Chapter 1
Introduction

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The social sciences are disciplines, which have been taught in most universities and colleges across the world. They mainly deal with society, aspects of the group life of human beings and their relationships. In other words, the social sciences may be regarded as the scientific study of social, cultural, psychological, economic, and geo–political forces that guide individuals in their actions (Kuper and Kuper 1985; Hunt and Colander 2004). Even though they are closely related to the humanities in that both deal with human beings and their culture, they are, at the same time, different. While the social sciences are mostly concerned with those basic elements of culture that determine the general patterns of human behaviour, the humanities deal with special aspects of human culture and are primarily concerned with attempts to express spiritual and esthetic values and to discover the meaning of life. In addition, whereas the social sciences study issues in a systematic, scientific way, the focus of the humanities is more on emotions and feelings (Hunt and Colander 2010).

The social sciences have been the subject of debate on three grounds. First, some scholars have argued that there is nothing like the social sciences. In other words, the scientific rigour of the social sciences has been questioned. It is therefore argued that it is a misnomer to call them sciences. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) had to change its name to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), in part because of a belief of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party in the early 1980s that the social sciences were not sciences (Smith 2000).

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Arguing against the social sciences being regarded as sciences in his book, *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy*, Winch (1958) sought to direct attention of "social studies" from their obsession with methodology to what makes their investigation significant: meaningful human actions. He therefore admonished scholars in "social studies" to see themselves as much more akin to a branch of philosophy than to the "experimental sciences". Similarly, Hutchinson et al. (2008), in their book with an intriguing title, *There is No Such Thing as Social Science: In Defense of Peter Winch*, referred to the "myth" of the social sciences and pointed out that what meaning one attaches to the term, "social science" may be expressed in the form of three questions, namely:

1. Is one talking of social science as scientific in terms of it being conducted in the scientific spirit: its practitioners acting in accordance with certain intellectual virtues?
2. Is one talking of social science being scientific in its method being one that is shared with the (or some of the) natural sciences, reducible in terms of methods employed?
3. Is one talking of social science as scientific in terms of its being reducible to one or other of the natural sciences, reducible in terms of the substance of their claims? (Hutchinson et al. 2008, p. 3).

Based on these questions, they concluded that "there is no such thing as a social science on the model of methodological or substantive reductionism because to be committed to methodological or substantive reductionism is to be committed to a priorism: it is to be committed to something methodological or the relevant explanatory factors in one's explanation of social action—prior to one's investigation. The correct method is to read off the nature of the phenomena. To embrace a particular method from another domain of inquiry owing to its success in that domain is … ironically contrary to the scientific spirit: it is to fail to act in accordance with the intellectual virtues" (Hutchinson et al. 2008, pp. 3–4).

In a rebuttal to the claim that there is no such thing as social science, McIntyre (1996) upholds the prospect of the nomological explanation of human behavior against those who maintain that this approach is impossible, impractical, or irrelevant. By pursuing an analogy with the natural sciences, McIntyre shows that the barriers to nomological inquiry within the social sciences are not generated by factors unique to social inquiry, but arise from a largely common set of problems that face any scientific endeavour. All of the most widely supported arguments against social scientific laws have failed, largely due to adherence to a highly idealized conception of nomologicality (allegedly drawn from the natural sciences themselves) and the limited doctrine of "descriptivism." Basing his arguments upon a more realistic view of scientific theorizing that emphasizes the pivotal role of "redescription" in aiding the search for scientific laws, McIntyre is optimistic about attaining useful law-like explanations of human behaviour. In his second publication, *Dark Ages: The Case for a Science of Human Behaviour*, McIntyre (2006) argues that the social sciences today are in the same state in which the natural sciences were in the Dark Ages. In the same way that religion inhibited the progress of science and the growth

of knowledge in the Dark Ages, so is political correctness inhibiting progress in the social sciences and the growth of knowledge today. This is why the social sciences do not follow the scientific method like the natural sciences do, and are hence incapable of offering effective solutions to pressing social problems such as crime, famine, and war. The reason why political correctness is able to affect science in this way is our fear of knowledge. Human beings are simply too terrified to discover unpleasant truths about themselves, so they prevent certain hypotheses from being seriously tested in social science research. Rather, they prefer to indulge in comforting pseudo-scientific ideology.

