Land, Investment and Migration: Thirty-five Years of Village Life in Mali* was published in 2020, and is now also available in French (2024). Formerly an Associate at the Institute for New Economic Thinking, and Professor at Lancaster University, she is currently working as a fellow at the Africa Europe Foundation, and as an Associate of IIED, the organisation she directed for 12 years.

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Introduction

Jonathan Michie and Sir Cary L. Cooper

The media—traditional and social alike—bombard us with seemingly mounting problems facing society—problems big and small. The global economy faces instabilities and uncertainties, and despite pledges at the time of the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, we seem in no better state to face future crises; despite almost twenty years of reforms, climate change threatens; war and armed conflicts risk escalation; the threat of future pandemics increases; unregulated AI and other new technologies pose threats; the headache of caring for elderly parents worsens; oceans full of plastic; furious rows about 'genetic engineering'; the unsayable about immigration haunting policies on unemployment; inequality of income, wealth, power and geography. Public issues and private troubles are as interlaced as ever. And, big or small, problems need solutions and

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solutions need to be based on accurate and suitable information and on a proper understanding of the issues involved.

This volume takes a considered look at a selection of problems such as these. In the process, it showcases contemporary work in the social sciences. It consists of fourteen commissioned essays on topics of prime concern at the beginning of the twentieth century to all in the United Kingdom (UK)—and globally. All tackle difficult questions and involve problems that are complex and hard to solve. Above all, each essay in its own way illuminates why having an understanding of a social scientific 'take' on the topic in question provides a grasp that would not be provided by any other 'knowledge producer'; in other words, the chapters make plain what is distinctive and thus invaluable about whichever social science is being presented, and why social science needs to be included if these issues are to be properly understood, and appropriate policies developed.

The chapters are written by experienced social scientists who work at the cutting edge of their respective research fields. Of course, there is a wide array of writing on each topic by journalists or politicians, activists and self-appointed commentators, from think-tanks and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), along with a steady stream of official documents, statistics and reports from governments and others in the UK, the EU and further afield. What sets this collection apart from those other contributions is that it presents the upshot of systematic scholarly investigation. The best of those others draw, from time to time, on this scholarship, as well as adding to it: the boundaries are permeable. Here, though, is the chance to read that scholarship first hand. Thus, scholarly virtues are made apparent. The book displays how the considerable complexity of each topic is grasped intellectually and sets out the way research is methodically undertaken, with the results analysed and presented even-handedly. It confirms the good reasons for pursuing evidence-based policy.

The book originates in the UK—enjoying the active support of the Academy of Social Sciences. But it is not exclusively UK focused. This is partly because it recognises that problems of the sort referred to above are not exclusive to the UK. Partly too because the contemporary world and its concerns are heavily interconnected. Also, most importantly, scholarship transcends national borders. The various contributors have looked

beyond the shores of the British Isles, not just to compare and contrast but also to analyse transnational consequences, and cross border effects and implications.

This volume is timely in analysing pressing problems; it is also timely in helping to make the case regarding the indispensability of the social sciences. Social scientists may be forgiven for being troubled by UK trends in university funding and regulation, and a focus on 'STEM' subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) to the detriment of the social sciences and the need for interdisciplinary research. So, as a side effect, albeit a most important one, this volume helps demonstrate the value of attempting to understand social life now and into the future. It builds on and complements the series of lectures and publications launched by the Academy of Social Sciences in 2010 under the heading of 'Making the Case for the Social Sciences', as well as the Academy's current podcast series on the 'We Society'.

This second edition has enabled a fresh look at each topic, which in some cases have developed significantly, such as for example with the 'Arab spring'—where the revised chapter not only brings developments up to date but is able to reflect on the reasons for the course of developments witnessed since the book's first edition. Other developments since the first edition have resulted in new chapters being commissioned, such as on decolonial theory. There was already a climate crisis when the first edition was published, but the issue has developed since, for example, with an increased focus on climate justice. And issues around AI, and the role of COVID-19 in exposing and in some cases accelerating certain social changes, arise across a number of the chapters.

Overview

In the newly commissioned Chap. 2, Jayati Ghosh argues that environmental rights are inseparable from political rights, economic empowerment and social justice, and that the elimination of poverty and the reduction of inequality are central to any strategy for sustainable development. This requires interlinked strategies: significantly increasing public investment in crucial social sectors as well as in climate alleviation; more

progressive taxation policies involving fair taxation of multinational companies and the super-rich; providing more countries in need access to foreign exchange by regular and directed allocations of the International Monetary Fund's reserve asset, Special Drawing Rights; and dealing with the sovereign-debt overhang. This would enable national policies that use regulation and redistribution to enable economic and social well-being that is in harmony with nature and the planet.

