WHAT IS SOCIAL SCIENCE?

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Like many another English word, science is used in a variety of senses from knowledge or comprehension to art or skill and its meaning in any context must be judged from that context. The usual meaning seems to be knowledge gained by systematic observation or knowledge coordinated and systematized, i.e., science, referring whether to method of gaining knowledge or to a body of knowledge, implies something more than sporadic activity. There is often contrast between science and art as may be illustrated by a quotation from Ruskin ("The Eagle's Nest"): 

In science you must not talk before you know. In art you must not talk before you do. In literature you must not talk before you think. . . Science—the knowledge of things, whether Ideal or Substantial. Art—the modification of Substantial things by our Substantial Power. Literature—the modification of Ideal things by our Ideal Power.

It will be noted that Ruskin does not here emphasize the systematic nature of that knowledge which is science, but inasmuch as without a certain degree of continuity there could hardly be art or literature I take it that the passage must imply the same of science.¹

¹Whether it is justifiable to place this interpretation on Ruskin's words may be questioned. Certainly his primary definition of science is sheer factual knowledge. "It is not the arrangement of new systems, nor the discovery of new facts, which constitutes a man of science; but the submission to an eternal system; and the proper grasp of the facts already known." (Art. 37) "We are so much, by the chances of our time, accustomed to think of science as a process of discovery, that I am sure some of you must have been gravely disconcerted by my requesting, and will to-day be more disconcerted by, my firmly recommending, you to use the word, and reserve the
Editor's Summary

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