

The Quest for a Social Ethics:  
An Intellectual History of US Social Sciences  
The Case of Herbert Hoover, Wesley C. Mitchell,  
Charles E. Merriam and Mary van Kleeck

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## Résumé

Au début du XXe siècle, les sciences sociales ont tenté d'instaurer une nouvelle éthique sociale aux États-Unis. Les experts des questions sociales ont eu entre 1900 et 1930 comme objectif de redéfinir le code de conduite des Étasuniens. L'avènement de la modernité aux États-Unis a déstabilisé les comportements et les façons d'agir de l'ensemble de la population. Des pionniers des sciences sociales ont réalisé le traumatisme moral engendré par la modernité. Certains experts ont décidé, au début du XXe siècle, d'entreprendre une vaste redéfinition de l'éthique sociale. Ils ont employé la méthode scientifique de l'enquête sociale afin de mieux comprendre le fonctionnement de la société étasunienne. L'économiste de l'Université Columbia Wesley Mitchell a circonscrit les comportements liés à la consommation des Étasuniens. Le politologue de l'Université de Chicago Charles Merriam a quant à lui délimité les comportements électoraux de la population étasunienne. La travailleuse sociale Mary van Kleeck a de son côté analysé les nouvelles formes de travail des Étasuniens. Ils ont collaboré avec d'autres experts à la vaste redéfinition d'une éthique sociale aux États-Unis. Cet objectif de redéfinition d'une éthique sociale adaptée à la situation que prévalait au début du XXe siècle a été au cœur des débats de l'émergence des sciences sociales comme champs disciplinaires professionnels. Des politiciens se sont aussi intéressés à cette question. Herbert Hoover a partagé avec ces scientifiques cette quête d'une nouvelle éthique sociale. À travers les multiples enquêtes effectuées quand il était Secrétaire du Commerce et comme président des États-Unis, il a aussi, de son côté, encouragé du mieux que sa fonction le lui permettait cette recherche d'une nouvelle moralité. Dans ses écrits, Hoover a exprimé le même souhait d'ajuster l'éthique sociale aux conditions engendrées par la modernité dans son pays.

## Abstract

Between 1900 and 1930, social scientists attempted to refashion social ethics by conducting extensive social research. Some of them collaborated with Herbert Hoover before and after he became president. In the 1920s, they accepted positions on Herbert Hoover's various commissions. The work they did on these commissions made them a forum for manifesting their interest in modernizing social ethics. At one and the same time, they were in a position to define both social ethics and the purpose of the social sciences. Throughout this dissertation, I explore the cases of three social scientists involved with Hoover's commissions: the economist Wesley Clair Mitchell, the political scientist Charles Edward Merriam, and the industrial researcher and social worker Mary van Kleeck. Wesley Clair Mitchell addressed issues of American consumption and economic behaviour. Charles Edward Merriam analyzed the political behaviour of American citizens. Mary van Kleeck surveyed labour relations between American workers and employers. In this dissertation, I have employed methods developed by intellectual historians, focussing on the published and unpublished papers that these social experts and Herbert Hoover himself produced. This collaboration between Hoover and some of the most prominent social scientists of the day explains the ambitious project they undertook, that of adjusting social ethics to the modern living conditions they had discovered while carrying out their social research. In so doing, they sought to adapt the traditional code of conduct of most Americans to the new circumstances that prevailed in the first decades of the twentieth century.

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## Introduction

In 1913, the intellectual historian Henry Adams (1838-1918) defined history as “a catalogue of the forgotten”.<sup>1</sup> Surprisingly, historians themselves, along with other social scientists have often forgotten to catalogue the history of social sciences. The remembering of the past of the social sciences is a relatively new field in the intellectual history of the United States. Social scientists have generally sought to make breakthroughs in their disciplines by obsessively pursuing preoccupations with theories and models. For the great majority of social scientists, older theories quickly become outdated and invalidated and so must make way for new ones. Yet it is this very search for the latest theories that has obscured the study of past theoretical development. It thus falls to intellectual historians to open and read from the “forgotten catalogue” of social science theories and aspirations.

Taking a different tack from that of social scientists, historians usually acknowledge that merely because ideas were championed by intellectuals in the past does not necessarily render them irrelevant for present-day society. Understanding past ideas can expose the limitations of ideas we hold today. Studying former ways of viewing the social sciences reveals how they transformed themselves and continued to evolve.

As was the case with other intellectual schools of thought, social science concepts evolved in a specific historical context. Certain essential notions have perdured from the earliest days of the social sciences. Methodology, for example, was and still is a central concern for the great majority of social scientists. It existed in 1900; it remains paramount in 2005. Other orientations have become casualties of historical trauma. One of them was the moral dimension of the social sciences. In the early years of the profession, roughly coincident with the Progressive Era, social scientists envisaged the purpose of their disciplines as the adaptation and adjustment of traditional American values to modern American society.

This motivation to adjust American values to contemporary conditions was, and still is in 2005, a controversial topic. Here I must divulge that this dissertation will not have a happy ending. Progressive social scientists largely fell short of their design to adjust past values to modern realities. For a variety of reasons that will become apparent later, Progressive social scientists gradually realized the impossibility of ever achieving their grand dream. This history

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Adams, *Mont Saint Michel and Charters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 34.

will thus be one of intellectual losers. Yet despite the failure of these social scientists to accomplish their goals, studying their work will shed light on some often underestimated dimensions to the profession. Traditionally, historians depict the birth of the social sciences as the final phase of the scientific revolution that had begun in the seventeenth century with the writings of Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Some historians have managed to apprehend the moral motivations of social scientists, but very few historians have gone as far as describing the contributions they made as moralists.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, as I will illustrate, Progressive social scientists essentially launched a dialogue about American moral values. The notion of moral dialogue is essential here because Progressive intellectuals differed from conservative and populist demagogues who rejected the discussion of values in favour of simply imposing them. In a democratic society like the United States, however, intellectuals opted to debate these notions. I am not suggesting that totalitarian leaders and anti-democratic sentiments were unknown in the United States, only that Progressive intellectuals did not fit into that group of ideological extremists. The Progressive approach was instead to encourage serious exchanges on fundamental questions like moral values.