In Chap. 3, another new commission, Joshua Lincoln reviews the contemporary intergovernmental effort to negotiate a global treaty on plastic pollution. These negotiations occur at a time in which existing systems of global governance are fatigued and brittle, even as environmental and planetary governance regimes remain fragmented and ineffective. The chapter draws the contours of the accelerating global plastics crisis, at the intersection of pollution and climate change, before describing the process of negotiations. It then reviews some key human rights and procedural or access rights (including the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment), several specific just transition issues (including vulnerable populations, gendered rights and inter-generational equity), as well as related principles emerging in the negotiations (such as prevention and precaution, polluter-pays, and common but differentiated responsibilities). The chapter then relates these issues to a wider set of themes associated with the accelerating Net Zero transition and the climate change domain. The chapter concludes by arguing for a more explicitly rights-based framework in treaty making.

In Chap. 4, Oz Hassan examines the Arab Spring through an interdisciplinary lens, highlighting the crucial role of the social sciences in understanding complex political and social transformations. Hassan argues that the Arab uprisings cannot be attributed to isolated triggers such as political dissatisfaction or socio-economic grievances but must be seen as emergent phenomena shaped by the dynamic interplay of entrenched authoritarianism, economic marginalisation, technological innovation and global systemic forces. By analysing underlying structures, mechanisms and causal powers, the chapter elucidates how multi-level interactions produced diverse outcomes, from regime collapse to prolonged civil wars, reshaping the regional and global order. This analysis underscores the importance of the social sciences in providing nuanced, theory-driven

insights that inform more effective responses to instability and systemic crises, fostering a more inclusive and resilient global framework.

In Chap. 5, Robin Cohen reports that pointing to the modest level of international migration, its long history and the acceptance of immigrants by some sections of host populations, a number of social scientists, deemed 'cautious optimists', have suggested that fears about international migration are exaggerated or irrational. However, Cohen cautions that there are real-life consequences of irrational beliefs, and credible reasons for concern. Certain long-term demographic, cultural and social trends are likely to validate the views of the cautious optimists, but there is a yawning gap between the present and the future, the contemporary period being marked by the dramatic rise of anti-immigration parties and movements. This gap has been filled by performative politics and largely ineffective measures designed to placate public opinion. Mainstream politicians have, Cohen argues, displayed a distinct poverty of the imagination, substituting slogans and rhetoric for effective policies.

In Chap. 6, Iyiola Solanke argues that the goal of widening participation has to apply to institutions such as the European Commission—considered the key institution in the European Union (EU) due to it having responsibility for a wide range of tasks including initiating new EU legislation. Diversity is important in the European Commission for the same reason it is important in all organisations. Although it created a pan-European scheme of Diversity Charters encouraging private and public bodies across the EU to promote diversity, a photograph of the new all-white Commission suggests it has forgotten to apply this to itself. Gender diversity was apparent, but in the twenty-first century, are all European women white? To address this lack of diversity, Solanke argues that euro-centrism in the Commission must be tackled. This requires taking a 'thicker' approach to diversity that emphasises knowledge production and knowing—re-evaluating what is understood as reliable knowledge, and "acting on that understanding by fostering more diverse communities". To develop such a 'thicker' approach to diversity, Solanke sets the diversity agenda within decolonial theory and suggests that a decolonial approach can disrupt euro-centrism to promote diversity in the European Commission—and in EU internal market law.

In Chap. 7, on Financial Stability and Sustainable Growth, Jonathan Michie argues that social science has a major and important role to play in analysing the nature and functioning of the economy. Many of the major economic issues are linked inseparably to other areas of social science research and interest, such as inequality of income and wealth and the effects of this on society. Indeed, many of the 'classic' texts analysing the economy—from Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* to Marx's *Capital* and Keynes's *General Theory*—touched on a range of issues beyond the narrowly economic. One such discussion today relates to whether measures of economic growth or progress need to take account of broader aspects than previously thought necessary, whether in welfare or sustainability. The chapter discusses these issues, including with reference to the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, globalisation, and the need to foster a more corporately diverse economy and financial services sector. In terms of environmental sustainability, the importance of complexity is stressed; it is argued that the economy cannot be understood adequately through 'marginal' analysis and that instead systems theory and interdisciplinary approaches are called for.

