

event was perceived in very different ways by different witnesses. Where then is the certainty?

Likewise, I am not convinced that Chinese culture is as socialized as all that. Daoist and Buddhist thought both place great emphasis on personal cognition, if the Daoist idea of not knowing can be placed under that umbrella as well. Daoists acknowledge that the Way is unity, consisting of all things, yet they pursue it on a solitary path. Buddhists search for enlightenment using devices such as contemplation which require individual effort. Both these are strong moderating influences on the Confucian socialisation described by Lin. The socialisation of certainty exists, yes, but it is by no means as complete as he describes. In my view, I believe there is a difference between perspectives of East and West, but that difference is not as stark as the author thinks. Westerners are more tolerant of ambiguity than is generally perceived, and the Chinese are perhaps a little less so. The difference is one of degree rather than kind. In the West, though we deal with ambiguity on a daily basis, we are taught to shy away from it, and it is regarded as having little place in our academic worlds, for example; most scholarly research aims to eliminate ambiguity, and this has corresponding problems for futures thinking. The Chinese are taught to accept it; but that does not mean they are necessarily adept at doing so, and there have been movements to try to deal with or ‘tame’ ambiguity in various ways.

These things apart, this book is a powerful one and deserves consideration as we seek for new ways of understanding the world, particularly the future. The writing is complex and often technical, and readers with little or no background in philosophy may find the going heavy in places.

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Chaos of disciplines

Andrew Delano Abbott. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2001 (cloth), \$54.00 (Hbk), \$17.00 (Pbk)

How does social science change? If answers served up by early versions of positivism and extremist strains of constructivism leave you unmoved, Andrew Abbott's *Chaos of Disciplines* fills the gap by inferring that new schools and theories do not so much react to older schools of thoughts as reinvent them in unfamiliar forms and idiom. The explication of this argument in Chapters 1–5 (pp. 3–153) will fascinate and likely frustrate hatchet persons on both sides of campus political wars. A Kantian to confound other devotees of Immanuel Kant, Professor Andrew Abbott is an institutional sociologist (p. 92, fn. 1). He has already made his mark with a 1982 disser-

tation and books on the social history of psychiatry and psychology and on social theory [1–4].

Additional information about the author's intellectual roots may help some prospective readers. "The true intellectual sources of my views on symbolic systems," Abbott tells us a touch sardonically, "lie in the theory of culture before it was overrun by the textual glitterati." "I grew up," he continues, "on the [Ernst] Cassirer-[Susanne K. K.] Langer-[George Herbert] Meade philosophy of knowledge, the Kuhnian [after Thomas S. Kuhn] sociology of science, the Marxian theory of ideology, and the classical tradition of social and cultural anthropology from [Bronislaw] Malinowski to the early [Clifford] Geertz" (p. 4, fn. 1). Abbott owes significantly fewer intellectual debts to Karl Marx or Max Weber than one might expect. Thus, Abbott declares his eclectic bona fides. But much to Abbott's chagrin, his ability to discern similarities between apparently incompatible theories was not appreciated by academic partisans (pp. ix–x). Indeed, that eclecticism has led to his losing many arguments from undergraduate years to his current post-tenure career as Chair of the Department of Sociology at The University of Chicago.

Abbott's eclecticism also pushed him into writing *Chaos of Disciplines*. He nudges self-satisfied social science practitioners away from complacency. Futurists—and all social scientists—should tackle Abbott's book. It reacts to many (but not all) important trends in sociology and other social sciences since the late 1960s. Abbott's "general aim is to establish self-similarity as a fundamental modality of structure in human affairs" (p. xvi).

Abbott reports a general finding that defies the assertions of true-believing diehard positivists and interpretationists: "If we take any group of sociologists and lock them in a room, they will argue and at once differentiate themselves into positivists and interpretivists. But if we separate those two groups and lock *them* in separate rooms, *those* two groups will each in turn divide over the same issue! (p. xvi). This suggests a risky social experiment that the more adventurous among us may contemplate conducting in the privacy of one's department! Eschewing the role of instigator, I fortuitously conducted a passive naturalistic observation after reading *Chaos of Discipline*. Following a lecture by a self-styled postmodernist, an opportunity arose when those not committed to his faith serendipitously remained silent. As Abbott might have predicted, the faithful subdivided into two distinct groups: While some insisted on a more focused, policy-relevant interpretation with greater care for explicit norms and canons of evidence, others were content endlessly to interrogate the questions at hand.