### The Moral Dialogue Among Progressive Intellectuals

The moral dialogue began early in the nineteenth century. The thought of Francis Wayland (1796-1865) inspired many intellectuals later in the nineteenth century and in the first decades of the twentieth century<sup>3</sup>. Succeeding generations of intellectuals read his *Elements of Moral Science* (1835) and his *Elements of Political Economy* (1837). In general, Wayland attempted to show the common moral purpose of scientific observation and religion, directly associating social inquiry and the “will of God”:

It has been shown that we may, by observing the results of our actions upon individuals and society, ascertain what the will of our Creator concerning us is. In this manner we may discover much moral truth which would be unknown, were we left to guidance of

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<sup>2</sup> James Turner, “Le Concept de Science dans l’Amérique du XIXe siècle”, *Annales: Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 57 (2002): 753-772; Christopher Shannon, *Conspicuous Criticism: Tradition, the Individual, and Culture in American Social Thought from Veblen to Mills*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Donald E. Frey, “Francis Wayland’s 1830s Textbooks: Evangelical Ethics and Political Economy,” *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 24 (2002): 215-231.

conscience unassisted; and we may derive many motives to virtue which would otherwise be inoperative.<sup>4</sup>

Wayland believed that “natural religion” harmonized with “revealed religion”.<sup>5</sup> He defined “natural religion” as the interaction between individuals in society. In his essay of 1835, he surveyed the economic problem of property, the question of how to run a judicial system efficiently, the idea of universal education, and the role of the state with regard to social matters.

Wayland showed the close connection between political economy and religious ethics. He asserted that the duty of political economists was to understand moral questions and act intelligently. This idea was central to the thinking of the most influential Progressive spokesmen, Henry George (1839-1897).<sup>6</sup> In the introduction to his classic *Progress and Poverty*, George suggested employing the methods of political economy to solve the social problems that resulted from poverty.<sup>7</sup> George advanced socio-economic solutions as fundamental, but he also insisted on changing the “mental habits” that undergird social injustice. George dropped the religious underpinning of political economy, which was omnipresent in Francis Wayland’s writings. Removing religious references did not imply a rejection of the moral dimensions either of political economy or, later, of the social sciences:

What more than anything else prevents the realization of the essential injustice of private property in land and stands in the way of a candid consideration of any proposition for abolishing it, is that mental habit which makes anything that has long existed seem natural and necessary.<sup>8</sup>

Political economy as viewed by Henry George thus had the dual responsibility of improving socio-economic conditions and emancipating American minds from social injustice. George figured prominently in the American pantheon of leftist intellectuals. Moderate in his interpretations and concise in his solutions, George swayed an entire generation of Progressive intellectuals.

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<sup>4</sup> Francis Wayland, *Elements of Moral Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1965 [1835]), 114.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph A. Giacalone and Clifford Cobb (eds.) *The Path to Justice: Following in the Footsteps of Henry George* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2001); John L. Thomas, *Alternative America: Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd, and the Adversary Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1983)

<sup>7</sup> Henry George, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth: The Remedy* (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation 1966 [1879]), 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 368.

Another central figure in Progressive circles was Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929).<sup>9</sup> In a slightly different manner from Henry George's, Veblen elaborated a complex system of ideas that addressed to the socio-economic effects of urban and industrial America. One of the most urgent problems, Veblen found, was the "disintegration of the spiritual foundations of our domestic institutions".<sup>10</sup> Veblen observed that "men trained by the mechanical occupations to materialistic, industrial habits of thought are best with a growing inability to appreciate, or even to apprehend, the meaning of religious appeals that proceed on the old-fashioned grounds of metaphysical validity."<sup>11</sup> In his vision, morals were not unchanging factors, but instead could be adapted to actual conditions:

Any established scheme of law and morals is an outgrowth of custom, of past habituation, and is bound to change incontinently in the course of further habituation. It is an empirical creation, a system of habits of thought induced by past habits of life, which have been induced by the drive of those material circumstances under which these human generations have been living in the past. And this system of habits of thought (law and custom) is, at best, in a state of moving equilibrium, forever subject to readjustment and derangement by further changes in those material circumstances that condition the community's habits of life.<sup>12</sup>

Veblen believed that morals, laws, and behaviour could be adjusted to living conditions. The task of adjusting morals remained unachieved in Veblen's day.<sup>13</sup> He found an unbridgeable distance to exist between the mechanistic logic of technology and the human need of spiritual stimulation:

This technology of physics and chemistry that goes to make the mechanical system of industry is an organization of habits of thought which run on the ground of mechanistic logic, the logic of impersonal activities which run wholly within the confines of the three

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<sup>9</sup> Elizabeth Watkins Jorgensen, *Thorstein Veblen: Victorian Firebrand* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1999); Stephen Edgell, *Veblen in Perspective: His Life and Thought* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2001)

<sup>10</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (Clifton: Augustus M. Kelley, 1975 [1904]), 358.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>12</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *Absentee Ownership and Business Enterprise in Recent Times: The Case of American* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1964 [1923]): p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Veblen observed that "habits of thought have therefore not been displaced and shifted forward to a new footing in laws and morals in anything like the same measure in which men have learned to use ways and means in industry. The principles (habits of thought) which govern knowledge and belief, law and morals, have accordingly lagged behind, as contrasted with the forward drive in industry and in the resulting workday conditions of living." *Ibid.*, 206.

dimensions of space. It makes no use of conventional, sentimental, religious, or magical truths. But the habits of thought of the community run, in the main, on conventional, sentimental, religious, and magical lines, and are governed by the logic native to that order of realities [sic].<sup>14</sup>

In one of his last essays, Veblen asked engineers and technicians to reconsider the impersonal character of the tasks before them and to insist on “an equitable distribution of the consummate output”.<sup>15</sup> Veblen had not carefully defined the roles of political economists and social scientists. Although he did not refer to it explicitly, he did ascribe to them the fundamental duty of collecting information in order to encourage efficient management.<sup>16</sup> Thus, although Veblen did not make a direct connection between moral readjustment and social science, he did emphasize the necessity of carrying out such tasks. His writings and teachings helped professionalize the social sciences.

Another contemporary of Thorstein Veblen's, the philosopher William James (1842-1910), dissected the problem of the moral condition of modern individuals.<sup>17</sup> William James analyzed moral life from a perspective that differed from Veblen's. For James, the moral condition of individuals lay within every person. James studied this question from the perspective of the individual rather than, as Veblen had done, from that of society. The pioneer of pragmatist philosophy insisted on the preciousness of the spiritual self and the precedence it took over the social and material selves.<sup>18</sup> In his *Principles of Psychology*, James defined in detail the superiority of ethics and morals over the material and instincts. Yet James was not an idealistic philosopher; he recognized the “moral tragedy of human life” caused by the discrepancy between ideals and possibilities.<sup>19</sup> The resultant discord that the pull of these two extremes caused in people's lives represented, to James's way of thinking, the moral breaking point for many.

