INTRODUCTION

Discipline and Freedom

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In the current era, the basic organizational unit of intellectual life in the academy—the discipline—finds itself under reconstruction, in response to both internal and external pressures. Outside the academy, much humanities and social science scholarship is dismissed as overly specialized, arcane, and ideologically invested, and for that reason, socially and economically irrelevant. Inside the academy, the value and merit of disciplinary boundaries and methods have become a highly contested issue. A number of traditional disciplines with secure institutional homes have sought to stretch their boundaries, while a highly visible group of “post-disciplinary” programs and units—such as women’s studies and cultural studies—have deliberately defined themselves against strict disciplinary affiliations, pursuing instead an eclectic combination of fields, methods, and theories.

These developments have occasioned tensions, debates, and disputes within and across the disciplines. Many critics of interdisciplinary innovation charge it with superficiality, lack of rigor, and abandonment of those carefully developed methodologies that have assured disciplinary integrity and success. Supporters of interdisciplinarity argue in return that their hybrid practices generate new forms of knowledge and answer to some of the most pointed charges against academic specialization and inaccessibility. At the institutional level, we can see the effects of this ongoing contest. Recognizing the claims of interdisciplinarity, many universities have inaugurated special humanities institutes, which typically bring together scholars from different disciplines working on similar issues or themes. Yet the overall budget structure of the university also shows deep intellectual, financial, and structural investments in traditional disciplinary boundaries, particularly in response to competition for “leading-department” status within colleges or throughout the university as a whole.

What has often been lacking in our current disciplinary debates is a longer perspective that would enable us to understand better their historical conditions and developments. This collection proposes to help address this need by stepping back to consider the formation of disciplinary knowledge during the last third of the nineteenth century. The end of the Victorian era is especially important to the understanding of disciplinarity because this was the
time which saw the emergence and professionalization of numerous disciplines or intellectual fields that might be broadly gathered under the rubric of the “human sciences”: aesthetics, anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, sexology, and economics. We feel that such an undertaking is especially timely insofar as current celebrations of interdisciplinarity often harbor within them a deep—yet insufficiently examined—distrust of these traditional disciplines. Such traditional disciplines are seen at best as narrow and unimaginative, and at worst as complicit in larger forms of power and policing, as modes of discipline that participate in larger ideological agendas. For example, the editors of the highly influential collection *Cultural Studies* write, “It is problematic for cultural studies simply to adopt, uncritically, any of the formalized disciplinary practices of the academy, for those practices, as much as the distinctions they inscribe, carry with them a heritage of disciplinary investments and exclusions and a history of social effects that cultural studies would often be inclined to repudiate.”

The assumptions underlying such a statement, as well as the accompanying assumption of interdisciplinarity’s inherent value or relative freedom from ideological complicity, merit close historical scrutiny. Indeed, the essays collected here stand as representative examples of a revisionist approach more attentive to the historical dimensions of disciplinarity. In part, they do so by providing more focused genealogies of specific disciplinary developments and interactions in a broad range of fields, including English, sociology, economics, psychology, and quantum physics. Such focused genealogies, both singly and jointly, thwart any precipitous claims that the story of disciplinary formation is one of consolidation, constraint, or ideological justification. Indeed, many of the essays present startling reversals of conventional wisdom. Viewed together, moreover, the arguments contained herein suggest a rather different story about the relationship between disciplinarity and the dialectic of constraint and freedom. Put most succinctly: if the tendency is now to associate interdisciplinarity with freedom, and disciplinarity with constraint, a closer look at the history of these disciplines shows that the dialectic of agency and determinism, currently distributed across the disciplinary/interdisciplinary divide, was at the heart of disciplinarity formation itself.

The very term “human sciences” captures the inherent tension between a need for certain principles of causality so as to develop full-scale field models and a need to honor the voluntary and not fully predictable dimensions of human life and action. Indeed, the recurrent concern within the human sciences that scientific models of human action might obliterate or fail to register freedom and agency is testimony to the centrality of this problematic. The sixth book of John Stuart Mill’s *System of Logic*, entitled *On the Logic of the Moral Sciences*, is one striking and early instance of this particular problematic, insofar as Mill acrobatically attempts to preserve a
site of freedom in his proposed science of human character. In the Logic, Mill argued that we can understand human action as conforming to discoverable laws of causation if and only if we include the internal motives of individuals as one among the several forces conducing to make them act in the way that they choose. Mill’s revision of the doctrine of Philosophical Necessity thus rests upon the sense that one can predict willed behavior: “We may be free, and yet another may have reason to be perfectly certain what use we shall make of our freedom.”

