

Chapter One

AN OVERVIEW

PRELUDE

Political decisions, and the public policies which result in them, are often based on little more than hunch and guesswork, combined with political bias. For example, it is rare to find a pragmatic view of the market which takes account of when it can be effective, and when relying on the market will have less desirable consequences. Policies on such matters as crime, housing and immigration, with serious social consequences, are often plucked out of the air, with no apparent effort made either to draw on existing knowledge, or to investigate before acting.

It is possible to do a lot better by adopting a scientific approach to social questions. No doubt very often the scientific answer to a question where we would like to have an answer is that we just do not know. Politicians are almost all of the view that the public would rather be given a definite answer which in fact has no basis than be told that while there is a problem, it is uncertain as to whether the proposed action will be helpful. This desire for authority, sometimes called leadership, acts against a more scientific approach.

For many, the mere suggestion that human affairs can be examined scientifically is anathema. It seems to imply that political choice must be reduced, or skewed in a particular direction. But that is entirely false. Another objection is rooted in the view that human affairs are beyond scientific investigation. It is vain, so the claim goes, and diminishing of human potential, to think that such an endeavour could be anything other than sham and pretence. Again, this is a mistaken concern.

One can argue the toss back and forth about a scientific approach to society in an abstract matter. Much better is to take a hard look at what is actually going on in social science. This book tells the reader what is, and what is not, social science. It is desperately important that more people, especially the right people, become aware of this branch of knowledge. The book has a snarling face, and a smiling face. It is angry with people who intentionally, or unconsciously, confuse and mess up intellectual endeavour. The book shows how to identify these social science impostors. At the same time, it tries to appeal to people who work in social science, or who want to know about their work. Even many specialists are unaware of what goes on in neighbouring disciplines. Above all, this book is addressed to those who should be aware of this branch of science. These are the people who take decisions that affect the lives of other people.

NORMAL SCIENCE

This is an unusual book about science. Most books on science cover the great ideas of key figures in science. They tend to concentrate on critical moments when big breakthroughs occurred. Science becomes drama and adventure. We suddenly discover a new and intriguing concept, such as chaos theory. Small changes in initial conditions can have huge consequences, raising deep issues about predictability. Science writers report on things like the race to crack the genetic code, or a new theory about dinosaurs and why they disappeared. This is entirely understandable.

There is a little problem in concentrating on great thinkers and big changes. Science is not like that. Scientific work goes on day by day, and it is done by reasonably intelligent and well-trained people who do useful work within a structure of ideas and information. Amazingly, that structure gets better as time goes by. It enables us to understand and do things today that we could not have understood or done in the past.

In this book I take a recent period, most of the decade of the 1990s, and examine the workings of a branch of science over that period. Due to the progressing nature of science, I would have preferred to deal with the decade ending on the date of publication of this book. Unfortunately, that was not possible. It takes time to analyse material and produce a book. The period on which I report is the most recent I could manage. It is an ordinary period in the story of science, much like any other ordinary period, as well as being the most recent I could manage. What we see is how science is actually working today, or just a few days ago.

SOCIAL SCIENCE

The branch of science I am writing about is a large branch that goes under the name of social science. The term covers a number of distinct disciplines, such as economics and political science. Social science is about human beings and what goes on in their institutions and interactions. Society is fundamental to human existence and therefore can be transparent. One might not be aware of it. In the same way, fish probably do not have a concept of water. They live in it and that is the way things are. What occupies their attention is food, mating, and getting away from predators.

Humans also think about fulfilling their needs, wishes, aspirations and desires, and may or may not be aware that all this takes place in a social medium. Humans interact with each other in face-to-face interactions, and in very remote and round about ways. The social unit, so to speak, may be a few friends, a workplace, a town, and all the way up to a giant nation, and beyond. Social science studies all levels from the family to the global society, and how the various levels affect each other.

