

A Social Science Manifesto

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Talk by Professor Craig Calhoun: A Social
Science Manifesto

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Society is real

- * Not just the sum of individuals but a condition for individuals
- * Relationships not a thing.
 - * Direct and indirect
 - * Subjectively meaningful and objective-systemic
- * Not separate from politics, economics, or culture but integrated with all

Social science enables understanding and choices

- * Not all conscious
 - * Social science enables consciousness and choice
 - * Policy
 - * Behavioral change
 - * And understanding of less conscious processes
 - * Cultural change
 - * Unintended consequences
- * Not free from material constraints
 - * But social science clarifies what is possible
 - * Technology creates capacities, but is socially shaped

Social Science was born of
intellectual transformations
shaped by “real world”
transformations

- * The rise of the modern state
- * Capitalism
- * Exploration, empire, and globalization
- * Science
- * Urbanization and transformations of scale
- * Individualism and transformation of everyday life
- * Secularism
- * Nationalism
- * Social Movements

Social science is crucial now

Some of the modern issues remain basic in new forms

- * States
- * Capitalism
- * Urbanization
- * Globalization

The pivotal 1970s crises

- * Crises of welfare state bargains
 - * Expanding redistribution of wealth
 - * Expanding state role in service delivery
- * Crises of the capitalist world system
 - * End of Bretton Woods, OPEC oil shock
 - * Turn to debt and finance
 - * Partly occasioned by politics
 - * e.g., financing the Vietnam War
- * Crises of the reliance on traditional culture to stabilize social participation
 - * Gender and family
 - * Ethnicity and community
- * The end of the postwar boom
- * Often identified with a crisis of sociology
 - * Which sometimes retreated into specialization

New Problems of Social Cohesion

- * Differentiation and need for articulation and integration
 - * Of “value spheres”
 - * Of sectors
 - * Of institutions
 - * Of fields
 - * Of cultures and subcultures
 - * Migration and minorities
- * Inequality
- * Addressing conflicts and making choices

The Turn Against the Social

- * Neoliberalism

- * The campaign for possessive individualism

- * Hayekians, Friedmanites and markets as freedom

- * Thatcher

- * Ronald Reagan's failure to use his college major

- * The naturalization of the private

- * Understood as possessive, property-holding individualism

- * Making both public and social seem contingent

- * The gutting of government

- * Encouraged also by antiauthoritarian romanticism of the Left

Deficient Provision of Public Goods

- * Restructuring
 - * Education,
 - * Health,
 - * Communications media
 - * Security
 - * and a range of other services strengthen society
- * This started before the financial crisis and the current wave of austerity programs
 - * Reflecting an era of financialization since the 1970s

Fragmentation vs. Cohesion

- * Enclave societies
 - * Ethnic
 - * Lifestyle
- * Political polarization
- * Intensified inequality
- * Challenges of migration
- * Incarceration
- * Attempted integration on larger scales
 - * Europe
- * Cohesion on what terms and at what scale?

Risk

- * Privatization
- * Profit-based approaches
- * Institutional deficits
- * Environment and Climate Change

Globalization

- * Of money and markets
 - * And capital accumulation
- * Of media
 - * Distribution, ownership
 - * Participation in new media
- * Of migration
 - * In diasporas and circuits not just flows
- * Of movements
 - * Feminism
 - * Environment
 - * Social Justice
- * Of transnational organizations
 - * MNCs
 - * NGOs
- * Of fate
 - * But not of understanding or identity

The Return of Geopolitics

- * The weakness of global institutions
- * The growing importance of regional structures
 - * Sometimes also changing relations of local to national
- * Crossroads and frontiers
 - * Cf. Central Asia
- * New security challenges
 - * Small wars
 - * Terrorism
- * The geographies of social solidarity
- * Will the modern world system be renewed?
 - * Chinese hegemony?
 - * Multilateral leadership?

Social science needs to change to understand a changing world

- * Social science must be at once national and global
 - * And this involves changing questions, changing relations and learning processes
- * Social science needs better integration across its own internal divisions
 - * Methodological (esp. qualitative and quantitative)
 - * Theoretical-perspectival (redefining objectivity as the maximization of perspectives – Nietzsche)
 - * Disciplines and interdisciplinary fields
 - * Problem-oriented inquiry
 - * Academic and professional
- * Social science needs to engage broad publics and movements

This starts with asking big questions

- * What is the future of the nation-state?
- * Is a more egalitarian society possible? How?
- * What are the ways religion can inform social life and what are their implications?
- * Can environmental degradation and climate change be stopped?
 - * How?
 - * How may societies adapt?
- * What are the imaginable and achievable social futures
 - * Will anyone mobilize to pursue them?

Avoiding false dichotomies

- * Global and local
- * Traditional and modern
- * Structure and action
- * Individual and society
- * Interpretation and objectivity
- * Political economy and culture
- * Deviant and normal
- * Theoretical and empirical
- * Macro and micro

Integrating

- * Disciplines
 - * As disciplines conventions for studying a connected reality, not divisions in reality
- * Perspectives
 - * Including context-specific
- * Problem-oriented research
- * Public social science

And new imagination