Another defender of social science as science is the British philosopher, Roy Bhaskar (1987, 1997, 1998), whose philosophies of science and social science resulted in the development of what is referred to as "critical realism." He emphasized that the conceptions of science do not necessarily demand that the conducting of experiments are essential to a science. This is because the unavailability of conditions under which experiments can be reproduced in some of the natural sciences like geology and astronomy is similar to a sense in which reproducible experiments are often unavailable to the social scientist. To him, therefore, the status of "facts," "evidence" and "theories" are issues which confront all researchers.

Of course, it is instructive to note and to remind ourselves that Max Weber, arguably regarded as the father of the social sciences as far back as the 1940s, did make the point that the social sciences exist. In his "Natural Science, Social Science and Value Relevance" (cited in Coser 1977, pp. 219–222), Weber did not see the difference in the methodology of the natural sciences and social sciences, nor the superiority of one methodology over another. According to him, differences between the natural sciences and the social sciences arise from differences in the cognitive intentions of the investigator, not from the alleged inapplicability of scientific and generalizing methods to the subject-matter of human action. In the view of Weber, "Both types of science involve abstraction. The richness of the world of facts, both in nature and in history, is such that a total explanation in either realm is doomed to fail. Both the natural and the social sciences must abstract from the manifold aspects of reality; they always involve selection" (Weber cited in Coser 1977, p. 220). In addition, Weber emphasized the value-bound problem choices of the investigator and the value-neutral methods of social science research (Weber 2011).

As editors, we concede that the methodologies of the natural sciences and the social sciences may be different, but they do not in any way erode the scientific project or endeavour of the social sciences in investigating endemic issues and challenges in African societies and coming out with findings which in most cases are relevant, enduring and often can be generalized, especially if they are from a comparative perspective. In addition, it is widely known that the methods of social science research may be divided into two broad categories:

- Quantitative designs approach social phenomena through quantifiable evidence, and often rely on statistical analysis of many cases (or across intentionally designed treatments in an experiment) to create valid and reliable general claims.

Table 1.1 Some of the key social science disciplines

Anthropology	Industrial relations
Archaeology	Information science
Area studies	International studies
Business studies	Law
Communication studies	Library science
Criminology	Linguistics
Demography	Media studies
Development studies	Political science
Economics	Psychology
Education	Public Administration
Geography	Sociology
History	

- Qualitative designs emphasize understanding of ten social phenomena through direct observation, communication with participants, or analysis of texts, and may stress contextual and subjective accuracy over generality (Kuper and Kuper 1985; Hunt and Colander 2004).

Social scientists have commonly combined quantitative and qualitative approaches as part of a multi-strategy or triangulation design. Questionnaires, field-based data collection, archival database information and laboratory-based data collections are some of the sources often used. In addition, social scientists use different methods. These include the historical method, the case method, and the comparative and cross-cultural methods. (National Focus Group 2006). Some of these approaches and methods have informed the chapters contained in this volume.

The second debate relates to the scope, diversity and complexity of the social sciences. The social sciences encompass several disciplines, as can be seen in Table 1.1,[1] even though this is not an exhaustive list. There is no agreement over which disciplines should constitute the social sciences. For instance, in some universities History and Linguistics are not social sciences but are rather considered as humanities or arts disciplines. The same applies to Geography, which some universities either place under the natural sciences or under both natural and social sciences because of its two sub-fields of Physical and Human Geography. In putting together this book, the editors were also confronted with this familiar age-old challenge of which disciplines actually constitute the social sciences. In this book, we have included some of the disciplines which may be regarded as eclectic, such as African Studies, Development Studies, Women and Gender Studies and Adult and Continuing Education (see Table 1.2).