Mill’s quixotic finessing of the problem of human laws did not issue in any full-fledged ethological science, as he had hoped, but the neologism selected by his German translator as the closest expression of “the moral sciences,” des Geisteswissenschaften, certainly achieved prominence in the European cultural imaginary. And the dialectic of constraint and freedom certainly shaped the conceptualizing of those intellectual paradigms that did succeed and influence the understanding of human life and behavior in the modern era.

To take a central example, the political science of Marxism was both energized and divided throughout its powerful history by its simultaneous attachment to the revolutionary voluntarism of the Communist Manifesto, from which it drew its political force, and the historical determinism of Capital, upon which it based its scientific status. According to the latter, the triumph of socialism should proceed automatically from the iron laws of political economy, as advances in the means of production repeatedly fractured the existing relations of production. According to the former, the triumph of socialism required the strategic and deliberate expression of the collective consciousness of the proletariat. The theoretical debates over the so-called heresies of economism, technologism, and historicism, which dominated the first and second Internationals, and continued through the rise of the New Left, all emerged from this fundamental and finally irresolvable crux. So did related and still more urgent pragmatic debates on revolutionary methodology: to precipitate radical change was almost by definition to fall into the error of stealing a jump on the laws of history that would ensure the success of the socialist project; to abide the laws of historical development was to subject revolutionary activity and, by extension, the socialist project, to an endlessly self-perpetuating delay. Faced with this conundrum, Rosa Luxemburg fashioned a model of historical determinism with a strong logical resemblance to Mill’s doctrine of Philosophical Necessity. By her account, the failures occasioned by precipitate revolutionary action form the groundwork, factor into the laws, of the dialectical triumph of socialism: that is, the necessity of history incorporates the waywardness of the collective will in working out its irresistible design.

That other monument of late-Victorian intellectual culture, psycho-analysis, was likewise theoretically grounded in a deterministic account of
human agency that its own practical agenda looked, and claimed, to belie.
The location of a pathogenic interplay of conflicting modes of desire (sexual vs. social, erotic vs. egotonic, eros vs. thanatos) proved crucial to the development of psychoanalysis as a hermeneutical discipline, but it threatened to compromise, not to say preclude, the possibility of the truly critical self-consciousness essential to the perfection of psychoanalysis as a therapeutic discipline. Freud’s admonition that a patient’s understanding of the nature and etiology of his or her symptoms does not entail nor even predict the patient’s amelioration amounts to an implicit acknowledgment of this disciplinary rift upon which psychoanalysis was founded. To go beyond such symptomatic awareness (in both senses of the phrase), the patient must traverse his or her fundamental fantasy, a process that involves embracing the underlying conditions of human perceptual and behavioral tendencies, in order to reopen and to change—without controlling or even finally understanding—the patient’s relationship to them. Just as Mill needed to find a measure of predictability in a nonetheless robust human freedom, so Freud needed to isolate an aleatory impulse in a nonetheless profound order of psychic necessity.

In each of these examples, the dialectic of freedom and constraint springs from and manifests conflicting epistemic and pragmatic stakes, divergent hermeneutic and therapeutic imperatives. On the one hand, the production of knowledge, including knowledge of the causes and consequences of social action, requires secure principles of determination, from which inferences and rules of evidence may be drawn. On the other hand, the initiation and performance of effective social actions, be it reformist or revolutionary, individual or corporate, requires a minimal degree of unconditioned agency, without which the changes wrought could not be directed to a designated end. This conflict is not only internal to but also, we suggest, constitutive of the formation of those orchestrated modes of discourse that we call intellectual or academic disciplines. Indeed, in this context, the term discipline captures the sense of a dual mandate, carrying the sense of a practical regimen into an economy of conceptual enterprise. If this is an accident of etymology, it is a happy one. For the abrasive slippage of the epistemic and the pragmatic affords a site for intertwining discourses to communicate with and distinguish themselves from one another simultaneously, bringing forth disciplinary boundaries from overlapping areas of interest and inquiry. It becomes evident, then, that disciplinariness was always interdisciplinary.

