



Interactions: Some Contacts between the Natural Sciences and the Social Sciences

I. Bernard Cohen

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One of the fruits of the Scientific Revolution was the idea of a social science - a science of government, of individual behavior, and of society - that would operate in ways comparable to the newly triumphant natural sciences. Thus was set in motion a long and often convoluted chain of two-way interactions that still have implications for both scholarship and public policy. This book, by the dean of American historians of science, offers an excellent historical perspective on these interactions. The core of the book consists of two long essays. The first focuses on the role of analogies as linking factors between the two realms. Examples are drawn from the physics of rational mechanics and energy physics (in relation to marginalist or neoclassical economics) and from the biology of the cell theory (in relation to nineteenth-century sociology). The second essay looks closely at the relations between the natural and the social sciences in the period of the Scientific Revolution. The book also includes a record of a series of conversations between the author and Harvey Brooks (Professor of Technology and Public Policy Emeritus at Harvard) that addresses the present-day public policy implications of the historical interactions between the natural and the social sciences. A short but illuminating history of the terms "natural science" and "social science" concludes the book.



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