The list of social science disciplines is sometimes considered both too broad and too narrow. It is too broad because parts of the fields of history, geography, and psychology should not be included as social sciences. For instance, parts of history and geography belong in the humanities, and parts of psychology belong in the natural

[1] Compiled from Encyclopedia Britannica "The Social Sciences" available at www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/551385/social-science (accessed 2 July 2013); Ross (2008).

Table 1.2 Social science disciplines covered in this book

Archaeology and heritage studies	International affairs
History	Information studies
Geography and resource development	Communication studies
Psychology	African studies
Sociology	Development studies
Social work	Adult and continuing education
Economics	Women and gender studies
Political science	

sciences. The list is too narrow because new social sciences are emerging, such as cognitive science and socio–biology that incorporate new findings and new ways of looking at reality (Hargittai 2009).

A complexity of the social sciences is that because all knowledge is interrelated, there are inevitable problems in defining and cataloguing the disciplines. Often, it is difficult to know where one social science ends and where another begins. Not only are the individual social sciences interrelated, but also the social sciences as a whole are also related to the natural sciences and the humanities. To understand history, it is helpful, even necessary, to understand geography; to understand economics, it is necessary to understand psychology. Similar arguments can be made for all of the social sciences. Indeed, part of the problem facing the social sciences comes from the wide-ranging nature of the disciplines, subject-matter and problem domains. Social science can encompass everything from psychology to international relations, from social theory to well-being. But while the methods of study used and subjects vary, there is also a strong common thread: explaining our social world (Hunt and Colander 2004; Backhouse and Fontaine 2010).

Notwithstanding the diversity and complexity, the social sciences are interrelated, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary. These have added new dimensions and nuances to conducting research in the social sciences, thereby making it intriguing. For instance, a study in HIV/AIDS is not only a medical and public health issue but also involves disciplines in the social sciences such as social work, sociology, economics and demography (Sulkunen 2007).

The third debate revolves around the prevailing perceptions that the social sciences, are irrelevant. Their non-utility may be traced from the initial stages of schooling, during which it is often suggested to students that the natural sciences are superior to the social sciences, and are the domain of "bright" students (Trigg 2001)—a perception common in Ghana as well.

There is the widespread belief that the social sciences merely transmit information and are too centered, on the texts, which students are required to memorize for examinations. The content of textbooks in the social sciences is considered to be unconnected to daily realities. Examination papers are perceived as rewarding the memorization of the superfluous "facts," with the students' conceptual understanding being largely ignored (Business/Higher Education Roundtable 2002).

A key challenge faced by students of the social sciences is the perception that not many desirable job options are open to them. In addition, it is felt that the social sciences are bereft of the "skills" required to function in the real world. This produces the impression that the disciplines are redundant (Hunt and Colander 2004).

Some scholars have pointed out that no field of study is more important to human beings than the social sciences (Berard 2009; Hunt and Colander 2010). To understand society is to learn not only the conditions that limit the lives of human beings but also the opportunities open to them to improve their conditions. Increasing knowledge of human society is as important as learning more about mathematics, physics, chemistry, or engineering, for unless one can develop societies in which human beings can live happy, meaningful, and satisfying lives, one cannot reap the benefits from learning how to make better automobiles and skyscrapers, travelling in space, or constructing faster computers. In the words of Albert Einstein: "Politics is more difficult than physics and the world is more likely to die from bad politics than from bad physics" (cited in Hunt and Colander 2004, p. 4). Indeed, so important are the social sciences to state and society that the tragic events of September 11, 2001 in the United States may be explained from a social science perspective. For instance, answers to the following questions fall under the purview of the social sciences: (i) What forces drove the hijackers to undertake such actions? (ii) What forces led the passengers to organize together to thwart them? and (iii) What might have prevented the hijackings? (Frieden and Lake 2005).

It is widely recognized that the social sciences have an important track record in the transformation of Western European countries from labour intensive agricultural economies to modern urban high-tech societies. European welfare states have particularly required a substantial input from social research. What is less well understood is that the conceptual structure, methodology, and research practice of the social sciences themselves have reflected their relevance, and that all this is rapidly changing as a consequence of the changing forms of governance (Sulkunen 2007).