A clear example of how the tension between scientific and humanistic models shapes and drives disciplinary development within the human sciences is provided by John Guillory’s “Literary Study and the Modern System of the Disciplines,” an essay that reconstructs the ways in which English emerged out of a contest between the study of language (philology) and the
study of literature (belles lettres). In this case, philology’s demise might be attributed to its overdeveloped scientism, which could not accommodate the forms of experience that characterize the human. Belles lettres, by contrast, was underdeveloped as a discipline insofar as there was too little determinism in its design—it did not begin to produce the kinds of laws and models that would enable regularized findings and reproducible methodologies. Two further conclusions might be drawn from Guillory’s historical analysis. First, his uncovering of the contested nature of an emergent discipline confirms that disciplines are always constituted in relation to, and in a kind of dialogue with, other disciplines. And second, the current antidisiplinary impulse within cultural studies and other sectors of the academy might be seen, within the framework of this longer history, as simply replaying this earlier antiscientific impulse. For practitioners of cultural studies, the developed literary disciplines fail to acknowledge and account for forms of popular and everyday culture which exceed the formal categories and methodologies that are already in place. But consequently to call cultural studies an antidisipline or even a multidiscipline is misleading insofar as disciplinarity was always defined against fields and methodologies that could not encompass its subject. Indeed, the specific precursor to cultural studies, literary studies, could be said to be antidisiplinary in its inception in precisely the way that cultural studies imagines itself to be right now.

The crucial point here is that claims to antidisclipinarinity are always greatly exaggerated, insofar as intellectual developments require recognizable disciplinary methodologies to be minimally intelligible, and they typically involve both alliances and contests with preexisting fields. Arkady Plotnitsky’s essay, “Disciplinarity and Radicality: Quantum Theory and Nonclassical Thought at the Fin de Siècle, and as Philosophy of the Future,” provides a particularly dramatic example of the former point. Quantum physics, generally understood as a radical departure from previous forms of understanding, is by Plotnitsky’s revisionist account actually deeply conservative in its preservation of fundamental principles of disciplinary practice: logical consistency, mathematics, explanation of data, unambiguous communication. Plotnitsky, in fact, argues that quantum physics is not only compatible with disciplinary principles but may also become necessary in order to maintain those principles. In this view, a certain disciplinary coherence characterizes both classical and quantum physics; disciplinarity is not the object against which radicality pits itself but remains a fairly constant structure accommodating the radical. This powerfully demystifying approach to the relation between radicality and disciplinarity might be extended, Plotnitsky provocatively suggests, to radical thought on a number of fronts, including philosophy and literary theory. In Plotnitsky’s view, it would be possible to trace a historical codevelopment whereby radical thought in both the sciences and the humanities displayed a fundamental allegiance to conservation.
of method, even as it forwarded the most radical claims of modern and postmodern thought.

Adopting a comparative approach, Liah Greenfeld’s “How Economics Became a Science: The Surprising Career of a Model Discipline” richly contextualizes the recurring tension between agency and determinism within the history of economics. Greenfeld situates her discussion of this politically influential science by tracing its French parentage in the seventeenth century, its complex German development in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and its triumph as a coldly impersonal science in twentieth-century America. By placing the tradition of laissez-faire, and in particular the influential work of Adam Smith, within a more broadly European framework, Greenfeld brings to light a crucial modern tension between belief in universal laws and an insistence on the variability of national circumstances. Indeed, within Germany a dual emphasis on both of these dimensions of economic thought initially produced a bifurcation between Staatswirtschaft—the examination of historical, cultural, and institutional variability—and Nationalekonomie—the formulation of universal laws that subordian all local variability. A delicate balancing act between these two approaches would eventually give way in Germany to a rejection of the universalistic approach in favor of the assertion of a human managerial will tuned to culturally defined needs and capacities. Interestingly, modern economic liberalism in England preserved a stress on individual liberty while simultaneously appealing to the larger determinism of the Invisible Hand, while German thinkers emphasized the historical uniqueness of individual culture, the fundamentally social nature of human beings, and the power of the state to guide and manage economic development. In each case, a rapprochement between agency and determinism is fundamental to the discipline’s self-conception, although the two may be distributed differently.

