

INTRODUCTION

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At the beginning of 2018, the *Annals* invited leading economists, sociologists and historians of science to participate in a symposium on the relationships between economics and other social sciences. Potential contributors had been selected for the understanding their research demonstrates of many of the issues involved. The symposium was intended to generate new thinking about such relationships and their importance in science and research. This special sub-issue is the first of a series – a sort of permanent forum for ideas – that the *Annals* will attempt at organizing, around the issue of the relations between different disciplines in an era of rapidly increasing specialization and more and more fragmented knowledge. The four essays gathered here all reflect upon the status of economics *qua* social science, which they problematize from different but complementary perspectives.

As known, the dismal science has long been criticized for expanding its method and analytical vision into territories traditionally occupied by other disciplines. The presumed superiority of economics would rest, Edward Lazear (2000) famously and proudly noted, on rigor, relevance, and generality; and on the use of a rigorous language that allows economists to get rid of complexity in providing the answers to issue identified by broader-thinking social scientists. It evidently appears highly implausible that Lazear (or other leading orthodox economists) would restate the argument today, at a time when the economics profession is self-reflecting on the limits of its disciplinary approach to human behavior. Still, there seems to be little intrinsic to this approach that can truly explain why Lazear's reasoning is not so fashionable any longer; a sense of "superiority" and "insularity" (Fourcade, Ollion and Algan 2015) arguably continue to define the field. Rather, increasing awareness of the somehow pluralist character of today's mainstream economics (being populated by an heterogeneous ensemble of research programmes, each deviating from the neoclassical core) and even

of the seeming ineluctability of incursions of other sciences into economics itself (see Davis 2016; Cedrini and Fontana 2018) are now compelling economists to ground their defense of economics on the “variety” of models allowed by the discipline (see Rodrik 2015, and the special issue of the *Journal of Economic Methodology* on Rodrik’s book, vol. 25, n. 3, 2018).

To borrow from Keynes, the issue investigates the present status of economics in the light of its past, for the purposes of the future. Roger Backhouse and Philippe Fontaine address the current position of economics in relation to other social sciences in the United States by means of a historical reconstruction of the changing nature of such interactions since the end of WWI. They find that economists’ curiosity – varying in degree and quality – for what has happened outside their own disciplines is not a recent phenomenon, and rather, it has clearly contributed to the evolution of economics itself over the past hundred years, and will, with all evidence and all the more so, influence the future of the discipline. Cross-disciplinary ventures are also the main focus of Mark White’s reflections on (today’s) relationship of economics and ethics – evidently a critical issue in a general discussion of economics *qua* social science. White’s argument highlights the emergence of economics and ethics as cross-disciplinary-in-nature field within economics, and illustrates the two trajectories of development (a “heterodox” research programme and an “accommodationist”, mainstream-friendly perspective) the field has originated in contributing to the evolution of the discipline. In his comment on White’s work, John Davis outlines a “complexity theory explanation” of the possible, trans-disciplinary-in-essence future of economics and ethics, and draws on this example to claims that, given ubiquitous specialization in research, relations between different disciplines will probably acquire more importance in (present and) future knowledge development than progress within firmly-established disciplines. Finally, sociologist Alain Caillé – the leading intellectual of the Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales, MAUSS – takes wings into the future. In his article (an abridged version of the introduction to the volume by A. Caillé, P. Chanial, S. Dufoix and F. Vandenberghe, eds., *Des sciences sociales à la science sociale. Sur des fondements non utilitaristes* forthcoming in French), building upon the contributions of some 30 “generalist” specialists who participated in an academic meeting held in 2015 on the future of social sciences, Caillé shows the possible, anti-utilitarian foundations for a reunification of social sciences on radically alternative bases to those provided by the centripetal force of the economic-utilitarian “model”.

In the same spirit of the four contributions presented here, we hope that the community of interested scholars will find in this symposium both the required informative basis and the launch of original perspectives

to further investigate the future of the relations of economics and other social sciences and of knowledge development in social sciences broadly considered.

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