Turning to animals instead of humans for a moment, we might note that some animals are loners, only getting together in pairs to reproduce. Others are very social. What it means to be 'very social' is that they are continually relating to each other. Social animals typically develop a hierarchy, and take their places in it. A single individual, or a few of them, may impose actions on the rest. Alternatively, the social system may be self-organising without any key figures. Males and females may behave differently. There may be division of labour, in the sense that some members of an animal group may specialise in defence against enemies, or in raising the young, or in providing food. The social behaviour of animals is an interesting and increasingly studied area.

The study of social interaction among humans can provide insights into understanding animal interactions, and the social behaviour of animals may be helpful in understanding some aspects of human society. In spite of the scope for cross fertilisation of ideas, essentially the subjects are separate. Social science, as the term is generally used, is about human society. That is how it is used in this book.

Most people start out in some kind of family. They pick up one or more languages. They are socialised into patterns of behaviour. They take part in institutions such as schools, prisons, armies, clubs, churches, professions, and productive units like stores, farms, factories and offices. People have multiple and interacting affiliations. Simultaneously they are part of a family, a friendship circle, an ethnic grouping, a community, a working association, a fan club, a religion, and so on. They are subject to social forces, which come from close by, along with forces whose origins are quite

remote. By remote forces I mean effects associated with markets, as well as those coming from political pressure and the laws and conventions of a society.

Some individuals may have important positions in one or more markets, or in the law making activities of government. They may be active in shaping laws and taking market decisions. While some individuals appear to have power, and probably can exercise power, when it comes to these more remote social forces, most people have little say and are simply swept along with the flow. Social science studies all of this, the face-to-face and the more distant social interactions.

Social science directs particular attention to those aspects of society when and where things go wrong. Big areas of enquiry are unemployment, or rioting and war, or crime and social disaffection. But social science is also interested in the ordinary and normal such as skateboarding and other fashions, how people team up in marriage and in other ways, and decisions such as moving from one place to another. Social scientists study both social problems and social non-problems. Both are studied out of inherent interest, and with the object of finding solutions. The study of non-problematic social interactions, institutions and events, as well as being inherently interesting, can be important to the understanding of social problems.

Few people have any difficulty with the notion that someone might want to investigate the public transport system of a city. The investigator might want to find out how the system works in the sense of who controls it and how it is financed. They might be interested in the relation between those managerial and finance features and the performance of the transport system in moving people about. Probably the study of the system will have the goal of trying to improve the performance of it. All this is easy to grasp.

Another investigator might be interested in whether people are marrying younger, getting divorced more frequently, and the consequences of these trends for child development. Again, this is understandable, and the motive for that investigation might be its potential for recommending helpful changes in the divorce laws, and in the laws on child custody. Ultimately this kind of research hopes to be part of a process leading to an improvement in existing laws and practices. The difficulty in understanding the concept of social science comes in convincing people that the transport system and the marriage system both have aspects that fall within the domain of social science.

Any social arrangement is part of the subject matter of social science, from a bowling club to a parliament. How to win bowling matches is not part of social science, though conceivably the social organisation of clubs could have some bearing on competitive success. It is the common element

of people interacting through large scale or small scale means, through large institutions like the World Bank and the global financial markets, and through smaller groupings like street gangs, which is studied by social science. That these matters, these interactions, can be studied scientifically, is not obvious and the concept of scientific investigation does not sit naturally with the uninitiated.

THE 'SCIENCE' IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

The next chapter of this book is about science. One cannot understand social science without some understanding of science as an activity different from other activities. People tend to confuse engineering with science. Both are important endeavours, but they are not the same. It is easier to visualise engineering than science. Engineering produces hardware and science produces understanding. The trappings of science, like white coats, microscopes and Bunsen burners can mistakenly come to epitomise the essence of science.