In the newly commissioned Chap. 8, Bart van Ark, Mary O'Mahony and Dirk Pilat argue for a broader interpretation of productivity than is generally used, of just measuring output per head, namely one which associates productivity with improved *outcomes*. This broader approach goes beyond just measuring output, to also ask whether the goods and services serve the need they were intended for. For example, is the new medical intervention or the new drug making the patient healthier? Are the extra police on the beat making a town safer? Is the investment in clean technology leading to a better natural environment? Looking at productivity from the perspective of outcomes makes it a useful concept not only for business leaders and economic policy makers but also for people, places and society as a whole. They also argue that productivity growth should work not only to increase prosperity and strengthen inclusion but also to increase the sustainability of our natural environment. With more than 8 billion people, we live on a small planet with finite natural resources and a limited capacity to support all of us. It is therefore critical that we use our natural resources as efficiently as possible so that we can use them not just now but also in the future.

In Chap. 9, on Wellbeing by Design: Social Science for Healthier Lives, James Campbell Quick, Cary L. Cooper, Ian Hesketh and Robert Gatchel draw on the practice of preventive health management, on established learning principles, on behavioural and social sciences and on emerging positive practices. The chapter opens with a discussion of the major preventable health risks that can undermine health and wellbeing. By building on strengths, guarding against risks and compensating for vulnerabilities, health and wellbeing can be enhanced. The chapter next shows how established learning principles offer powerful and positive ways to advance health and wellbeing through the behavioural and social sciences. Three specific learning pathways are through: classical conditioning; operant conditioning; and observational learning, or modelling. Attention is given to the environmental context within which learning occurs, especially the work environment. The chapter concludes with a section on positive psychological and organisational wellbeing as enhanced through the behavioural and social sciences.

In Chap. 10, on Food Security, Power, and Justice, Camilla Toulmin argues that food security and politics have been closely linked since ancient times. Today, questions of food security focus on how to increase total supply for a possible 9–10 billion people by 2050. It is the job of social scientists to ask difficult questions, place food and agricultural systems in the bigger picture and ask why, in a world of plenty, a billion people across the world still go hungry. In the last twenty years, social science has helped turn received wisdom on its head, by putting local people, their knowledge, insights and priorities to the fore. This has shown the importance of 'how' food is produced as well as 'how much'. Social science must also offer answers to the big public policy issues of the day, alongside the natural sciences, and address issues of politics, power and interests. Many of the most interesting food security questions cross the biophysical and socio-economic disciplines and demand a joint approach if a just and sustainable solution is to be found.

In the newly commissioned Chap. 11, Dave Cowan and Sally Wheeler start with the widely accepted idea that one of the key principles of the rule of law is equality before the law. They then draw on socio-legal research to demonstrate how already disadvantaged citizens are commonly disproportionately affected by the application of apparently

neutral rules. Cowan and Wheeler draw on their own research into two rather different enforcement regimes—against landlords, on the one hand, and company directors, on the other—to demonstrate how the enforcement of such laws can become skewed according to wealth and power. The chapter considers the implications of technological change, concluding that the digital welfare state will continue to produce sites of discretion in apparently neutral algorithmic regulation such that socio-legal research techniques will remain important and the resulting findings will remain significant.

In Chap. 12, on Crime, Policing and Compliance with the Law, Mike Hough argues that social scientific research has made a very substantial contribution to specialist academic understanding of crime and its control. The chapter sketches out the contribution that has been made in three areas: our understanding of crime trends; our knowledge of policing and its effects on crime; and the factors that encourage people to comply with the law. The ways in which practitioners and academics think about these issues have been transformed over the last half-century, and social scientific research is a significant factor in achieving this transformation. However, the same research has achieved a much more tenuous hold on political and public discourse about crime, and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the reasons for this and offers some thoughts on how social science should aim to extend its reach into highly politicised issues such as 'law and order'.

In the newly commissioned Chap. 13, Andreas J Stylianides and Gabriel J Stylianides suggest that education's scientific status has been regarded by some with scepticism and that a common reason for such beliefs—which the chapter rebuts—is that almost everyone has personal experiences with education, as students, as home tutors of their children, or in other ways, and that these anecdotal experiences form the basis of common views of education that do not do justice to its actual scientific practices. The chapter explores the imperative of recognising education as a distinct social science and provides examples that illustrate the nature of educational research and its role in supporting evidence-based policies and educational practices at both the school and teacher education levels. Specifically, the chapter argues for the need to embrace dedicated and rigorous scientific study of educational phenomena rather than 'doing' education based on common sense. Notwithstanding its inherently

multi-disciplinary nature, educational research has a distinctive role to play in addressing problems of educational practice, including the most pressing ones related to all students' learning. Education can transform lives and societies, and educational phenomena are too important to be left to anecdotal evidence or 'commonsensical' approaches.