Actually, James was not as fatalistic as some scholars and biographers have suggested. In another article, James advocated updating ethics and morals. According to his theory, morals and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>15</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Engineers and the Price System* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965 [1921]), 152.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 136-137.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Taylor, *La Diversité de l'Expérience Religieuse: William James Revisit  * (Montr  al: Bellarmin, 2003) ; Richard M. Gale, *The Philosophy of William James* (Cambridge, UK : Cambridge University Press, 2005); George Cotkin, *William James, Public Philosopher* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover Publication, 1890) Vol. I: p. 314.-315.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 547.

ethics were not absolute disciplines that sought to discover fundamental truths or laws. In fact, he argued that “[e]thical science is just like physical science, and instead of being deducible all at once from abstract principles, must simply bide its time, and be ready to revise its conclusions from day to day.”<sup>20</sup> Moral renewal must be based on empirical study: “No philosophy of ethics is possible in the old-fashioned absolute sense of the term. Everywhere the ethical philosopher must wait on facts.”<sup>21</sup> Finally, James did not consider the task of refashioning ethics as solely the responsibility of philosophers: “The ethical philosopher, therefore, whenever he ventures to say which course of action is the best, is on no essentially different level from the common man.”<sup>22</sup> In James’s and Veblen’s writings, ethics and morals were plastic, malleable components of individual and social life. They both acknowledged the actual moral crisis facing the American people; they did not venture clear solutions, but they did insist on the necessity of gathering facts in order to understand fully prevailing moral and social conditions.

The pragmatist philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952) explicitly associated the act of gathering facts with the quest to refashion social and individual ethics.<sup>23</sup> In 1907, Dewey set forth his understanding of the relationship between information, knowledge, and wisdom: “Information is knowledge which is merely acquired and stored up; wisdom is knowledge operating in the direction of powers to better the living of life.”<sup>24</sup> Dewey moreover clarified that, in itself, the empirical method did not discriminate between “right” and “wrong” conclusions.<sup>25</sup> The nuance was significant because Dewey ascribed that purpose to the persons behind the inquiry and not to the methods it employed: “The only guarantee of impartial, disinterested inquiry is the social sensitiveness of the inquirers to the needs and problems of those with whom they are associated.”<sup>26</sup> Methodological improvements did not themselves guarantee, Dewey knew, significant improvements in human welfare. He laid bare the fundamental contradiction between advanced technological discoveries issuing from the scientific method and the halting progress of human wellbeing:

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<sup>20</sup> William James, “The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life”, an Address to the Yale Philosophical Club, published in the *International Journal of Ethics*, April 1891, reproduced in William James, *Pragmatism and other Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000): p. 258.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 258-259.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991)

<sup>24</sup> John Dewey, *How we Think* (New York: Dover Publications, 1997 [1910]): p. 52.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>26</sup> John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920): pp. 147-148.

The sciences have created new industrial arts. Man's physical command of natural energies has been indefinitely multiplied. There is control of the sources of material wealth and prosperity. What would once have been miracles are now daily performed with steam and coal and electricity and air, and with the human body. But there are few persons optimistic enough to declare that any similar command of the forces which control man's social and moral welfare has been achieved.<sup>27</sup>

Dewey was optimistic enough to suggest a way to resolve that contradiction: "When the consciousness of science is fully impregnated with the consciousness of human values, the greatest dualism which now weighs humanity down, the split between the material, the mechanical, the scientific and the moral and ideal will be destroyed."<sup>28</sup> Dewey proposed to employ social science and historical examples to balance these extremes. "We need to know," he insisted, "what the social situation is in which we find ourselves . . . to know what is right to do."<sup>29</sup> As for history, its use "for cultivating a socialized intelligence constitutes its moral significance."<sup>30</sup> Dewey's philosophy was much more complex than is apparent here, but his grand theory defined the relationship between social science and social ethics. The people in charge of doing social science had a larger responsibility than just being effective technicians who applied scientific methods; they also had a duty, Dewey believed, to inspire their readers with their own values. In other words, social scientists had to redefine dominant values through their research and galvanize the whole population with their discoveries.

John Dewey's Chicago friend, Jane Addams (1860-1935), agreed with him about the necessity of reintegrating spirituality into modern living conditions.<sup>31</sup> In her classic autobiography, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, Addams expressed the same need to adapt values to the new century. She saw that "for many people without church affiliations the vague humanitarianism the Settlement represented was the nearest approach they could find to an

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>29</sup> John Dewey, *Logical Conditions of a Scientific Treatment of Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1903): p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1912): p. 254-255.

<sup>31</sup> Katherine Joslin, *Jane Addams: A Writer's Life* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Jane Addams and the Dream of American Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 2002); Eleanor J. Stebner, *The Women of Hull House: A Study in Spirituality, Vocation, and Friendship* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997); Mary Jo Deegan, *Jane Addams and the Men of the Chicago School, 1892-1918* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988).

expression of their religious sentiments.”<sup>32</sup> She suggested certain activities that allowed inculcating values into the behaviours of Hull House residents. She described theatres and plays as “a pioneer teacher of social righteousness”.<sup>33</sup> In addition to these social activities, Addams fully endorsed John Dewey’s, Thorstein Veblen’s, and William James’s positions on the role of data collection in the revision of ethics.<sup>34</sup> Although she discussed this idea in her autobiography, she was more explicit about it in her essay on *Democracy and Social Ethics* (1916). For her, the study of social problems was the first step in the adjustment of ethics to changing conditions:

We can only discover truth by a rational and democratic interest in life, and to give truth complete social expression is the endeavor upon which we are entering. Thus the identification with the common lot which is the essential idea of Democracy becomes the source and expression of social ethics. It is as though we thirsted to drink at the great wells of human experience, because we knew that a daintier or less potent draught would not carry us to the end of the journey, going forward as we must in the heat and jostle of the crowd.<sup>35</sup>

Addams associated social ethics with richer relationships among individuals living in community. She observed a widening gap between business interests and basic social ethics.<sup>36</sup> She recommended scrutinizing social phenomena to determine which values were the most appropriate for diffusion:

Action is indeed the sole medium of expression for ethics. We continually forget that the sphere of morals is the sphere of action, that speculation in regard to morality is but observation and must remain in the sphere of intellectual comment, that a situation does not really become moral until we are confronted with the question of what shall be done in a concrete case, and are obliged to act upon theory.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York: Penguin Books, 1961 [1910]): p. 116.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 227-228.

