This book is excellent. If you are interested in the history of sociology, this book offers knowledge of the part of our discipline that is oriented towards defining sociology as a science. If you are specifically interested in sociological science, this book will give you its historical roots. And, for everyone, the book includes interesting details, such as, why Popper did not want to meet Merton when he visited London.

Most sociologists agree that sociology is a discipline in which empirical research and theory formation should be better integrated. Yet sociologists often disagree on what this integration implies. In this book, John Goldthorpe continues his work on sociology as a population science. By carefully selecting which pioneers to include, and critically discussing their contributions, Goldthorpe provides a new version of the history of sociology, and he does this in a way that delivers a clear message for the promising future of sociology – when defined as a science.

Inspired by the pioneers, in particular Otis D. Duncan, Goldthorpe (2016) has previously defined sociology as a population science. This implies first, to identify the *explananda* of sociology, that is, to provide solid and trustworthy descriptions of population regularities. Importantly, to identify probabilistic regularities in the life events of individuals in all their variation, sociologists need access to population data across time and space. Second, to explain these regularities, sociologists need to hypothesize which social processes and mechanisms might create and sustain these patterns. To do so, sociologists should develop middle range theories based on individual actions. This implies theorizing individuals’ choice of action, given their – often limited – opportunities, and the intended and/or unintended consequences of their actions for the aggregated regularities, whether one addresses the primary group level or the societal level.

The observant reader will recognize elements of Coleman’s boat model in these sentences; with an analytic design that moves between levels of analyses, from macro- to micro- and back to the macro-level again. *Probabilistic regularities* also imply an explicit rejection of the old idea of finding law-like regularities of social life. Moreover, we note a clear affiliation to methodological individualism. Given this definition of sociology, the first part, establishing population regularities, is as vital for sociology as the second part, explaining these patterns. Goldthorpe correctly argues that existing books on the history of sociology are inadequate, as they neglect the first part and its associated intellectual history.

Goldthorpe presents seventeen pioneers of sociological science. He traces the origins of sociological science back to discussions of the logic of scientific inference in London and Oxford in the second half of the seventeenth century, where an understanding emerged that all knowledge claims – both descriptive and explanatory – should be grounded in empirical evidence. This logic was primarily introduced to improve the natural sciences, but also included attempts at studying society. Pearson argued (in 1892) that the link between the sciences lies in the use of common methods, not in its material. Defined as a science, sociology uses the same statistical methods as the natural sciences, but as our ‘material’ is human beings, with the capacity to think and (constrained) autonomy to act, we depart from the natural sciences in our theoretical ambitions. Thus, some of the pioneers included in this book are usually not regarded as important pioneers of sociology, yet they provided the necessary tools for establishing population regularities; whereas others are usually thought of as pioneers of sociological theory.

John Graunt, Edmund Halley, Adolphe Quetelet, Francis Galton, Karl Pearson, and George Yule laid the foundations for an analytical methodology, whereas Andreas Kier, Arthur Bowley and Jerzy Neyman established the
recognition of representative population data. These pioneers also examined social problems, such as poverty, unemployment, and health inequalities. The book also includes chapters on Max Weber, Robert Merton, James Coleman and Raymond Boudon, who are usually thought of as more theoretically oriented sociologists. Moreover, Goldthorpe includes chapters on William Ogburn, Samuel Stouffer and Paul Lazarsfeld, American sociologists who contributed to defining sociology as a science. And, of course, a chapter on Otis D. Duncan, who defined sociology as a population science.

Where are the women? Goldthorpe acknowledges their existence, which is good, since they often go unnoticed, yet they are few, and they often show up as assistants and/or wives. He mentions Emily Perrin, who worked with Pearson, Margareth Hogg, who worked with Bowley, Marianne Weber, Alice Kitt, who worked with Merton, and Beverley Duncan, who worked with her husband.

Defining sociology as a science implies a narrower definition than usual. Goldthorpe (2016) discusses this, and I find his argument strengthened by this book on the roots of sociological science. He explicitly recognizes that his selection of pioneers is based on his present-day view of sociology as a population science. As several of these pioneers are left out of textbooks on sociology or social theory, one might suggest that the power of defining a discipline’s history deserves more attention.

I am very sympathetic to Goldthorpe’s intentions, and I include parts of his 2016 book in a theory course at the University of Oslo. I will also recommend this book to everyone interested in sociology. Particularly, this book will give students interested in quantitative sociology intellectual grounding and self-confidence as sociologists.

However, I have two reservations. First, defining sociology as a population science leaves little room for qualitative sociological research. Explaining population regularities is complicated, and when developing middle range theories of social processes, sociologists should be open to insights from qualitative research, which can provide more in-depth knowledge, albeit with limited range. Second, Goldthorpe is concerned with sociology, yet many of the pioneers included in this book were trailblazers for all social sciences, including political science, economics, and even social psychology. Establishing an *explanandum* requires the same tools in our sister disciplines, albeit with slightly different substantive content. I therefore sympathize with attempts, such as by James Coleman and Gary Becker, to find common threads between our disciplines, and I believe more could be found, when defined as social sciences. These reservations are, however, related more to the definition of sociological science than to this book on the pioneers of sociological science.

In the last chapter, Goldthorpe discusses some differences between analytical sociology and sociology defined as a population science related to the theory of action, and what he sees as excessive use of simulation models in analytical sociology. He is also critical of the present fascination with ‘big data,’ such as social media data, since we do not know if these data are representative, and if so, for which population. Yet, he argues, when concerned with the future development of sociological science, these differences should not be overstated. We can learn much from the pioneers of sociological science, and they often disagreed with each other. Yet, Goldthorpe argues, they also had ‘the capacity to innovate and consolidate at the same time, so that in this way it may be possible to avoid drawing unnecessary dividing lines, whether of an intellectual or an institutional kind, within what should be a common endeavour’” (210). There speaks a master of sociology.

Reference

Goldthorpe JH (2016) *Sociology as a Population Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lars Skov Henriksen, Kristin Strømsnes, and Lars Svedberg (eds), *Civic Engagement in Scandinavia: Volunteering, Informal Help and Giving in Denmark, Norway and Sweden*, Cham: Springer Nature, 2019, 234 pp.

Reviewed by: Liv Egholm, *Copenhagen Business School*

DOI: 10.1177/00016993211030407

This book about civic engagement in Scandinavian countries (specifically Denmark, Norway, and Sweden) could well have been titled “Context matters.” Based on high-quality longitudinal survey data from Denmark (1993,