A popular phrase nowadays is 'rocket science'. But there is no such thing as rocket science. Physics and chemistry are sciences that contribute to the engineering of rockets, along with other natural sciences. Given the popular misconceptions about science, it is not surprising that using the term social science does not seem natural. The phrase social science does not appear to refer to something that is the same as natural science, according to popular criteria. Where is the equipment, the impressive display? Where is the success that we attach to science? What does social science have in common with the atom bomb or the double helix?

It all depends on what you think of as being essential to science. Is it experiments? Is it the discovery of laws? These are big questions, and in the next chapter they are addressed. My answer is that neither equipment nor success goes to the essence of science. The objective is what is crucial, and that objective is understanding. A science is a connected body of concepts, facts and explanations. As we shall see, this feature of connected ideas is crucial to scientific understanding, in contrast to other types of understanding. This is true of social science and of natural science.

Of course there are differences between sciences. There are differences between anthropology and physics, between biology and political science, between chemistry and sociology. As a group the social sciences differ in emphasis from the natural sciences. For example some sciences, both natural and social, rely more on controlled experiment than others do. On the whole, social science uses less controlled experiment than natural science. The natural sciences, too, differ from one another in the way they

Chapter Two

WHAT IS SOCIAL SCIENCE?

FRIENDS AND ENEMIES OF NATURAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

One of my motives for writing this book is the growing presence of people in universities who are antagonistic to science in any form, yet call themselves social scientists. Some are anti-science without realising this. Others champion their hostility to a scientific approach to society. Another motive for writing this book is to break down some of the insularity between social science disciplines. I hope that my view of science is broadly acceptable to this group of supporters of social science, and that seeing what goes on in surrounding disciplines proves of interest.

As to those modern thinkers who either have a very different view from mine of what constitutes social science, or think the whole enterprise is both impossible to do and wicked to attempt, I hope to make inroads into their closed world. I will do my best to argue with these sceptical writers who tend to be prolific, energetic, muddle headed and popular with students. But I will argue by example. I do not intend to identify these scoundrels by name, and will resist the temptation to engage in abstract debate. They know who they are, and they do not need me to advertise for them. I know it is difficult to get the ear of this misguided *avant guard*. They have made big investments in the unfortunate intellectual positions they have adopted, and they tend to confine their reading to books and articles written by each other. But perhaps even they will agree that the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

My main goal and fervent hope is to interest some people who have never given even a moment's thought to addressing the boundless range of social issues in a scientific fashion. Lots of people have opinions about such diverse things as famines, the effects of television on children, a common currency for Europe, and life on housing estates, without realising that these topics, and a myriad other social mysteries and social problems, can be studied scientifically. Discussions in pubs which are not about sex or football are almost all about society in one way or another. People do find party politics, the pay of City traders, house building in the south East, war wherever it is going on, and so on, to be of real interest.

Even sex and football can be looked at from a social point of view. And anything which exists, including things of a social or societal nature, can be studied scientifically. My main aim is to describe and analyse how this is done. I am fully aware that a scientific approach to society is not the only approach. I do think that it is an interesting, attractive and potentially very useful thing to do. In passing, I hope to make a case for social science, along with describing and explaining what it is.

The whole of this book is an answer to the question, "What is social science?". Most of the answer provided is very practical and 'hands on'. It deals with what social scientists actually do, not with what they might do, may do, or could do in principle. This chapter is different. It operates at a very general level. In order to understand social science, it is necessary to have a framework for thinking about science as a whole. Social science is a part of the picture. So let us begin with the big picture, a picture of that amazing construct which is science.

SCIENCE AS CULTURE

There is nothing more peaceful than a herd of cows lying down in a field. As they ruminate together, is it possible that they are thinking? Probably, yes, they are. But are they wondering about how they came to be there, and what awaits them at the end? I doubt it. But suppose they did. They would not get very far with these questions because they are not very good at thinking. Even human beings, who are supposed to be good at thinking, a characteristic that allegedly distinguishes them from other animals, find these difficult questions. But perhaps among the millions of cows and the many millions of hours they spend thinking, a few unusually able and lucky ones from time to time manage to construct an important question, and maybe even to find some plausible answers.