For Greenfeld, it is a social motive above all—the desire for prestige on the part of its intellectual practitioners—that drove the triumph of scientistic, impersonal, and ahistorical forms of economics in early twentieth-century America. While Greenfeld acknowledges the progressive impulse toward ambitious social reform as a significant dimension of the history of American economics during the Gilded Age, it is ultimately the conservative classicists that prevailed, with their narrow focus on the establishment of economics as a legitimate and powerful science based on physics. As a consequence, contemporary economics is judged by Greenfeld to have cut itself off from material and human reality, even as its influence as a social science is unrivaled in the realm of policy-making. Greenfeld provocatively attributes the fate of economics to a more fundamental division between the social and natural sciences: in her view, the institutional history of the natural sciences is subordinate to their intellectual development as bodies of knowledge, while the forms of knowledge represented in the social sciences
Henrika Kuklick’s “Professional Status and the Moral Order” examines a range of professions and disciplines associated with the emergent social sciences during turn-of-the-century America. Like Greenfeld, Kuklick situates social science within its historical, political, and institutional frameworks, but she tells a very different kind of story. Bringing to light the self-understanding of early social scientists and other self-regulating professionals, Kuklick describes them as “self-conscious agents of history” pursuing a well-developed scheme of social reform that dovetailed with contemporary theories of social evolution. According to Kuklick, an evolutionary model was adapted by social scientists to promote a view of unconstrained human agency in the service of progressive political and moral ideals. In recovering this history, Kuklick aims to dislodge a prevalent assumption that early social science was unduly influenced by social determinism through the sway of the anthropological school of Franz Boas. She then contrasts the forces at work among early social reformers with the profound reconfiguration of the professions in our own era, particularly the erosion of power within the medical profession (though she sees similar attacks on professional authority in the university and within the field of social work). Diminishment of professional power and efficacy is attributed both to the decline of vocational ideals of disinterestedness and altruism, and to the loss of important protections for professionals against the demands of the market. In a way, Kuklick’s explanation supports the more limited claims that Greenfeld makes about the dominance of classical economics, insofar as Kuklick attributes the loss of protections to a climate favoring free-market theories. By contrast, the earlier era, in Kuklick’s view, was shaped by the intellectual and cultural framework of a progressive evolutionary theory that sought the self-conscious elaboration of communal, rational, and ethical ideals.

Despite an important divergence of approach with respect to the assumed motives of early social scientists, Kuklick’s and Greenfeld’s narratives share another similarity as well: both essays reconstruct key ways in which social science performed what we might call a contestatory emulation of scientific disciplines. This is reminiscent of the role that the conflict between science and letters played in Guillory’s account of the rise of English as a discipline. In Greenfeld’s account of economics, the key model science was physics, and any differences between human experience and natural laws were assiduously discounted. In Kuklick’s broader account of the rise of professions, evolution provided the model, and was altered so as to accommodate the effectivity of human guidance, the power of human agency. In one case, the emulated discipline provides a limit to the explanatory power and human resonance of the model; in the other case, the emulated discipline allows for an expansive model of growth, development, and cooperation. In one case,
the emergent discipline is constrained by its scientism; in the other, enabled. Viewed in tandem, these contrasting accounts reveal that disciplinarity, along with its constitutive forms of agency and determination, varies across the interactive but incommensurable political, cultural, and institutional histories in which they are embedded.

Ivan Strenski’s contribution, “Durkheim, Disciplinarity, and the ‘Sciences Religieuses,’” provides a textured account of discipline formation in fin de siècle France. Again, the comparative approach is instructive, given the distinctiveness of government subsidy in French higher education, and given the particular stresses that cultures of belief place on the emergence of the science and sociology of religion. In tracing the powerful challenge that Durkheim and his followers waged against the Liberal Protestant bases of the Fifth Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études—the institutional home of the “sciences religieuses”—Strenski reveals the effectiveness of those vibrant intellectual cultures that worked outside of and against official state patronage to promote new disciplinary paradigms. Strenski also shows the precise intellectual and political factors at play in this disciplinary agon. On the one hand, the Fifth Section served as a kind of haven for free thinkers and their ideological allies, those Liberal Protestants who promoted the idea of religious universalism and thereby aided in the fight against clericalism and Catholicism more generally. On the other hand, the crypto-theological commitments of the Fifth Section could not accommodate the firmly naturalist and societist approach of the Durkheimians, who fought hard to shift the terms of the debate. Both approaches were affected by political aims: the Liberal Protestants were funded by a state eager to understand and thereby control a deeply religious populace; the Durkheimians thought that the liberal view of religion ultimately was not adequate to the moral needs of a diverse Third Republic. The multilayered story told by Strenski exemplifies the competitive dimensions of disciplinary evolution, while bringing to the fore the particular political, cultural, and intellectual tensions that result when “science” aims to encompass religion.

