

INTRODUCTION

Probably no area of study has ever had a more Whiggish history than American social science. Whig historians such as Thomas Carlyle and pre-Kuhnian historians of science systematically analyzed historical incidents as they appeared in the light of a perfect present. They criticized or praised events and individuals according to whether they seemed to aid or hinder progress toward a present that had achieved a sound stasis of solved conflict. Certainly the history of American social science shares this presentism. Most histories of the different disciplines judge past works of social science and their authors in terms of whether they represented positive or negative steps toward a social science that reproduced models of the natural and physical sciences. These historians have valued works according to how well they eliminated moral statements and feelings and replaced them with quantitative data. For example, a historian of economic thought quickly dismissed Adam Smith's precursors as "pre-scientific" and welcomed the "rigorous, mathematical" statements that had replaced the squabbles of past schools. As early as 1894, a University of Chicago graduate student in sociology polled the leading practitioners in the field and found that although few could agree even on the subject matter of their discipline, thirty out of forty accepted it as a true science. By 1919, the sociologist Luther L. Bernard could proudly proclaim, "We, as scientific workers in sociology, are so definitely launched upon the trend toward objectivism and definiteness of measurement in scientific method that it is needless to argue in its defense." As the social theorist Richard Bernstein ironically concluded, "One could write the history of social science during the past hundred years in terms of declarations that it has just become, or is just about to become, a scientific enterprise."¹

Yet many historians of social science have gone beyond the Whiggish approach of Carlyle or historians of science such as George Sarton and I. M. Cohen. Carlyle, Sarton, and the early Cohen, at least, compared past events according to an existent period or scientific theory. Conversely,

none of the social sciences has ever achieved a commonly agreed-upon theory. Economists continue to debate the functioning of the economic system and the key problems of the discipline and the best methods of solving them. Social scientists from all the disciplines choose their research topics based on a combination of scholarly significance, available research funds, and personal experiences and interests. No majority from any of the disciplines has ever actually accepted an antinormative, quantitative theory of technique or any other paradigm. Indeed, many thinkers have attributed the ongoing vitality of the American social sciences precisely to this constant challenge of existing assumptions and conceptions. The absence of a consensual paradigm has not, however, prevented most historians of social science from proclaiming its existence.

The reasons for the adoption of such a paradigm vary. Early practitioners of the discipline such as Bernard, his wife, Jessie, and the sociologist Floyd Nelson House apparently accepted the scientific perspective so completely that they could not conceive of everyone not accepting it in the near future. More recent historians have recognized the consensual paradigm as a myth but continue to write as if it existed. George Stocking, Jr., the preeminent historian of American anthropological thought, defended "presentism" in the history of the social sciences as the best means of teaching current practitioners about their history and about previously acquired data and conclusions, and he referred specifically to paradigmatic shifts. The social theorist Paul Lazarsfeld went beyond this to praise the myth of the accepted paradigm as the best way to lead to the actual adoption of one. Once the profession assumed that the paradigm exists, practitioners could act upon it and do the type of small-scale, empirical research that such consensus encourages. This, in turn, would further strengthen the validity and common acceptance of the theory. One of the most extreme, and certainly most ironic, examples of the Whiggish view of social science is Edward Silva and Sheila Slaughter's *Serving Power*, in which the two authors examine the creation of academic social experts who provided quantitative studies to corporate and government leaders in the early part of the twentieth century. Silva and Slaughter openly opposed this and berated social scientists for abandoning the early reformism of their disciplines in order to serve the status quo. Yet nowhere did they seem to recognize that many social scientists could and did continue to act as critical social activists. That is, Silva and Slaughter accepted social scientists' universal adherence to a theory which they themselves hate and which has never been held by most social scientists.²

This book criticizes the Whig interpretation of the social sciences during the interwar years from 1918 to 1941. The 1920s and 1930s are key decades for the history of the social sciences in the United States. According to the commonly accepted interpretation, during this period a true quantitative, antinormative science of society emerged, later reaching its culmination immediately after World War II. Certainly many pressures existed that encouraged the development of such a perspective. No graduate student of the day could be unaware of the multitude of academic freedom cases during the progressive and World War I years in which professors, including prominent tenured ones from all the disciplines, were fired or "disciplined" through the threat of dismissal for their stands on controversial political and social issues. At the same time that their outspoken stands threatened the livelihood of those willing to speak, the demand for technical data by governments and private businesses rewarded value-neutral experts with high-paying and high-status occupations. In addition, in the 1920s several major foundations began to fund social science research generously. The directors of these foundations favored small-scale, empirical research, which they believed could have an immediate impact on society and which had previously been too expensive for most social scientists because of the high price of technical equipment and trained researchers. Thus the objective, scientific study of society became attractive for professional as well as for theoretical reasons. While historians had characterized the period from 1870 to 1920 as an ongoing debate between social advocacy and scientific objectivity, they saw the 1920s and 1930s as representing the triumph of the objective service intellectual.