The big problem for cows is that these discoveries are not transmitted to their fellows. Cows a thousand years ago, and a thousand years in the future,

will probably have much the same thoughts as cows today. They lack the capacity to transmit ideas across generations. In other words, they do not have much in the way of what could be called a culture, or an accumulation of knowledge. There is some growing evidence that cultural transmission among animals may be more important than hitherto expected. But whatever might be found, it will still be very minor compared to the central and over-riding role of the capacity to absorb and build on the ideas of the past which is the truly distinguishing feature of humans compared to other animals.

Of course humans today may choose to think about the great mysteries, and mundane puzzles, much as people did a thousand years ago. They can do that, but they do not have to. With suitable training, we can draw on the thinking of others. There are many, many traditions of thought. When people set about to build a house, a car, a football team, make a work of art, design a constitution for a government, or a treatment for a patient, they can draw on the handed down experience of the past, and in most cases, they have to draw on the past. They could not even make a start without doing so.

The truly distinguishing feature of human beings is that we can absorb constructions from the past, language being the outstanding example, and pass these hard won achievements on to others. Most people contribute nothing memorable to the language they speak, but many of the contributions of those who do add something new are added to the total and retained. That is the great feature of cultural transmission and development. Along with art and technology, science shines as one of the great and growing traditions of human culture.

Art changes, evolves, and responds to events and conditions of the past and the present. It does not in any obvious sense show continual improvement. Nor need it do that. It has other aspects of grandeur. Science is also a truly amazing human activity, and this is partly because of its cumulative and progressing nature. Scientists today may be no better than scientists in the past, but science is unrecognisably better. This intellectual structure which is science is such a marvel in itself that it would be a glory of mankind even if it had no practical consequences whatsoever.

While some people care about science for its own sake, the achievements of science interest relatively few people. What affects most people, whether they know it or not, is the practical consequences of science. The growth of scientific knowledge has changed life on this planet for everyone. The great advances which we see in health and life expectancy, in communication, and above all in productivity have all been made possible by the development of new knowledge. Science is not the only source of new knowledge, but it is the most organised, the most continuous and the most fundamental source of

knowledge. Of course knowledge has to be applied in order for it to have these great beneficial effects. Some of the finest achievements of engineers and others can be seen in developing an application of a discovery of science. But without the scientific knowledge in the first place, there can be no application of it. Undoubtedly practical experience adds to better practices. Science is not the only source of technical improvement. But many truly heroic leaps have come from science, and could not come from any other source.

No doubt there are serious problems that come with new knowledge, and adverse applications are always possible. There are different schools of thought as to how to respond to the possible destructive uses and the unintended consequences of science. Some people feel that scientists themselves have a special responsibility to work on certain problems, and not to work on other questions. Others feel that whether experiments should be done on human embryos, for example, is a matter for governments to decide, and scientists have no special role to play in these essentially ethical and political decisions. Tragic consequences of new knowledge are by no means confined to examples like Hiroshima. In the process of looking for new answers, mistakes are made, and these can have terrible effects. However, allowing fully for any and all of the unfortunate consequences of scientific knowledge, there is still an overwhelming case that so far mankind has reaped enormous net benefit from the progress of science.

Untold millions live longer and healthier lives. Many millions are incomparably better educated and have greater choices. Many have standards of living which even as little as a hundred years ago were inconceivable. Even in what are the rich countries today, nine out of ten people had hard lives working on farms in the year 1900. Today there is a richer life for most people in advanced countries. Only a tiny part of these gains which many experience came at some cost to others. The vast bulk of the gains for the millions who are gainers come from the advances of science. This is the single most fundamental source of what I see as human progress.