<sup>35</sup> Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1916): p. 11.

<sup>36</sup> “By the very exigencies of business demands, the employer is too often cut off from the social ethics developing in regard to our larger social relationships, and from the great moral life springing from our common experiences.” *Ibid.*, 154-155.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 273-274.

Addams went further than Dewey, James, and Veblen in supporting coercive and legal means to design new values.<sup>38</sup> Although they disagreed on the solutions, they shared an understanding of the moral crisis facing Americans in the first decades of the century.

These major Progressive intellectuals agreed on the necessity of adapting social and individual ethics to modern conditions. Some of them thought social scientists should be officially designated to study these new problems. If studies proceeded on a factual basis, modern values could be fixed. At the same time, the social sciences were emerging as a fresh, new intellectual field. Disciplines such as economics, political science, anthropology, sociology, psychology, industrial research, social work, and criminology established their credentials in a relatively conservative academic environment.<sup>39</sup> Even though social scientists were still defining their fields, they also committed themselves to the debate about the nature of American morals. The founder of the Department of Political Economy at the University of Chicago, the sociologist Albion Small (1854-1926), agreed with John Dewey and Jane Addams on the leading role that social scientists had to play in defining values:

The central questions for social science are: what have men done and how and why, and what light does this experience throw upon what remains to be done, and how to do it? The central task of social science is to understand past and present men, and to derive from this knowledge valuation of both ends and means for the use of the men we shall be tomorrow.<sup>40</sup>

In his seminal essay on the social sciences, Small depicted them as the study of “the evolution of human values”. “I do not say and I do not think,” he clarified, “that social science can ever be a substitute for religion. It is getting plainer and plainer, however, that social

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<sup>38</sup> *Twenty Years at Hull House*. . . , p. 228.

<sup>39</sup> For a complete study of that process see Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977); Jean M. Converse, *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence, 1890-1960* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Donald Fisher, *Fundamental Development of the Social Sciences: Rockefeller Philanthropy and the United States Social Science Research Council* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993); James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Theodore M. Porter, *Trusts in Number: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Dorothy R. Ross, (ed.) *Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994); Dorothy R. Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>40</sup> Albion Small, *The Meaning of Social Science* (Chicago: The Press of the University of Chicago: 1910): p. 114-115.

science . . . is the only rational body for religion.”<sup>41</sup> Small emphasized the role of the initial descriptive and analytical phases of doing a social science survey, which, although essential, were of secondary importance to:

that service by which they open the way to larger realizations of life. By ‘larger realizations of life’ I mean not merely richer mental furnishings of individuals, but more purposeful and more extensive functioning between individuals in developing superior types of associations.<sup>42</sup>

He even encouraged social scientists to produce a “mature conception of social destiny”.<sup>43</sup> For example, Small, one of the first American social scientists to gain renown as a professional, prescribed an extensive moral program for the social sciences. He viewed the rise of the social sciences as the outcome of far more than just a colourless transposition of natural science methods to the sphere of human problems.<sup>44</sup>

The question of the purpose of the social sciences interested other social scientists in the United States and in Europe. Graham Wallas (1858-1932), an English political scientist at the London School of Economics, addressed the issue of values in his essays *Human Nature in Politics* (1908) and *The Great Society* (1914).<sup>45</sup> For Wallas, the scientific survey of society was interconnected with the moral sciences.<sup>46</sup> Focusing on political institutions, Wallas did not consider morals as fixed forever in the past. Rather, he understood them as an evolving element of human nature: “In the evolution of politics, among the most important events have been the successive creations of new moral entities—of such ideals as justice, freedom, right.”<sup>47</sup> This notion of morals as organic was fundamental to Wallas and other Progressive thinkers because if one implicitly accepted that morals had changed in the past, they could also be modified in the future. Wallas indicated the direction of that change: “A fusion might take place between the emotional and philosophical traditions of religion and the new conception of intellectual duty

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 283-284.

<sup>44</sup> Vernon K. Dibble, *The Legacy of Albion Small* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Ernest Becker, *The Lost Science of Man* (New York: Braziller, 1971).

<sup>45</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *Between Two Worlds: The Political Thought of Graham Wallas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971); Terence H. Qualter, *Graham Wallas and the Great Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

<sup>46</sup> Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (London: Constable and Co., 1914 [1908]): p. 18.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 73.

introduced by Science.”<sup>48</sup> He delineated the role of the modern State in that process: “One of the most important functions of a modern government is the effective publication of information. . . .”<sup>49</sup> Fundamentally, however, “[t]he modern State must exist for the thoughts and feelings of its citizens, not as a fact of direct observations but as an entity of the mind. . . .”<sup>50</sup> In his second essay, Wallas argued that the methods of social psychology offered an effective means “to guide human action”.<sup>51</sup> In this essay, Wallas, who distinctly preferred education to eugenics as a means for adjusting morals to modern realities, showed what could be done to achieve the moral responsibility of the state.<sup>52</sup> In the early decades of the twentieth century, Wallas recognized, the fusion between religious feeling and science was yet to be realized.

For Progressive social scientists, fact-gathering was closely related to behaviour definition. Albion Small and Graham Wallas exemplified the opinions of moderate and professional social scientists in the 1910s and 1920s. Other social scientists had reflected on the ties between inquiry and morals or ethics and had attempted to explain the impact these had on social science methods. The sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968), for example, was one of the intellectuals who defined this impact:

In order to be able to indicate what ought to be done, ethics must give some concrete rules. To formulate such rules the ethicist must know customs, mores, mechanism of human behavior and its stimuli, causal relations between different factors that influence human behavior and social life, the concrete circumstances of each case, and so forth. These data are given by sociology, anthropology, psychology, and by other sciences. Without knowledge of these data an ethicist can give only purely theoretical and useless recipes or the prescriptions which instead of curing may poison, instead of improving may aggravate individual or social sickness. Hence, an increasing dependence upon ethics, as an applied art, upon science.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 264.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 273-274.

<sup>51</sup> Graham Wallas, *The Great Society: A Psychological Analysis* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1920 [1914]): p. 31.

<sup>52</sup> See his discussion on the “mental vacuum” in *The Great Society: A Psychological Analysis*. . . , p. 198.

<sup>53</sup> Pitirim Sorokin, “Sociology and Ethics”, in William Fielding Ogburn and A. Goldenweiser (eds.), *The Social Sciences and their Interrelations* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1927): p. 315.