Despite the undeniable allure of the scientific position, many social thinkers rejected it and attempted to develop an alternative theory. Certainly neo-Thomists such as Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler and Catholic legal theorists from such law schools as Notre Dame, Georgetown, and Fordham rejected the entire concept of the scientific study of society and called for social thinkers to recognize the existence of a priori natural laws. The dominant service intellectuals were relatively unconcerned with such opposition, at least until the late 1930s. They found a far greater threat among their fellow social scientists who accepted the validity of the ideas of social science and the scientific method but rejected the developing amoral science of technique, with its lack of attention to normative concerns and elevation of empirical methods to a position of prominence. Those in the opposing group, whom I call the purposivists, insisted on the need for preconceived goals and ends for so-

cial science and for social scientists' personal participation in their selection. This conflict raged throughout the social sciences and appeared in journals, lectures, books, private letters, and even the presidential addresses of the professional societies.³

The debate can best be understood through David Hollinger's concept of the discourse of intellectuals. Hollinger argued that intellectuals share a community of discourse with established boundaries and assumptions. For true interaction to occur, the participants must share certain beliefs, values, language, and, especially, questions. Discourse in this sense is a social as well as an intellectual activity. These shared factors made the debate all the more important and contributed to the bitterness it generated. While both sides could quite easily dismiss the manifestos of a Hutchins or Adler as completely misguided and even incomprehensible, they could not so easily ignore each other's conclusions. Each group argued with some validity that it reflected the true faith of American social science. Each identified the same individuals as seminal thinkers in its tradition. Indeed, each group desired essentially the same ultimate ends for its professions. Yet the two disagreed on such essential issues as research topics of importance, appropriate research methods and their correct utilization, and the proper subject matter of the individual disciplines and even of social science itself.⁴

The central question dividing the two groups seemed to be a simple one: What is the proper role of the social scientist in relation to his or her knowledge of society? In other words, how should social scientists use their knowledge, and indeed, should they have any say at all in its utilization? Should the correct role of the social scientist be that of a technical expert who provides information and advice to whomever requests it? Or should the social scientist go beyond understanding and analyzing society and use scientifically derived information consciously and personally to help create a better society more suited to humankind's basic needs and desires? How can one reconcile either the delivery of information exclusively to political and economic elites or the determination of social and political goals by a self-determined elite of social scientists within a democracy? Indeed, is it reasonable for social scientists to play any pedagogical role in complex societies? Despite the assertions of service intellectuals, the question went well beyond the matter of alleged bias or objectivity. The issue was, as the historian Robert Bannister said of a group of sociologists of the period, "what [social scientists] thought social science was in the first place." Moreover, its participants believed fervently that the result of the debate

would determine not only the direction of social science for the present but for the future as well.⁵

Indeed, social science during the 1920s and 1930s represents not a triumph of the objectivist social science approach but rather the crystallization of opposing perspectives. The social and economic pressures of the time served as torches burning the social sciences into a core residue within the crucible of academic and professional institutions. This residue, moreover, was a fine ash of two chemically pure and separate elements, the very normative cores of the opposing positions on the proper use of social science. American social scientists were forced during the 1920s and 1930s, more than at any other time in history, to face the central dilemmas and needs of their profession.

The debate within 1920s and 1930s social sciences reflects a central and continuing facet of American social and cultural thought. Traditionally, thinkers in the United States have had to deal with the purposive aspect of inquiry. The question has always been, What is the goal of thought? For what purpose is one conducting the inquiry? Lewis Coser noted that intellectuals throughout world history have chosen from several strategies in their utilization of social knowledge. Some have used the knowledge to attain power through political office or leadership of a mass movement. Others have advised men of power or provided them with ideological justifications for their preconceived decisions. A final group, the most common Western tradition, have used their information to become critics and intellectual gadflies. Service intellectuals could justify their selection of the second option because they believed that the mere accumulation of data led necessarily to social reform and betterment through a more complete understanding of society. The purposivists, who followed the third tradition and maintained their role as critical outsiders, reproached the service intellectuals for their naive optimism by pointing to the mixed experiences of social reformers during the progressive and war years. The abandonment of reform during the 1920s and the intellectual bankruptcy of the nation's leaders, as evidenced by the economic and social collapse during the Great Depression coupled with the rise of totalitarianism and its use of technical social scientists and their knowledge, further strengthened the beliefs of the purposive group and caused some service intellectuals to reconsider their views.⁶