At this historical moment, of course, disciplinary studies, like its more famous relative, cultural studies, is dominated by the figure of Michel Foucault. His field-defining contributions have been to chart not only the rise of disciplines and the human sciences but also to elaborate the ways in which a distinctly modern form of subjectivity, marked by interiority and self-surveillance, arose out of new configurations of knowledge and power. In key respects, the present volume looks to a post-Foucauldian dispensation, keeping its distance from approaches that too easily assimilate bodies of knowledge to techniques of management—whether of the social body, the intellectual field, or the individual person. Nevertheless, the effort to show how disciplinary developments have affected both theories and practices of
modern selfhood remains central to the project of rethinking the human sciences. This effort can also be adapted to the end of dislodging some of the comfortable pessimism of Foucauldian scholars, who do not sufficiently register the very struggle with questions of agency that has characterized the project of the human sciences since its inception. We spoke in broad terms at the outset about the dialectic of agency and determinism informing disciplinary development in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, showing how that dialectic emerged at the conceptual and theoretical level in many disciplinary formations. Several of the essays in the volume vivify this issue by specifically exploring the relation between disciplinary developments and conceptions of selfhood.

In “Subjecting English and the Question of Representation,” for example, Gauri Viswanathan suggestively reframes the “rise of English” in terms of the forms of subjectivity it assumed, promoted, and enabled. Viswanathan locates in early English-language pedagogy a Christian model of selfhood marked by inadequacy and in need of tutelage. Yet the function of English begins to shift in the nineteenth century in order to accommodate its heterogeneous readership, recasting the Christian model so as to promote a new civic and national identity, one whose capacity for improvement could be slated into a model of progress. For Viswanathan, what prompted this development was not so much a simple reaction on the part of a controlling institution, but rather the direct challenges and competing claims of a religiously plural society during the nineteenth century. The current scholarly emphasis on ethnicity has obscured this important disciplinary history and the fractured society that catalyzed it. Viswanathan also importantly claims that the new civic model of selfhood helped set the stage for more elaborate and far-reaching democratic claim-staking: as the forms of selfhood developed to accommodate plurality, they themselves enabled a further contest for expanded rights. Thus, a revisionist account of the rise of English enables us to trace the path whereby social groups emerged from their status as objects of moral pedagogy to become “subjects of their own history.” Viswanathan’s essay, besides insisting that we recognize the profound role played by religion in the contests for cultural and political legitimacy, also shows ways in which constructions of the self have both mediated and transformed disciplinary life.

In “Dying Twice: Victorian Theories of Déjà Vu,” Athena Vrettos focuses on debates within the field of nineteenth-century psychology to explore an interdisciplinary fin-de-siècle topos distinctly concerned with the nature of selfhood and consciousness. In part attributing the appeal of déjà vu to the heightened awareness of temporality brought on by millennial thinking, Vrettos uncovers two basic attitudes toward this popular topic: on the one hand, a desire to protect the category of “normal” consciousness by pathologizing déjà vu experiences and, on the other, a belief that déjà vu was
one experience among others that evidenced the permeable boundaries of consciousness. Analyzing the writings of four British psychologists, Vrettos uncovers responses that range from defended investments in rational control to the virtual embrace of layered consciousness. By reconstructing the competing explanatory models that emerged in order to account for déjá vu, Vrettos not only insists on a contested cultural field with differing attitudes toward the nature of human agency, but also brings to light both the interactions and contests among a range of intellectual and cultural fields, including literature, psychology, neurology, psychical research, and spiritual belief. The particular interdisciplinary formations that took shape here had in part to do with the nature of the topic: literary example was especially prominent not only because articulate examples of déjá vu could be found in fictional texts, but because the very act of rereading and quotation was formally continuous with the object under study. But the intellectual biography of déjá vu is also the result of specific contests for intellectual prominence within the larger European theater. Partly because of France’s dominant role in producing ambitious theories of memory, British psychology attempted to carve out a niche for itself by focusing on topics associated with more mundane, everyday, psychological experiences.