Sorokin went into considerable detail about the utility of the social sciences for making ethical rules.<sup>54</sup> Yet he differed from other social scientists in his insistence on the disciplinary boundary between ethics and the social sciences. For certain social scientists such as Charles A. Ellwood (1873-1946), a sociologist at Duke University, social science directly implied ethics. Sorokin had sought a closer and more formal collaboration between the two fields. The distinction was a crucial one, although the problem of adapting ethics to modern conditions has continued to this day.

Ellwood, who explored ways for ethics and the social sciences to relate to each other, thought that the first reason for the fundamental ethical nature of the social sciences had to do with the similarity between the philosophical and scientific method:

This is because the social sciences do not deal simply with external appearances, which can be measured by instruments of precision, but with qualities and conscious values. Like philosophy, they are necessarily reasoned sciences, as over against the mathematical—physical sciences of external nature with their methods of measurement.<sup>55</sup>

Second, Ellwood presented moral values as having social origins: “All social facts have an ethical aspect and all moral values and ideals are at the same time social facts.”<sup>56</sup> Finally, social scientists who dealt with social problems such as crime, unemployment, and depression among industrial workers could not, in Ellwood’s opinion, distance themselves from the effects these problems had on their lives.<sup>57</sup> Ellwood’s concerns illustrate well how recent debates about subjectivity in the social sciences echo the problems he faced in adapting morals to modern conditions in his day. Thus, for Progressive social scientists, bringing American morals into line with social conditions was one of the most important duties they had in an age marked by major transformation.

Historians intervened in this debate, which raged during the first decades of the twentieth century. The Harvard professor of American history James Harvey Robinson (1863-1936)

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<sup>54</sup> Barry V. Johnston, *Pitirim Sorokin: An Intellectual Biography* (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 1995); Gary Dean Jaworski, “Pitirim Sorokin’s Sociological Anarchism”, *History of the Human Sciences* 6 (1993): 61-77; Lawrence T. Nichols, “Deviance and Social Science: The Instructive Historical Case of Pitirim Sorokin”, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 25 (1989): 335-355; Samuel P. Oliner, “Sorokin’s Contribution to American Sociology” *Nationalities Papers* 4 (1976): 125-151.

<sup>55</sup> Charles A. Ellwood, “Scientific Method in Sociology”, *Social Forces*, 10 (1931): 18.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

maintained that the United States was facing a moral crisis in the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>58</sup> The situation called for a “moral and economic regeneration”, and Robinson proposed a clear solution:

We should proceed to the thorough reconstruction of our mind, with a view to understanding actual human conduct and organization. We must examine the facts freshly, critically, and dispassionately, and then allow our philosophy to formulate itself as a result of this examination, instead of permitting our observations to be distorted by archaic philosophy, political economy, and ethics.<sup>60</sup>

Robinson, insisting that following such a procedure would go a long way toward bringing this mind “up to date”, championed the creative and intelligent elites as the most suitable for fashioning new values in society. For him, science was not the sole source from which to derive values:

Science, which is but the most accurate information available about the world in which we live and the nature of ourselves and of our fellow men, is not the whole life; and except to a few peculiar persons it can never be the most absorbing and vivid of our emotional satisfactions. We are poetic and artistic and romantic and mystical.<sup>61</sup>

Still, Robinson did not ask social scientists to decree what they believed “would be the most useful” for society.<sup>62</sup> Leaders, to his way of thinking, bore responsibility for proposing and influencing but not for imposing their wills on the collective will. Robinson thus agreed with social scientists, philosophers, and other intellectuals on the necessity of basing social ethics on social inquiry.

Charles Austin Beard (1874-1948), professor of Politics at Columbia University, advanced a similar point of view concerning the quest to revise social ethics.<sup>63</sup> In the early 1930s Beard, who had become well-known after writing *The Economic Interpretation of the American*

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<sup>58</sup> “When we contemplate the shocking derangement of human affairs which now prevails in most civilized countries, including our own, even the best minds are puzzled and uncertain in their attempts to grasp the situation.” James Harvey Robinson, *The Mind in the Making: The Relation of Intelligence to Social Reform* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publications, 1921): p. 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>63</sup> Ellen Nore, *Charles A. Beard: An Intellectual Biography* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983)

*Constitution*, headed up a prestigious survey on the educational role of the social sciences. In that role, he highlighted the moral implications of social science. In an unpublished manuscript about the teaching of social science, which he had written during the survey, Beard lauded ethics:

Social science cannot ignore ethical considerations; otherwise it would become a branch of inert scholasticism without direction or motive force. At each given moment it is under obligations to select the striking ethical propensities apparent in society, consider their practical upshot, and indicate the various forms which they take. Ethics give to civics a dynamic quality.<sup>64</sup>

Beard, who had published *The Rise of American Civilization*, explained what set neutral social science apart from ethical social science: "Insofar as social science is truly scientific it is neutral; as taught in the schools it is and must be ethical; it must make choices and emphasize values with reference to commanding standards."<sup>65</sup> Beard associated this role for social science with his own leftist convictions about eliminating poverty and squalor in society (this latter idea being considered the practical or "materialistic" side to his program for social science).<sup>66</sup> As can be seen here, Progressive social scientists and historians viewed the purposes of their fields from a deeply moral perspective. Their commitment to liberalism also put this moral program on a par with social justice and economic well-being.

In 1932, the same year that Charles Beard was expressing his optimism about the redefinition of values through social science, a younger intellectual, leftist theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), called Beard's design into question.<sup>67</sup> In one of his first published essays, Niebuhr highlighted the limitations of that thirty-year-old idea. Reason as applied in social situations, according to Niebuhr, did not allow full control over ethics and morals:

Complete rational objectivity in a social situation is impossible. The very social scientists who are so anxious to offer our general counsels of salvation and are disappointed that an ignorant and slothful people are slow to accept their wisdom, betray middle-class

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<sup>64</sup> Charles A. Beard, *The Objectives of Social Studies* (unpublished manuscript of the American Historical Association study of Social Studies and Education, Special Collection of the University of Chicago, Charles Edward Merriam Papers, Box 125: 2): 49-50.