UNDERSTANDING

One of the proofs of the achievements of human understanding was the lift-off from the surface of the moon of the lunar module, bringing the two astronauts up to the circling spacecraft. There could be no full-scale rehearsal for this event. The functioning of the machine sitting on the moon's surface depended on many factors including the moon's gravitational pull, the near vacuum conditions, and the temperature at the time. None of

these could be measured directly. They were deduced from scientific theory. They could not be duplicated on earth. Engineers had to build a machine capable of taking account of these conditions. No doubt the engineering achievement in building this machine, which had to work the first time without testing under the actual conditions, is immense. It is comparable to constructing the temples of Luxor. But even the greatest engineers of the past could not have built the lunar module. They could not draw on the vast array of scientific knowledge necessary for that endeavour.

Some years before the Russians launched Sputnik, an uncle of mine tried to persuade me that it was impossible for humans to launch an artificial satellite. His understanding of why the moon stayed in orbit was shaky. As a child it was not easy for me to argue with him. How do we know the gravitational pull of the moon, he would ask? Even as an adult it is not easy to explain to a sceptic that through complex chains of reasoning, combined with observations that can be made here on earth, we can be pretty sure about how some things work thousands, and millions, and even light years away. Can we be certain? Certainty is not possible. Nor is it necessary. Only a fool insists on certainty.

When the Sputnik went up, my uncle had a number of options. He could have maintained that the scientific community was mistaken. Those beep-beep-beeps coming over the radio had some other source. In fact, the line that he took is not unusual in those circumstances. Much to my frustration he maintained that the reasoning which led him to argue those years ago that an artificial satellite could not be launched from the earth was essentially correct. He just missed out on one small, trivial consideration. I found the argument unfair. Why could he not simply say that he was wrong? Perhaps he felt that an adult must always be right in arguing with a child, and in addition, as a lawyer, he probably was pretty innocent of scientific reasoning.

But what is “scientific reasoning”? Not only is science amazing, it is also mysterious. Philosophers of science struggle with dozens of issues including how scientific knowledge is acquired? What distinguishes science from other activities? What are “facts”? What are scientific “laws”? Is there such a thing as the “scientific method”? Can we identify valid and invalid methods of investigation? In these opening chapters I want to provide a working picture of what it means to be scientific. It would be foolhardy in the extreme to expect to make a contribution to the high level debates that engage the philosophers. Those are important and intricate debates. Some of the greatest scholars of the past and the present have worked, and are still actively working, on these questions, and many other related questions. I can eavesdrop on these fascinating discussions, but that is as far as it goes.

Chapter Three

VALID AND INVALID ALTERNATIVES TO SOCIAL SCIENCE

Some people have a talent for discerning that certain things which appear to be dissimilar are in fact similar or even the same. Other people emphasise the opposite side of the coin and take pride in showing that certain things which are often taken to be the same are in fact different. Both can be valuable discoveries. Usually the most appropriate and realistic stance is to note that certain methods, or disciplines, or subjects, which is what we are discussing now, are similar in some respects and different in others. The fact that things have much in common does not make them the same. The differences may be very important for some purposes.

ART

We can all agree that scientific understanding of society is not the only kind of understanding. A concrete example is useful in comparing the understanding that can come from literature with that of social science. Economics, sociology and political science all study the Great Depression. Each subject comes at the topic from a different perspective, and each has the goal of explaining different aspects of this social event. These social sciences are not directly concerned with creating for the reader the subjective experience of being an unemployed urban worker, or a hopelessly indebted farmer, or showing the reader what it was like to be any other participant in the depression.

The novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, in sharp contrast to social science, does have the goal of providing a picture of what it was like to be there. That is

very different from the economics monograph *The Great Crash*, which attempts to explain how this depression came about. I have no problem with calling "what it was like to be there" a kind of knowledge, and "why it came about" another kind of knowledge. I do have a problem with the claim, if it were to be made, that they are the same. Art is a wonderful vehicle for creating in the person who absorbs the art the emotions and feelings of various experiences. It is not particularly suited to explaining the causes of the events described. Social science does not have the goal of reproducing experiences. It has the goal of explaining things. Art is not social science. It is a perfectly valid alternative mode of understanding.