Jeff Nunokawa’s “Oscar Wilde, Erving Goffman, and the Social Body Beautiful” compares the models of agency and self-presentation that structure the British aestheticism of Oscar Wilde and the American sociology of Erving Goffman. His analysis draws out the ways in which Wilde’s aestheticism aims to triumph over social regulation through an aggrandized form of theatrical agency, which he contrasts with Goffman’s more modest notion of the agent’s active involvement in social scripts. Because of its suggestive comparison of Wilde and Goffman, Nunokawa’s essay allows us to understand aestheticism in protodisciplinary terms, as an intellectual and aesthetic project that sought to be at once theory and practice, that sought to understand everyday life in the way that sociology later would. Moreover, the forms of response to questions of social determination that Nunokawa locates in Wilde resonate profoundly with the contemporary project of queer theory, which shares with Wilde both a keen awareness of social laws and a compensatory, aestheticized voluntarism.

Not surprisingly, the dialectic of freedom and determinism that we have been tracing grows especially involved and self-conscious in those bodies of practical knowledge that interrogate the existing and optimal relations between the individual or corporate subject of civil society and the overarching power of the state. Lauren Goodlad’s historical analysis of the career of “pastorship” in Britain from the New Poor Law of 1834 to the rise of the new mass politics after World War I, “Character and Pastorship in Two British ‘Sociological’ Traditions: Organized Charity, Fabian Socialism, and the Invention of New Liberalism,” provides a textbook illustration of this ten-
dency. In her meticulously detailed account, a British cast of sociology came to be born of the interanimating contest between a moral, voluntarist conception of human character, identified closely with the Charitable Organization Society (COS), and a rational, environmentalist conception of human character, identified with the Fabian Socialists. Each school not only gave a particular definition to its critical object—the people and behaviors to be studied—but also generated a corresponding method or strategy of treating this object, what Goodlad calls pastorship. If, as the COS contended, social phenomena ultimately result from the concerted volitional force of the individuals involved, then the best and only means of remedying problematic or dysfunctional phenomena is to minister to the character of those producing and suffering them. But if, as the Fabians contended, particular social ills are the rationally calculable effects of misshapen, far-reaching historical arrangements and economic conditions, then they could never be properly repaired except through similarly technical and wide-ranging adjustments in the conditions and arrangements themselves, adjustments of a scale and complexity requiring organized state action.

These battle lines, however, do not remain starkly drawn. The stubborn slippage of the epistemic and pragmatic registers of late-Victorian human science reasserts itself, bringing the two camps into full dialectical contradiction instead of static dichotomy. As a matter of logic, to postulate a fundamental moral freedom at the root of social causation is to incur a loss of predictability fatal to the project of social analysis. A play of truly autonomous world-making wills remains by definition impervious, in the final instance, to those contingencies or determinants from which the criteria for preferring one explanation or strategic projection over another must be elaborated. As a result, the COS needed to bolster its credentials of expertise by incorporating and then boasting of the scientific training of its field-workers and the rationality of its protocols, in a tacit concession to the superior epistemic purchase of the Fabian agenda. On the other side, the comprehensive determinism of the Fabians, like that of scientific Marxism, provided a strong theoretical basis for understanding the world but no basis at all for changing it in accordance with their will. The need to square their deterministic principles with their activist aims left the Fabians preaching the comparative virtue of aligning one’s efforts with rather than against the momentum of historical progress. Taken in its worst light, this position is simply nugatory, since a fully deterministic universe admits neither obstruction nor facilitation in any case. Taken at its best, this position, as Goodlad sees it, opens up a space, however slender or rudimentary, for independent volitionality, in a tacit concession to the superior pragmatic potential of the COS agenda.