<sup>65</sup> Charles A. Beard, *A Charter for the Social Sciences in the Schools* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932): p. 94.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>67</sup> Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); Eyal J. Naveh, *Reinhold Niebuhr and non-Utopian Liberalism: Beyond Illusion and Despair* (Portland, Or.: Sussex Academic Press, 2002); Ronald H. Stone, *Reinhold Niebuhr: Prophet to Politicians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971)

prejudices in almost everything they write. Since reason is always . . . the servant of interest in a social situation, social injustice cannot be resolved by moral and rational suasion alone, as the educator and social scientist usually believe.<sup>68</sup>

Although Niebuhr questioned the progressive aspiration of bringing ethics into line with society, he did recognize the moral crisis taking place in the United States: "Since the ultimate sources of social conflicts and injustices are to be found in the ignorance and selfishness of men, it is natural that the hope of establishing justice by increasing human intelligence and benevolence should be perennially renewed."<sup>69</sup> He pointed out the limitations of morality to illustrate just how far the solution proposed by social scientists actually went toward bringing about social justice.<sup>70</sup> The revision of social ethics, Niebuhr knew, was not a panacea for all problems in modern society. "The development of rational and moral resources may indeed qualify the social and ethical outlook," Niebuhr conceded, "but it cannot destroy the selfishness of classes."<sup>71</sup> Intellectuals demanded new solutions different from the Progressive credo of moral adaptation.

### Historians' Interpretations

The quest for revised values characterized the social sciences during the Progressive Era and the 1920s. From their philosophical foundations to the earliest professional forms they took, the social sciences imbued rational method with moral purpose. Niebuhr's critique only illustrated the extent of the influence of such programs among Progressive intellectuals. Moreover, it is crucial to recall that Niebuhr wrote that critique in the early 1930s, in a historical context significantly different from that of the Progressive and the New Deal eras. From the 1940s on, intellectual historians sidelined the moral purpose of the social sciences. Indeed, social science was not the most popular topic among intellectual historians. The Progressive intellectual historian, Vernon Parrington, barely mentioned political economy in his seminal essay *Main*

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<sup>68</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960 [1932]).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>70</sup> "The possibilities of increasing both the rational and the more uniquely moral resources of individuals are so real that it is not surprising that those who study the possibilities should frequently indulge the hope of solving the problems of society by this method. They easily fail to recognize the limits of morality in human life." Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. . . , 40.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

*Currents in American Thought*.<sup>72</sup> Considered by many as the work that defined the field of intellectual history, this essay failed to address the origins of the social sciences.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Merle Curti and Richard Hofstadter launched the historical analysis of social science. Curti, an intellectual historian, located the historical origins of social science in the German scientific breakthrough of the late nineteenth century.<sup>73</sup> Hofstadter described social scientists as leading “mugwumps” in the Progressive movement, who defended their middle-class interests with their scientific discourse.<sup>74</sup>

With Curti and Hofstadter, intellectual histories of the social sciences gained respectability among historians. As with other fields of historical inquiry, historiographical debates affected the history of the social sciences. Daniel Bell called into question the role of intellectuals in dealing with social problems. Bell associated the emergence of the figure of the intellectual with the quest for social prestige or status:

An unsettled society is always an anxious one, nowhere has this been truer than in the United States. In an egalitarian society, where status is not fixed, and people are not known or immediately recognizable by birth or dress, or speech or manners, the acquisition of status becomes all-important, and the threats to one’s status anxiety-provoking.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, according to this interpretation, intellectuals, scientists, journalists, and scholars were members of the middle class who shared typical bourgeois aspirations.

Historians of the New Left, who had a strong materialistic bias, challenged the Progressive interpretation of social science. The debate around New Left history in the 1960s brought new actors to historiography. The 1960s and 1970s were the golden age of segmented histories based on gender, race, sexual orientation, disabilities, and so on. The history of

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<sup>72</sup> [Do you need a citation here for Vernon Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*?]

<sup>73</sup> In social studies, Germany exerted a profound spell on American scholarship. The ideal of investigating objectively the phenomena of social existence and the methods for doing so were largely responsible for establishing such fields as economics, political science, sociology and history on their modern basis in America.” Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1943): 568.

<sup>74</sup> “If the professors had motives of their own for social resentment, the social scientists among them had special reason for a positive interest in the reform movements. The development of regulative and humane legislation required the skills of lawyers and economists, sociologists and political scientists, in the writing of laws and in the staffing of administrative and regulative bodies.” Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955): 155.

<sup>75</sup> Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: The Free Press, 1962): p. 117-118.

oppressed groups affected the writing of the history of the social sciences, which for some time thereafter became the history of social legislation and of the welfare state. For example, the gender historian Linda Gordon analyzed the application of social science concepts to legislation concerning women and children.<sup>76</sup> Other gender historians have studied the impact of the social sciences upon social legislation, an interpretation that is still very popular today.<sup>77</sup> Certain intellectual historians have analyzed the contribution of women intellectuals to the making of social science. The Canadian historian Lynn McDonald has discussed the crucial role of women in the founding of the social sciences.<sup>78</sup> Thus, the philosophical foundations of gender interpretation and its impact upon the creation of the welfare state are well-established in the social sciences.

The other great pillar of the New Left analyzed the impact of race and racism on the making of social science. Historians in the late 1960s and 1970s began to study the contribution of black social scientists.<sup>79</sup> A great debate pitted intellectuals searching for the persistence of an African mentality through American history against those who saw a violent assimilation of blacks by the dominant white culture, and not surprisingly it affected the history of black social science. Yet this history encompasses merely black sociologists. Historians have studied, for example, the debate between W. E. B. Du Bois (1868-1963) and Chicago sociologists Charles S. Johnson (1893-1956) and Edward Franklin Frazier (1894-1962) during the 1920s and 1930s. Intellectual historians organize their research mainly around the expression of cultural traits among African Americans and the defence of their interest as an oppressed cultural group. In a

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<sup>76</sup> Linda Gordon, *Pitied but not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

<sup>77</sup> Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in America, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Ann O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth Century United States History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>78</sup> Lynn McDonald, *The Women Founders of Social Sciences* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> See Ralph H. Hines, "The Negro Scholar's Contribution to Pure and Applied Sociology", *Journal of Social and Behavioral Science*, (1967: 8): 30-35; James Blackwell and Morris Janowitz (eds.), *Black Sociologists – Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); John H. Bracey Jr., August Meier, and Elliot Rudwick (eds.), *The Black Sociologists: The First Half of Century* (California: Wadsworth, 1971); Gerald McWorter, "The Ideology of Black Social Science", *The Black Scholar* (December 1969): 28-35; Joyce A. Ladner (ed.), *The Death of White Sociology* (New York: Random House, 1972); Robert Stapler, *Introduction to Black Sociology* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1976); Robert E. Washington and Donald Cunnigen (eds.), *Confronting the American Dilemma of Race: The Second Generation Black American Sociologists* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2002); Pierre Saint-Arnaud, *L'Invention de la Sociologie Noire aux États-Unis d'Amérique: Essai en Sociologie de la Connaissance Scientifique* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2003).