In Chap. 14, another new commission, Marya Besharov and Catherine Hasted explore how three social science perspectives offer distinctive frameworks for tackling complex societal challenges that span sectoral and geographic boundaries. Systems approaches illuminate the dynamic relationships among human, technical and natural forces. Organisational hybridity reveals how organisations can bridge multiple institutional logics to pursue social impact alongside financial profits. Relational working examines the collaborative processes through which transformative change occurs in practice. Through case studies of Maven Clinic's transformation of women's healthcare and Aviva's neurodiversity initiative, Besharov and Hasted demonstrate how these perspectives provide vital insights: the holistic understanding, organisational structures, and human interactions that help to catalyse positive systemic change. While scientific and technological advances remain essential for today's global challenges, their successful implementation depends on understanding and shaping human, social and organisational dynamics. The social sciences equip us with crucial tools for this work, helping practitioners and researchers to navigate the intricate landscape of large-scale change for people and the planet.

Finally, in Chap. 15, Will Hutton discusses how the social sciences can shape Britain's future. Social scientists have long argued, Hutton notes, that a capitalist economy needs guide rails, pro-active management, and mechanisms to offload and share risk—whether for workforces or companies. Providing workers voice and mechanisms of engagement in their organisations is good both for them and the organisation, together with a social floor—an income safety net, decent affordable housing, good public transport, access to health and social care, the chance to be educated and trained—to underwrite their lives and through which they do not fall when through no fault of their own the hazards of life overwhelm them. Capitalist firms have only limited appetite for risk—without frameworks that share that risk with wider society they tend to invest and innovate less. Or they try to reduce risk by building monopolies or

exploiting consumers and workers. Capitalism, far from producing successive equilibrium outcomes, veers from boom to slump, prolonged periods of stagnation, creating monopolies and generating such inequalities that it threatens its own legitimacy. Social science, condemned by its very nature never to be an onlooker but compelled to address real-life economic and social problems, once again must find feasible responses. The 'Me' Society, Hutton argues, has begun to undermine not just economic growth and stability but is damaging economic dynamism, and wider structures and values. Social science is called for, the chapter argues, to analyse what is needed for the creation of a 'We' society.

Conclusion

These contributions make powerful cases across an important array of pressing issues. None of the authors seek to promote the importance of social sciences as against other areas of research or enquiry—on the contrary, the clear message is that to understand the major issues of the day requires genuinely interdisciplinary approaches, and this has to apply across the whole range of academic disciplines as appropriate—certainly not just restricted to the social sciences alone. Thus, to understand climate change of course requires the natural sciences, but equally, it requires an understanding of the worlds of management and business, of consumer behaviour and of public policy behaviour—all of which require the social sciences. Neither are the authors complacent about the state of social science itself. The need for improved interdisciplinary working applies within the social sciences as well as between social science and other disciplines.

There are thus lessons for us all to learn, in order to understand better the processes at work behind the various policy challenges that society faces, and to then build on this understanding to develop appropriate policy responses. The clear message is that deepening our understanding of many of the major issues facing us and future generations, improving the quality of public discussion and assisting in the development of effective policy depend crucially on the social sciences.

The social sciences themselves need to rise to this challenge. The authors in their contributions to this book have certainly heeded that call.

2

Sustainable Development: Linking Poverty, Inequality, and Climate

Jayati Ghosh

Sustainable development can be most simply defined as development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and without depleting nature and adversely impacting on the planet. Ever since the global community adopted the "Sustainable Development Goals" in 2015, with the aim of achieving those 17 goals (with associated more specific targets) by 2030, sustainable development has become a much-discussed issue both in policy circles and among the wider society. Yet our patterns of growth and economic development still do not reflect that emphasis—in that sense, that ambitious development agenda has been at best only very partially successful at the global level, and in many ways could even be said to have failed.

Consider what is likely to be the most central challenge of our time: responding to and coping with climate change and ecological degradation. It's worth stepping back in time to understand the context. More than half a century ago, in 1972, the United Nations held its first-ever

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