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Sciences with the Science

Éditions A. Athéna

Societies, sciences & Social Sciences and Humanities

Sociétés, sciences et sciences humaines et sociales

DOI: 10.4000/books.allianceathena.232

Publisher: Éditions A. Athéna

Place of publication: Paris

Year of publication: 2015

Published on OpenEdition Books: 29 July 2015

Series: Collection ATHENA

Electronic EAN: 9791093170114



<http://books.openedition.org>

Electronic reference

COMMAILLE, Jacques ; THIBAUT, Françoise. *Societies, sciences & Social Sciences and Humanities In: Sciences with the Science* [online]. Paris: Éditions A. Athéna, 2015 (generated 16 mai 2023). Available on the Internet: <<http://books.openedition.org/allianceathena/232>>. ISBN: 9791093170114. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.allianceathena.232>.

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Societies, sciences & Social Sciences and Humanities

Three evolutions should be stressed upon if one wants to think the place of Social Sciences and Humanities in their relations to other sciences and to human societies.

The first evolution concerns the field of knowledge addressed by Social Sciences and Humanities.

On the one hand, over the last decades, the SSH have established their ability to work in an interdisciplinary way, especially to analyse the various questions of collective identity, of the making of private universes in reference to

public spaces, of social and political structures and cohesion and of processing the building of new citizenships.

On the other hand, the SSH have brought many proofs of the fact that ‘natural’ issues (resources, climate etc.), and technological issues cannot be separated from issues regarding the subjectivity and agentivity of the individuals, taking into account their ways of creating collective organisations with their vision of the world, inspired by the past, immersed in the present and marked by different ways of considering the future.

All the efforts accomplished to assert the identity and to establish the boundaries of the field of the SSH have led to new perspectives on collective work, where the main objectives are to reach a knowledge in reference to the issues our societies are addressing today.

Such is, for instance, the whole project of the Maisons des Sciences de l’Homme initiated in France at the beginning of the 60’s and generalised at the end of the 90’s.

The second evolution refers to the sharp question of the statute of science. The confrontation is intense between a science called ‘Science of Nature’ which aims at integrating human dynamics and a science which can be described as a ‘Science of Measurements’, stronger than ever, which reduces human beings to a few observable and quantifiable phenomena.

For the first ones, the human being is explicitly part of the causal chain of nature, through transformations which, willingly or unwillingly, lead to the world he or she lives in. Science is then considered a human production and an activity which must be permanently questioned in the names of its responsibility towards the humans and of the impacts it can have upon them. This science tends to give the SSH a major role as compared with what it used to have in former schemes.

For the latter ones, the human being is an object just like any other, that an omnipotent science would eventually be able to decipher completely. The immanence of such a science shelters it from permanent questioning, so that many SSH disciplines are refused any scientific status because of their too close acquaintance with subjectivity and creativity.

The third evolution concerns the integration of scientific and technological breakthroughs in a new model for regulating societies, the latter being considered in its societal, economic, legal and political dimensions. The advancement in sciences, its multiple impacts on humans and on societies do not suffice to define the idea of progress and even less so to generate confidence in the future.

A progress that would not include the many components of a society nor confront the world as a whole cannot be considered as such. It arouses, more today than in the past, defiance, hostility, disqualification and even rejection (possibly together with the rejection of the democratic social model), if these

questions concerning the meaning of problems are not met and possible solutions to solve them are not defined.

It is in that sense that radically diverging conceptions of what is modernity and the place that should be given to science confront each other in human societies.

A refusal of sciences for the benefit of beliefs could be an answer to the vision of an omnipotent science. However the historical process of supranationalisation and transnationalisation, the imbalance in the way spaces are occupied (growing urbanisation, dismantling of social spaces etc.), the dents in the living together (rise of 'singularist' societies), the uncertainties in the networks of socialisation and in the sharing of current and future resources, as well as the ecological problems, all show how indispensable it is to develop the practice of a global, open and reflexive science that would transcend disciplinary boundaries inherited from past centuries and give the great achievements of the of SSH a status of knowledge to be shared by all researchers.