In Goodlad’s account, the interpenetration of these antipodal viewpoints helped to bring forth a synthetic “third way,” the New Liberalism of Winston...
Churchill and David Lloyd George. In articulating the interdependence of self and state help, private and public responsibility, circumstantial determination and moral freedom, this new movement helped to sponsor the development of a mature sociological discipline. That is also to say, looking from the other end of the telescope, Goodlad isolates the contentious origin of British sociology, specifying how that discourse came to define itself over against its own warring constituents.

In the succeeding essay, “Victorian Continuities: Early British Sociology and the Welfare of the State,” Simon Joyce illustrates that the effects of such contentious origins do not necessarily evaporate with the consolidation of a discipline in its own right, but rather have a tendency to linger or reappear in its subsequent deployments. Taking up the recent vogue among antistatist Anglo/American conservatives, he explores Victorian deliberations on fostering individual self-reliance. Joyce mounts a convincing, textually specific argument that Victorian social thought has been subject to highly selective and tendentious appropriation. Yet such appropriations are made possible in part by the profoundly ambivalent, even self-dissenting quality of Victorian thought itself. The central focus of Joyce’s counter-revisionist study is the relationship between Gertrude Himmelfarb’s immensely influential argument, The De-Moralization of Society, and one of her chief Victorian sources, the work of Charles Booth, most particularly Life and Labour of the People in London (1889). Himmelfarb wields the latter as a weapon to flay the contemporary welfare state and vindicate private industry and charity, but not without doing considerable violence, as Joyce sees it, to Booth’s own social agenda. This violence, however, is one of reduction rather than traduction. Booth’s writing condensed multiple and dissonant practices and beliefs that could readily coexist in the nascent discourse of sociology precisely because, as Joyce notes, it as yet “lacked a stable disciplinary base,” being a “broad church of positivists, philanthropists, statisticians, social evolutionists, and anthropologists,” rather than the monolithic institution suggested by Himmelfarb’s genealogy. The dominant vision shared by these various thinkers, Joyce demonstrates, was a recognition of the very sort of state action that Himmelfarb conscripts Booth to condemn. But Joyce’s argument goes still further in suggesting that a “stable disciplinary base,” understood as a matrix for the kind of programmatic consistency that characterizes Himmelfarb’s misreading of Booth’s work, can exist only as a retrospective illusion which feeds upon the very interdiscursive flux that it denies or forgets.

The political right does not have a monopoly on this type of amnesia, as the final two essays in the volume denote. Both Christopher Lane and James Buzard take the largely left-identified, avowedly postdisciplinary formation of cultural studies to task for organizing itself around significant distortions or elisions of disciplinary history. Whereas Himmelfarb mistakes discursive equivocality for disciplinary uniformity so that she might embrace the latter
as the sign and instrument of healthy social order, the experiments of cultural studies have, according to Lane and Buzard, mistaken their own relationship to such discursive equivocality in order to reject disciplinary coherence as both intellectually and politically coercive.

Christopher Lane’s “The Arnoldian Ideal, or Culture Studies and the Problem of Nothingness” reassembles the extensive corpus of Matthew Arnold to illuminate the misrecognition involved in his ill repute as a “staunch traditionalist,” an arbiter of canonicity, and the father of a mode of literary criticism that handed down cultural ideals for the purpose of enforcing social order and stability. Indispensable to this image of Arnold as, well, Himelfarb, has been the omission or dismissal of a countervailing and still more pivotal strain in his work—what Lane calls “the problem of nothingness,” the extradiscursive dimension that founds, stymies, and exceeds the possibility of cultural expression. To divine in Arnold’s more prescriptive moments, as Lane does, a self-consciously inadequate response to this extradiscursive dimension, is to restore a proper ambivalence to his text, which is committed to both the necessity and the futility of cultural discipline. By this view, Arnold can be read as herald of the literary genealogy—from Pater to Wilde to cultural studies—that has so raged against him.

Cultural studies itself cannot discern this family resemblance, Lane insists, because of its own fundamental positivism, an embrace of multiplicities—of identities, cultures, values, determinations—that neither engages, nor develops the tools to engage, the radical finitude which, as Derrida famously argues, underlies any such proliferation of differences. Staked as it is upon a latitudinarian politics of recognition and tolerance, cultural studies has great difficulty tolerating that which “resists discursive processing” or recognizing the embattled virtue of grappling, as Arnold does, with the “obstacles” to primary sense. In excluding whatever refuses to be confined to that most basic discursive discipline, the discipline of meaning, cultural studies bumps against its own limits or boundaries, which is to say, the limits on its disposition to transgress entrenched boundaries. Put another way, the economy of legible discourse—what Lacan terms the symbolic—forms a kind of disciplinary horizon that shelters cultural studies, in all of its interdisciplinary mobility, against the prospect of the irrecuperable, or what Lacan terms the Real.