Abbott finds common ground between the following well-known quantitative/qualitative epistemological antipodes: positivism/interpretation, analysis/narrative, realism/constructionism, social structure/culture, individual level/emergent level, and transcendent knowledge/situated knowledge (p. 28). Is every trend in the social sciences to be understood fractally? Yes, insists, Abbott, that is, unless one is a dogmatist. For Abbott, opposing perspectives mutually reflect one another's distinctions. And developments seen by others as a Hegelian dialectic of progress are understood by Abbott as renaming and relabeling.

Part I ("Self-Similarity in Social Science") of *Chaos of Disciplines* consists of

five tightly argued essays. These are as follows: “The Chaos of Disciplines” (pp. 3–33), “The Duality of Stress” (pp. 34–59), “The Fraction of Construction” (pp. 60–90), “The Unity of History” (pp. 91–120), and “The Context of Disciplines” (pp. 121–153).

Two errors of omission mar Table 2.1 (p. 40) and temporarily slow the flow of argumentation in Chapter 2. Table 2.1’s intimate connection with Figure 2.1 (“Articles in Popular Magazines”) on the same page should be made explicit. It deserves a title and a vertical left label (“Percent of articles”) so the reader will not have to puzzle out the crosstab headers.

Fractals shape social life at large, according to Abbott. And methods are related to morals but not in the way asserted by ideologues. Part II (pp. 155–123) of *Chaos of Disciplines* extends fractal analysis to society and morality in a wide-ranging, provocative style. Yes, even systems of ethics are said to “function fractally” (p. 214). As the reader of this review now suspects, the book will push the buttons of participants in hotly debated topics over equality, multiculturalism and a host of contested topics in academia today.

In potential affinity with futurists, Abbott’s initial definition of sociology broadly acknowledges “that the discipline is not very good at excluding things from itself” (p. 5). Again, like many futurists, Abbott does not see that breadth as a liability. Arguing cogently that, if pushed, Kantian dualism between pure and practical reason collapses (pp. 7–9), Abbott infers and tests the claim that “nested dichotomies” (p. 9, fn. 13) of fractals, that is, self-similar knowledge structures, cause social science concepts to slip and to reshuffle continuously (pp. 9–33).

Abbott’s orientation to change in symbolic systems like sociology as cyclical but fractal lets him make some predictions. Referring to sociological tribes and schools of since the Sixties, his classification of “Positions of Various Groups on Various Important Dichotomies” ranging from macro/micro to quantitative/qualitative” is profound (p. 102, Table 41).

Chaos of Disciplines belongs on reading lists for advanced political science or sociology qualifying examinations. For example, Abbott’s argument complements an earlier critique of comparative politics by Lawrence C. Mayer [5]. For style, content and likely impact, *Chaos of Disciplines* should be linked with seminal but ecumenically communicated insights by Gary King, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba [6] into logical similarities between the best of qualitative and quantitative political science research. Abbott has begun to do for sociology what Graham Molitor did a quarter-century ago for public policy change [7]. In a dedicatory footnote to Chapter 7 (“The Selfishness of Men”), Abbott self-deprecatingly describes his effort as “fumbling” (p. 197). I agree with the author that that his social structural and moral arguments” in Part II are relatively “undeveloped” (p. xvi). Even so, Abbott’s comments on “false consciousness and hegemony,” zealous academic “condescension” towards opponents, “power without reference to our personal values,” “equality,” “inequality,” “multiculturalism” and “moral reparameterization” will be lightning rods (pp. 187–231) for productive controversy.

If the cases one selects to illustrate a thesis determine the limits of a book’s inferences, *Chaos of Disciplines* might have ventured more deeply into the relevant polit-

ical science literature than Abbott's sensible analysis of Robert Dahl's concept of "power" (pp. 205–212). Nor does Abbott directly address the futures studies literature, especially that by Wendell Bell and other sociologists since the 1960s. Of course, implementing these implied suggestions would substantially lengthen *Chaos of Disciplines*. Yet the catholicity of Abbott's book suggests that he would be interested! This reviewer infers that Abbott would invite futurists to confirm or disconfirm the extent to which futures studies has been ingested by other disciplines, as well as to specify the emerging trends and circumstances under which futures studies may survive as a separate academic field and profession and to what extent is the knowledge foundation of futures studies not just progressive but cumulative.

Those familiar with Abbott's earlier work will want to know that earlier versions of Chapters 1–4 and 6 appeared as journal articles and conference papers. Graduate research libraries specializing in futures studies, philosophy of science, general sociology, sociology of knowledge, general psychology, political theory, and general anthropology should acquire *Chaos of Disciplines*.

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