The relevance of the social sciences to some professions such as law (Berard 2009) and medicine (Eisberg and Kleinman 1981) has been underscored. For instance, for legal education:

> The interaction of law and social science is something with which the law student will want more than a passing familiarity. Ideally, this would include exposure to the methodology of the social sciences, including some statistics; the student should be equipped to exercise some critical judgment upon claims advanced by social scientists whether in economics, political science, sociology, psychology, or anthropology. Law is a social science. The other social sciences are vital to law, since law is preoccupied with human behavior and its implications (American Bar Association 1980, p. 118).

Similarly in medicine, even though physicians believe that biomedical sciences have made and will continue to make important contributions to better health, they are "no less firmly persuaded that a comprehensive understanding of health and illness, an understanding of the social sciences is equally important" (Eisberg and Kleinman 1981, p. ix). In addition, the social sciences provide physicians with "empirically verifiable knowledge that serves as a foundation for understanding and influencing individual, group and societal actions relevant to improving and maintaining health" (National Academy of Sciences 2004, p. 5). The relevance of

the social sciences to medicine has led to the introduction of some subjects such as medical sociology, medical geography, health economics and history of medicine in some universities across the world.

In addition to what has been said so far about the relevance of the social sciences, it is also important to emphasize their normative concerns. They are indispensable in laying the foundations of analytical and creative minds, which are required to adjust to an increasingly interdependent world, and to deal with political and economic realities as well as create and widen the popular base for human values, namely, freedom, justice, trust, mutual respect, and respect for diversity (Smith 2000).

Even though the relevance of the social sciences for the job market may be seen as limited in some ways, given the competencies that their students gain, they are able to perform better in employments which demand retraining and adaptation of knowledge and skills than their science counterparts (Hunt and Colander 2010).

A more nuanced part of the debate is over the policy relevance or irrelevance of the social sciences. According to those who consider the social sciences irrelevant, relevance requires better theory and better-designed tests to fulfil the expectations and needs of those who make policy, or simply those who want to understand better our complex world—theory and tests which the social sciences do not have. In short, social science practitioners have failed to use their detailed empirical knowledge to offer opinions and identify with some confidence the forces that have driven issues and interactions in the state and society (Tsebelis 2002; Trachtenberg 1991; Hutchinson et al. 2008). Two cases highlight the perceived policy irrelevance. In May 2012, Jeff Flake, a member of the US House of Representatives, managed to persuade a House majority (218–208) to vote to block the National Science Foundation (NSF) from funding political science research. Flake argued that the NSF would no longer "waste taxpayer dollars on a meritless programme." Similarly, in the *New York Times*, the philosopher Gary Gutting advised policy makers to ignore the social sciences on the grounds of unreliability (Marar 2012).

On the other hand, proponents of the policy relevance of the social sciences have pointed out that the real test of relevance is what the discipline provides in the form of approaches, theories, and analytical tools that can be marshalled to explain why events happen and what can be done to alter the course of future events. In addition, the social sciences have been involved in academic and practitioners' debates which have resulted in several academic publications, conferences and workshops and have reached broad audiences, while some professors of the social sciences have engaged in public or government service (Frieden and Lake 2005).

Furthermore, according to the Business/Higher Education Roundtable (2002) the social sciences and policies are important in ensuring the maintenance and functioning of a stable society by attempting to provide a more equitable distribution of wealth and income as well as ensuring an understanding of governance and institutions of civil society. Universities have played a key role in providing social science courses which educate graduates in the philosophy, knowledge and the new developments of the social sciences. This enables government agencies to access skilled social scientists who are capable of developing and implementing new and appropriate social science policies to meet the needs of an ever changing world.