precedent-setting essay, Henry Yu studied the development of Japanese-American sociology before, during, and after the internment of Nisei during World War II.<sup>80</sup>

In the late 1970s and the 1980s, New Left historians began to encounter criticism from two schools of dissenting historians. First, inspired by the “linguistic turn”, postmodern historians called into question the conclusions of the New Left historians. For postmodern historians, the history of social science meant more than the history of the middle class or the history of oppressed groups like women and non-whites. Postmodern and poststructuralist historians emphasized the power structure that shapes knowledge, including social science. Michel Foucault set forth this idea in his *Archéologie du Savoir* and *Les Mots et les Choses*. Zygmunt Bauman applied Foucault’s notions to a historical survey of “teachers, administrators and social scientists”: “Power needs knowledge; knowledge lends power legitimacy and efficiency. . . .”<sup>81</sup> This connection between power and knowledge profoundly affected the historical analysis of the social sciences. The premise behind this idea is that science allows rational control over social and individual phenomena. Intellectual historians of the social sciences have attempted to prove the existence of such aspirations in the social sciences during the Progressive Era and the 1920s. Jonathan Mathew Jordan, in his essay *Machine-Age Ideology: Social Engineering and American Liberalism, 1911-1939*, has offered a classic illustration of this interpretation:

The antithesis of emotion was of course reason, the stuff of science and the source of the modern world’s mechanical marvels. . . . Science’s methods and its spirit of inquiry could solve social problems just as engineers could calculate correct load factors for bridges or lift coefficients for airplanes.<sup>82</sup>

Jordan explained the strong bond between technology and social institutions.<sup>83</sup> Mark C. Smith employed the same approach as Jordan’s to show the quest for power among social scientists. In Smith’s essay, *Social Science in the Crucible*, social scientists craved the political prestige that typically accompanied mastery of the scientific method. Paradoxically, this

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<sup>80</sup> Henry Yu, *Thinking Orientals: Migration, Contact, and Exoticism in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University press, 2001); on the internment, see Greg Robinson, *By Order of the President: FDR and the Internment of Japanese American* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>81</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (Cambridge Polity Press, 1987): p. 48.

<sup>82</sup> John M. Jordan, *Machine-Age Ideology: Social Engineering and American Liberalism, 1911-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994): p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

interpretation echoes Hofstadter's and Bell's thesis of anxiety status. The difference between these two interpretations lies in the source of power. For Hofstadter and Bell, power remained in the socio-economic infrastructure, whereas for Jordan and Smith power lay in the political and cultural superstructure. Thus, with the linguistic turn, social science regained the status of a cultural field by keeping its distance from the materialistic determinism of New Left historians.

The second critique of the interpretations proposed by New Left historians occurred as conservative intellectuals re-emerged in the United States. These analysts from the right participated in the great attack against the welfare state and liberal intellectuals. One such intellectual, Allan Bloom, provocatively discredited "science's latest attempts to grasp the human situation" as the "suicide of science".<sup>84</sup> Bloom maintained in his controversial essay that no creative purpose animated the social sciences.<sup>85</sup> In the same vein, Russell Jacoby mourned the evanescence of true intellectuals who operated outside academia and were less inclined toward university teaching.<sup>86</sup> Conservative intellectuals have tried to prove the absurdity of the welfare state by denying the credibility of its principal spokespersons: liberal and progressive social scientists and intellectuals. They have recalled the forgotten critique of eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers while trying to show the inherent contradictions in the philosophical premises of the social sciences.

The conservative attack on social science prompted reactions among liberal historians that took the form of researching the institutional structure of their fields. Institutional historians justify the existence of the social sciences by depicting social science as embedded in larger political, economic, and social contexts. The institutionalist interpretation of social science that emerged in the 1970s is still in vogue today. It associates the social sciences with the existence and the transformation of large prominent institutions, and considers the state, the university, the trade union, the private corporation, and the media to be among the entities that have had the greatest influence on the social sciences.

Initially, institutionalist historians examined the academic environment in which the social sciences operated. Thomas Haskell has researched the relationship between the modernization of the university at the turn of the twentieth century and the emergence of

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<sup>84</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987): p. 39.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>86</sup> Russell Jacoby, *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1989): p. 17.

professional social sciences, as represented by national associations like the American Historical Association, the American Economic Association, the American Political Science Association, and the American Statistical Association.<sup>87</sup> Donald Fisher continued Haskell's research by reviewing the founding of the Social Science Research Council in 1923.<sup>88</sup> They primarily focused on the administrative changes affecting these organizations.

At the same time that researchers were turning their attention to academia, other institutional historians were studying the effects the professionalisation of the social sciences was having on municipal, state, and federal governments. They linked the metamorphosis of politics to the emergence of professional social science and focused on the political and partisan aspect of the social sciences. Michael Lacey and Mary O. Furner have analyzed the development of these transformations in the early twentieth century.<sup>89</sup> Carol Gruber has discussed how government officials sought and applied the advice of social scientists during World War I.<sup>90</sup> Thomas Bender has reviewed the role of social scientists in adjustment at the municipal level.<sup>91</sup>

The ties between social scientists and economic institutions such as trade unions and private businesses interested other historians. David Noble observed a close relationship between rational social science and effective business management.<sup>92</sup> William Leach analyzed the role played by social scientists and their organizations (e.g., the National Board of Economic Research) in the management of large enterprises.<sup>93</sup> Clarence Wunderlin highlighted the involvement of social scientists in labour relations as industrial researchers and labour activists.<sup>94</sup>

In 1991, Dorothy Ross published one of the most important reviews of the early institutional history of the social sciences, a superb synthetic institutional history that elucidated

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<sup>87</sup> Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).

<sup>88</sup> Donald Fisher, *Fundamental Development of the Social Sciences: Rockefeller Philanthropy and the United States Social Science Research Council* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993).

<sup>89</sup> Michael J. Lacey, and Mary O. Furner (eds.), *The State and Social Investigation in Britain and in the United States* (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993).

<sup>90</sup> Carol S. Gruber, *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of the Higher Learning in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975).

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Time* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987) and Thomas Bender, *Toward an Urban Vision: Ideas and Institutions in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1975).

<sup>92</sup> David Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York: Knopf, 1977).

<sup>93</sup> William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993).