The perception of the social scientist as an intellectual, an individual who attempts to deal with the core values and questions of a culture, is an important one. The Whiggish nature of social science history has

derived largely from the tendency of writers to construct purely internalist studies of the social science disciplines. They view each discipline and its practitioners as existing in a social vacuum, reacting only to books and articles by other specialists and occasionally to the ideas of other academics. Clearly, however, individual social scientists read newspapers, react to ongoing social and political problems, and are influenced by personal crises and experiences, like all human beings. The central question of the proper use of social knowledge was held in common and discussed by every social scientist as well as by journalists, philosophers, clergy, and ordinary men and women who would never consider themselves intellectuals. Social scientists in the 1920s and 1930s were not only intellectuals in a narrow, professional sense but intellectuals grappling in incisive and sophisticated ways with some of the most timely social dilemmas of the day.⁷

One cannot separate service intellectuals from purposivists by age or institutional affiliation. Many of the latter came from the new generation of social scientists who had come of age during the 1920s, but others, including several of the leaders, were of the same generation who had developed the objective perspective of the service intellectuals. A few of the purposive group retained their independence by giving up their university connections, but others occupied positions in such bastions of scientific thought as Columbia and the University of Chicago. The debate over the proper role of the social scientist involved the conflict of two of America's most widely cherished values: the utility of the scientific method and the normative goals of social thought. Indeed, these two concepts represented the two core components of American social science. Consequently, one can find mutually contradictory statements on the issue from almost every major thinker of the period. As Charles Beard expressed it in 1934, "Everywhere the learned world is split into 'schools' and rare indeed is the savant who does not appear to be at war with himself in his own bosom."⁸

I have chosen to analyze this central debate largely through the work and lives of five representative thinkers for several reasons. First, as Beard's quote attests, by taking quotations out of context one could pigeonhole almost any thinker into either side of the debate. Nevertheless, when one studies the work of an individual thinker in its entirety and in the context of his or her behavior, a clear position almost always emerges. Second, since this discourse took place equally on social and intellectual planes, it is necessary to reconstruct the institutional environment of universities, research institutes, philanthropic founda-

tions, and government agencies and commissions to fully understand the dimensions and implications of the conflict. Although I am not asserting that any of the social scientists assumed ideas or research methodologies purely on professional or economic considerations, clearly such factors affected them. Finally, my hope is that by integrating the biographical elements of personality, social class, career and career goals, and political loyalties with a careful analysis of written works I will broaden the study of the history of social science beyond disciplinary analysis and goals and reach a more sophisticated perspective of how social scientists interact with their culture.

The issue of representativeness in general is, of course, problematic. Since the debate over social scientists and their role occurred in all the disciplines, my primary goal was to choose figures who together would cover as much of the spectrum of social science as possible. Included here are chapters on economics, sociology, political science, history, and political psychology, as well as substantial sections on neo-Freudian social psychology, legal education and realism, public administration, civic education, and the culture and personality school of anthropology. My second aim was to choose individuals who were intellectual leaders in their profession, whose work represented a significant contribution to knowledge, and who took an active role in social and political affairs. Finally, I chose five individuals for whom the question of the purpose of social research was a central theme in much of their writing and activity: historian and political scientist Charles Beard, economist Wesley Mitchell, political scientist Charles Merriam, sociologist Robert Lynd, and political scientist and neo-Freudian Harold Lasswell. In both the scope and clarity of their thought, these five provide telling insights into the crucible of 1920s and 1930s social science.⁹

Since the debate over the proper role of the social scientist turned directly on the possibility and desirability of objectivity, I have been compelled to examine my own methodology. In his introduction to *That Noble Dream* Peter Novick wrote eloquently about the dilemmas and ironies involved in writing "objectively" about the lack of objectivity of other historians. As a historian, I have been trained to examine events and ideas in terms of their changing cultural setting and assumptions. Yet my former career as a clinical social worker makes me appreciate the attraction of verifiable proofs that allow absolute solutions to specific problems. Certainly the external pressures of postwar economic and social conversion and the Great Depression, along with the need for research funds and the pressure from foundations and governmental bodies

for specific types of information, made the service intellectuals' desire to achieve a standard of knowledge unassailable to outside criticism greater than at any previous period in the history of American social science. Yet their methodology oversimplified both the scientific method and the complexity of society and often ignored the practical and political consequences of their research choices. Although the purposivists were often philosophically limited and perhaps even naive, their vision of a probabilistic universe and the openness of history and culture more closely mirrors contemporary and my own thinking about society and the role of thought.