In “Notes on the Defenestration of Culture,” James Buzard adduces different and arguably more constraining limits on the vaunted transgressive power of cultural studies, of which the “chief principle,” he writes, “seem[s] to be the avoidance of disciplinary self-definition.” Reading the evolution of this “discipline that is not one” against the autocritique of the social anthropology that cultural studies claimed to supersede, Buzard finds the reputation for perpetual mobility and openness currently enjoyed by this new field to have originated in its bold but oversold reclamation of the concept of cul-
ture. The reclamation was bold inasmuch as the analytic paradigm of culture bequeathed by anthropology seemed discredited, beyond repair, “as an instrument of power/knowledge wielded at the behest of imperial governments”—the very sort of intellectually appropriative device that the rise of postcolonial theory might have been expected to rule out of court. The reclamation was to some degree bogus, however, insofar as it was primarily staked on extending the reach of “culture,” understood by cultural studies as an honorific attribute, beyond the sphere of elite or respectable social achievements and to the habitus of the marginalized, the impoverished, the ignored, and the disdained. There is nothing, Buzard contends, particularly innovative in this latitudinarian gesture; the effort to promote recognition of subaltern cultural forms dates at least as far back as the Victorian era. Then it served, of all things, to delimit the nascent discipline of anthropology itself from the less systematized defenses of “civilization” associated with reputed traditionalists like Matthew Arnold. Given this history, Buzard infers that the elastic measure of culture adopted by cultural studies is less a solution to the difficulties recently confronting anthropology than a new spin upon them.

In the terms we have set forth, cultural studies has realigned the abrasive slippage of the epistemic and pragmatic imperatives without finally repairing it. In making sure that the predesignated groups to be studied could all lay claim, in Buzard’s words, to a “culture of their own,” social anthropologists incurred the objection that they had represented their “subject” peoples in a relatively uniform or monolithic manner suspiciously reminiscent of old-fashioned stereotyping. Through this left-handed patronage, the criticism runs, anthropology managed to reserve an individualizing unrestrictedness to the cultures of the West, which did not suffer the assumption of coherence let alone homogeneity. Put another way, the pragmatic interests and motivations of Western anthropology were held to have corrupted its epistemic dimension: the evidence it produced and the conclusions it drew. Cultural studies, of course, would seem to have inoculated itself against these charges by making agency detection among the apparently disempowered the overriding priority of its enterprise. But even leaving aside the danger of overcompensation—and Buzard records some highly comical attempts to parse casual pleasures for political efficacy—such agency cannot be warranted except as a response to social conditions that tend to define the group in question on a culturally homogenizing if overdetermined basis: “race plus class plus gender plus sexual orientation etc.” This methodology, what Diana Fuss and others have defended as a strictly “strategic” essentialism, does not avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping, but rather aims to generate enabling stereotypes, which is to say generalizing images conducive to certain kinds of political mobilization or consolation. No less than social anthropology, in other words, has cultural studies mortgaged its epistemic protocols to a pragmatic agenda, and the greater self-consciousness with which that liability has
been engaged does not at all diminish its underlying disciplinary function (in both senses of the term). A field or “movement” committed to boundless inter- or transdisciplinarity finds its own more or less stable definition in the putatively emancipatory definitions that it imposes on the cultures it studies.

As Buzard and other contributors show, a disciplinary history of the present reveals that interdisciplinarity can only lay claim to the kinds of theoretical and practical “breaks” that it assigns itself by distorting or suppressing its relation to the past, which also means distorting or suppressing its own disciplinarity. What results is an inattention to the dialectic of agency and freedom that defines the science of the human. The essays in this volume help to reframe these issues. Combining critique and reconstruction, case study and theoretical meditation, these essays enact a more sustained inquiry into the nature and effects of disciplinary histories, one which can more fully comprehend the complex legacy of the human sciences.

NOTES