Of course, the subjective experiences people have often play a crucial role in understanding social events. Whether people perceive something as hard luck or unfair, permanent or possible to change, frightening or terrifying, and so on, may for many problems be important data for social scientists. The skills of the artist may be very similar to those of the scientific investigator. Anthropologists specialise in understanding what the world looks like from the inside of various communities. So do some film makers and novelists.

Taxi Driver and *Glamorama* put you in the shoes of certain characters who one feels one can recognise and know that in some sense they are not pure invention. The artists have given us insight into significant ways of living and feeling that are present in the world. There is some generality here. It is not just these particular characters who engage our attention. They are socially significant. That is as far as the artist need go. What it means to be "socially significant" does not have to be directly explored in a work of art. It does have to be in a work of social science — significant to whom, and in what way, and with what consequences.

The important differences between art and science as ways of approaching society have to do with generality and accuracy, with the audiences both engage, and with relations between works of art compared to the relations between works of science. *Crime and Punishment* and *The Stranger* are novels with something in common and they are helpful in illustrating all three differences. In both novels the reader gains insight into the experience of being particular people caught up in a particular murder. Novels are not usually about murders, or businessmen, or workers, in general, but are about particular people and particular events.

When prisoners on Death Row are taken to the electric chair in the novel *The Green Mile*, we are there with both the condemned men and the prison guards who have to carry out this awful task. Different prisoners and different guards would result in a different novel. This is especially true of the narrator in the novel. For many novels the character and humanity of the explicit or implicit storyteller is the basic content of the novel. We would

get a different answer to the implied question, what is the death sentence like, for example, with a different author, or the same author writing about different characters.

When we say that "art provides the experience of being there", it is worth asking exactly what do we mean? Are we referring to what it is like to be those particular characters, or the reader somehow in those characters, or the experience in general? I would suggest that all three are involved, with varying degrees of emphasis in particular plays, novels, films or whatever. The novel *American Psycho* is an interesting example. Taken as a simulation for the reader of the experience of being a trader in financial markets in New York City, it tells the tale through an extreme character who is hardly characterised at all. This tends to heighten what the author takes to be the significant and hidden, or repressed, features of a certain slice of contemporary life.

It can be argued that authors, and other artists, make general statements through the particular. For the most part, these are implicit statements. The act of showing what it is like to get married, commit a crime, work in a certain trade, go to war, or suffer some humiliation, is bound to involve some kind of implicit theory. Part of the task of literary criticism is to attempt to make explicit the implicit theories of works of art. Science is explicit. We may disagree about the significance and accuracy of a scientific theory. What the theory is saying is usually not a matter for dispute. It can also be argued that works of art not only have lots of meanings, the richness of a work of art may lie precisely in its breadth of meaning. *The Stranger* may mean something rather different to you than to me. Which is the 'true' meaning is not a helpful question. Scientific theories do not mean different things to different people. Scientific work addresses itself to that structure which is science. In that sense it has a single audience, personified by science specialists. Art is addressed to all mankind. The ability it has to mean different things to different people is a strength. In science the lack of a clear and unambiguous meaning is a weakness.

We learn from art, or perhaps better, enrich our lives through art, in much the same way as we learn from experience. The virtual experience which art provides is not real, but it may go to more significant layers of a subjective event than much of ordinary life. It is less real, in the ordinary sense, but often it is more focused. One can relate to experiences in a work of art which are totally remote from one's own life. Few of us have been outside a space vehicle in orbit to undertake repair work on it. Yet we can know something of it through imagination and having gone through fear, loneliness and demanding work in other contexts. It is reality passed to us through the mind and emotions of another person. That other person, the artist, may bring more to our experience than we often do ourselves, or at

least something very different and valuable. Even familiar experiences portrayed in a work of art may be more telling than much of what life itself often provides for us. Art works both with the familiar and the unfamiliar. Apart from its capacity for generating an experience which we may be unlikely to have in real life, we get an appreciation of the events told and expressed in the novel which we are incapable of having without the benefit of the guide, who is the artist.