This is not to say that my viewpoint is not finally a personal one. Beard argued that one doing social research needs to be as objective as humanly possible while recognizing the inevitability of personal biases and freely admitting them to one's audience. I think this is basically sound advice. I freely admit my anger at the complacent (and I believe lesser) heirs of Mitchell and Merriam who unreservedly accepted the status quo and scornfully rejected the value and even the possibility of significant social change. As a child of the 1960s and 1970s, I have shared the frustration of being denied already forged weapons in the battle for a more desirable society, and I accept Robert Lynd's definition of social science as "an organized part of the culture which exists to help men in continually understanding and rebuilding his culture . . . [and] an instrument for furthering men's purposes." I feel the purposivists, for all their limitations, represented a positive movement toward a more constructive view of social change and action. I recognize that many readers will have different opinions and goals from my own and trust that my perspective will not deny the utility of this work for them.¹⁰

I've often wondered when I was most arrogant in writing such a book—in its first manifestation in the late 1970s, when secondary sources were limited largely to disciplinary histories, or in its present form in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when relevant works seem to appear on a monthly basis. Early in my research, I was most influenced by Edward Purcell's remarkably astute *Crisis of Democratic Theory* and Barry Karl's *Charles E. Merriam and the Study of Politics*. In this latter stage I have especially appreciated two excellent institutional histories, Guy Alchon's study of the National Bureau of Economic Research and Donald Critchlow's examination of the Brookings Institute, for helping to confirm my earlier perspectives on organized social science.¹¹

Like everyone else in the field now and for the foreseeable future, I have grappled mightily with two magnificent recent books, Peter No-

vick's study of the American historical profession, *That Noble Dream*, and Dorothy Ross's *Origins of American Social Science*. I see this work as complementary and supplementary to those two, while still differing from both in approach and conclusions. Like Novick and unlike Ross, I have placed objectivity and the role of the social scientist as the central defining issues. Such a perspective concentrates on the ongoing conflict within the profession(s) and thus implicitly critiques the unilinear model of progress envisioned by the disciplinary historians. Ross's reliance on the shared concept of American exceptionalism results, for all her criticism of Hartzian liberal consensus and disciplinary histories, in an alternative vision of ideological concurrence. Like Ross and unlike Novick, I explicitly treat history as social science and view all the social sciences as reflecting a common discourse of beliefs, assumptions, and questions. By concentrating on the question of the proper role of social scientists, I have been able, unlike Ross, to extend this integration into the fields of anthropology and social psychology. Finally, the key difference is my intensive analysis of a much more limited period and number of individuals. It is my hope that such an approach coupled with extensive analyses like those of Novick and Ross will result in a more thorough and insightful history of American social science.

Although many books seem to engage in interminable odysseys before sailing into the harbor of publication, this manuscript has had an especially long and colorful one, wandering through years of teaching in Germany and Japan and even a career shift to clinical social work before docking at its original harbor at the University of Texas at Austin. A large number of people from various professions and locations along the way have contributed important insights and suggestions. I especially thank June and Sid Axinn, Sally Clarke, George Glaser, Dave Haney, Herb Hovenkamp, Bruce Hunt, Mike Lauderdale, Luci Paul, Richard Pells, the late Tom Philpott, Steve Pyne, Elspeth Rostow, Woody Smith, and Alex Vuccinich. This work also reflects the unconscious contributions of innumerable students from many nations who had their greatest impact when discussing issues seemingly far removed from the subject of this work. Bob Abzug and Brian Levack were instrumental in providing me with the opportunity to return to academic life and encouraging me to expand and finish this work. Larry Malley and Rachel Toor, my editors at Duke, have consistently believed in this work and given support when I needed it most. Bob Crunden and Bill Goetzmann, my earliest mentors, have long served as patient sources of information on an

incredible range of subjects far removed from their specialties. My greatest direct debt is to Jeff Meikle, who as fellow graduate student, present colleague, and long-suffering friend has read this manuscript more times than either of us would like to remember. Most of all, however, this book belongs to my wife, Georgia Xydes, whose patience, good humor, and strength have navigated us through the writing of this book and far greater and more important crises and joys.