The importance of the social sciences in Ghana cannot be underestimated. They constitute about 70 % of the student population in both public and private universities in Ghana and therefore contribute to revenue-generation in these institutions. Moreover, social science students and lecturers have served in past and present governments, thus contributing to policy relevance. In terms of scholarship, there has been an avalanche of publications (either theoretical, empirical and comparative or a combination of these) from the social sciences in universities in Ghana and the diaspora on virtually all aspects of the Ghanaian state and society. This contribution of the social scientists must be viewed against the backdrop of the fact that Ghana is not only the "paradigmatic African country" (Ayee et al. 1999) but also "a microcosm of social, political and economic processes in Africa. The Ghanaian proclivity for experimentation has made Ghana into a veritable laboratory for the investigation of different approaches to endemic African problems" (Pellow and Chazan 1986, pp. 209–210). This volume, therefore, brings together under "one roof" the scholarship of most of the key social scientists in Ghana and their contributions to their disciplines.

It is against this backdrop that the contribution of this book should be viewed. First, the book contributes to the ongoing debate over not only the "scientific" nature of the social sciences but also their diversity, complexity and policy relevance. Second, it is most likely the first compilation of its kind in Ghana that brings together discussions of the evolution of scholarship in different branches of the social sciences. The volume has a two-fold aim, namely, to: (i) present in one volume a comprehensive multi-disciplinary collection of papers on the changing dynamics of the social sciences in Ghana; and (ii) provide a broader perspective from which to view the evolution, theory, methods, substance and policy relevance over time of each of the social science disciplines and their multiple interfaces. This ensures, first, a historical perspective, and second attention to specific issues (evolution, theory, methods, substance and policy relevance) in each of the disciplines covered. The ultimate goal of the book is to enable readers to compare and appreciate the synergies, differences, trends and nuances between the social science disciplines in a holistic and scholarly manner. Thus, regardless of the audience, the chapters have been set up to facilitate meaningful comparisons, with as few gaps as possible. The book, therefore, is for academics, students, practitioners and the general reader who are interested in promoting the contours and boundaries of the social sciences.

The book has 17 chapters, 15 of them devoted to some of the disciplines of the social sciences while Chaps. 1 and 17 cover the introduction and conclusion, respectively. The disciplines are arranged in clusters based on their cognate nature and interrelatedness, even though in one or two cases, such relationships may be disputed (for instance, Geography and Archaeology or Heritage Studies and History). Chapters 2, 3 and 4 are covered by Archaeology and Heritage Studies, History and Geography and Resource Development, respectively. Psychology, Sociology and Social Work are contained in Chaps. 5, 6 and 7 respectively. Economics is in Chap. 8, Political Science in Chap. 9 and International Relations in Chap. 10. Information Studies and Communication Studies occupy Chaps. 11 and 12, respectively. Chapters 13, 14, 15 and 16 are devoted to what may be referred to as the

eclectic disciplines of African Studies, Development Studies, Women and Gender Studies and Adult and Continuing Education respectively. The analytical framework for most of the 15 chapters is based on the evolution, growth, theories, methods, substance and their policy relevance. The richness of the chapters lies in the different evolution and growth of the disciplines, the challenges that faced them and how they were addressed, the scholarship built around them, especially from the Ghanaian perspective, curricular transformation and in some cases the change in nomenclature of the departments in which they were taught; for instance, from Archaeology to Archaeology and Heritage Studies and from Library and Archival Studies to Information Studies. The influence of globalization on the disciplines has been underscored even if not directly. Chapter 17, the Conclusion, is devoted to the implications of the chapters for the theoretical, comparative and empirical literature and the future of the social sciences.

As we close this introduction to the book, it is instructive to emphasize that the chapters were written mostly by scholars at the University of Ghana (UG) from the perspective and trajectory of the disciplines at the university. The book therefore does not cover some the disciplines as they evolve in the other public universities in Ghana such as the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), University of Cape Coast (UCC), University of Education, Winneba (UEW) and the University of Development Studies (UDS). This could be a strength or weakness depending on how one looks at the contribution of the book. However, as editors, it is our view that the issue of a more comprehensive book on social sciences in Ghanaian universities should be an agenda for future research and therefore a different academic pursuit.

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