THE BASIC DISTINCTION BETWEEN ART AND SCIENCE

But now we come to a crucial distinction between art and science. A new theory in science has to deal fully and explicitly with existing theory. The significance of the scientific idea lies in its relation to the current body of science. A work of art has a very different relation with other art. There is no sense in which *The Stranger* has the goal of improving on *Crime and Punishment*. New works of art generally do not replace or refine existing works. There is no question of the two novels offering rival views, only one of which may be right. Artists differ greatly in the extent to which they inform themselves of the history of their art. They may be aware of other work and be responding to it, but that response may or may not be apparent to the people who read the novel or come to the play. Each artist is working on her own project. In sharp contrast to the arts, scientists work on the same project.

It has been pointed out many times that if a particular scientist had not produced a certain piece of work, another scientist eventually would have done so. It is inconceivable that the nature of the genetic code would have remained unknown without Crick and Watson, or that biologists would not have a theory of natural selection if Darwin had not provided it. Indeed, in both cases, historians of science report on a race to reach certain discoveries and theories. Sometimes scientists are well aware that others are trying to solve the problem they are trying to solve, and they know who these competitors are. The reason for this that scientists all work on parts of the same structure of ideas. A gap or incongruity can be seen by all scientists. While artists certainly influence each other, the influence is not so direct because they are not working on the same thing in quite the same way that scientists address the same problem. Beckett does not replace Shakespeare. We cannot maintain that Faulkner was right and Vidal was wrong. We certainly can have different preferences. We may rank their achievements differently. But they and their works are in no sense obliged to deal with each other in the way that scientists and their work deal with one another.

Rival, or contradictory, scientific theories may co-exist for a time, or even a long time, because scientists have not figured out a way of resolving the conflict. It may be difficult to find implications of the two ideas which are different and which can be subjected to empirical investigation. But if this can be accomplished, this is a classic route for resolving conflict. Sometimes deeper logical investigation accomplishes the same task. Works of art are not rivals in the same sense. We need not compare them at all. We certainly do not have to say if one is true and another false. If I report that I went to see a new play last night, it would be odd for you to ask me whether it was true or false. You might want to know how much I enjoyed it. If you are a particularly serious chap, or lady, you might be interested in whether it moved me, and in what way. Did it give me a new insight into love or boredom? It may be very informative. Maybe I never thought about psychoanalysis, or AIDS, that way before. But works of art do not link up in the same way that scientific work links up. Works of art compete for our attention and appreciation. Scientists try to extend and improve explanations.

HISTORY

Though there are those who contest the view that art is different from social science, many other people feel that the point hardly needs to be made, and pointing out the differences between the two activities is pretty easy stuff; shooting fish in a barrel, as they say in America. When it comes to social science and history, the border between them is much fuzzier, and it is no easy matter to delineate it. The first point to dispose of is the idea that history is about the past of mankind, and social science is about the present. Of course much of the work of social scientists is applied work on current problems, or more basic work which is suggested by current problems, or simply takes off from current events. There are practical reasons why it is easier, as well as potentially more useful, to work on present day material, or fairly recent material, and these include data availability and the possibility of making all kinds of observations, including undertaking surveys. We may be able to ask some pertinent questions of those people who participated in removing the Berlin Wall, but we cannot question participants in the French Revolution. However, these practical considerations do not rule out doing social scientific investigation on any period that contained a society. Certain commonly employed methods will be impossible to use, but others will still be available.

It is also possible to write a history of any period, including right up to the present. My ignorance precludes me from giving specific examples, but