<sup>94</sup> Clarence Wunderlin, *Visions of a New Order: Social Sciences and Labor Theory in America's Progressive Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

the connections between disparate institutions and the social sciences.<sup>95</sup> In *The Origins of American Social Science*, she explained the relations between social scientists and business executives, politicians, trade union leaders, and even novelists and artists. She attempted to demonstrate the need for and the utility of social science in the debates that raged in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The historiography of social science is a battlefield of opposing views and methods. In 2005, the history of social science offered a basis for replying to conservative intellectuals who asserted that the welfare state and liberal intellectuals had neither purpose nor utility. It is thus crucial to have familiarity with the origins of social science in order to understand the transformations that the social sciences underwent during the twentieth century. My principal reservation about institutional histories of social science lies in the undue emphasis they have given administrative sources. These accounts mainly relate the story of agencies dealing with other agencies in the hands of few influential individuals, particularly politicians, business executives, and trade union leaders. Institutional historians have thereby imposed a certain political, economic, and social determinism on the social sciences. Institution-based interpretations of the social sciences tend not to attribute much significance to the intellectual debates among social scientists, thinkers, and other leaders.

By contrast, postmodern and poststructuralist historians have overemphasized the place of reason in defining social science. Their analyses have obscured the role that the social sciences originally played in the larger movement to redefine American moral values. For the last thirty years, the economist Amartya Sen and the philosopher John Rawls have revived awareness about the moral purpose that informs the social sciences. Their emphasis, however, is hardly new because as early as 1920 social scientists had already made this very case. The mistake of postmodern and poststructuralist historians has been to continue to pit reason against emotion and matter against spirit. Eighty years ago, these dualisms did not exist in the way postmodern historians now portray them.

### Defining Basic Concepts

This dissertation explores how far the quest among social scientists to revise morals went. Before explaining the thesis in detail, I will define some basic concepts. The first idea, *social ethics*, was

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<sup>95</sup> Dorothy R. Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

very popular among Progressive intellectuals in the early twentieth century. Although this dissertation aspires to be neither a philosophical nor an ethical work, it does treat the general ideas of the Progressive Era and the 1920s. Social ethics represented, for intellectuals and social scientists of the time, the general code of conduct that informed behaviour in social and interpersonal relations. The idea of social behaviour subsumed a variety of issues that were of concern to Americans of the period.

The social scientists under study here did not subscribe to behaviourist psychology; conversely, they were fascinated by the breakthroughs that social psychology had made possible. This dissertation has intentionally not addressed individual and behavioural psychology. Social psychology will be studied from the perspective of the interest that motivated social scientists to adapt codes of conduct to social, rather than individual, problems. The problems that Progressive social scientists encountered were not to alter the purposes these scholars espoused, but they would define the code of conduct that social scientists wanted society to adopt.

These same problems led social scientists to abandon, in the 1930s, the moral purpose they had ascribed to the social sciences during the thirty years before the Depression. In 1939, the sociologist Robert Lynd (1892-1970) wrote about the abandonment of the moral purpose that had formerly inspired social scientists:

Social science is heir to all the strengths and weaknesses that human beings and their culture exhibit. In the very process of its precise ordering of data, it displays cultural lags, distortions of emphasis, blind spots, and a propensity to play safe at exposed points. Its objectivity tends to be impaired by the fact that it is bent and molded by the very thing it must try to objectify. In a culture like ours, which is casual as to its structuring and integration, it is not surprising, therefore, that the social sciences are not integrated; or that, in a culture patterned to oppose changes in fundamental rituals and beliefs, social scientists manifest some hesitation as regards forthright teaching and research on problems explicitly concerned with fundamental change.<sup>96</sup>

Many factors explain the evanescence of the moral purpose of social science. My primary interest is to study the intention to adapt American values to modern conditions and to show that

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<sup>96</sup> Robert S. Lynd, *Knowledge for What: The Place of Social Science in American Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1940): p. 116.

it was more than a *voeu pieux* that was only expressed publicly and did not actually influence research agendas.

Indeed, a second notion in this dissertation, *social science*, by its very existence demonstrated the perceived need for new values. In the Progressive and the New Deal eras, the social sciences were much more integrated than they are today. Social scientists from different fields read each other's work. Also, the tradition of collaboration between political economy and sociology that prevailed during the latter nineteenth century inspired many social scientists in the early decades of the twentieth century. It was through the work of these social scientists that the value systems that governed earlier eras were found to be breaking down even though new ones were not arising to replace them. Robert Lynd's *Middletown*, published in 1929, exemplified this very theme, to which many social scientists in the 1910s and 1920s subscribed. Lynd was one of the most famous sociologists to undertake such a survey. He was not, however, alone. Political scientists, economists, psychologists, anthropologists, industrial researchers, and social workers hungered for empirical evidence that would confirm that the old value system was indeed vanishing.

Social scientists scrutinized the moral crisis they found, but they were also practical. They sought to build a framework for new values via political means. Some engaged in partisan politics and activism; others took part in public commissions. The quest to reform American morals motivated many social scientists to intervene in various ways, including entering public life. Leading social scientists expressed a desire, for example, to join Herbert Hoover's commission bandwagon. Hoover, too, understood the clash between past values and modern reality, viewing it through the eyes of a Quaker and an engineer. In his private papers and in some of his public statements, he emphasized the necessity of moral reconstruction based on research in the social sciences. During his years as a politician, from 1920 to 1933, Hoover encouraged the use of public commissions for these very reasons. In his correspondence with social scientists, he acknowledged the responsibility of the federal government for such undertakings. Hoover was not, of course, in touch with every social scientist in the country, but he did maintain relations with the leading social experts of his time.

Barry Karl has studied, from an institutional perspective, the relations between Hoover and social scientists. Karl brilliantly revealed the interconnections among academia, private

philanthropies, social science associations, and the federal government.<sup>97</sup> Yet Karl barely touched upon the intellectual discussions that took place when the social sciences came into being. For him, the primary dimension in social science was organizational. He did not dissect the debate between social scientists, analysts, and philosophers about the role and purpose of the social sciences. Karl's essays and articles exemplify the administrative character of institutional history. His work, although thoroughly and accurately researched, did not pay enough attention to discussions of the moral purpose behind the social sciences.

Still, Karl superbly described the roles of the leading social scientists who worked with Herbert Hoover's commissions. Taking as my starting point the historical context that Karl has so well documented, I have selected the most representative social scientists who worked with Hoover. I have decided to study the three disciplines that contributed the most toward the reshaping of social ethics. These disciplines were economics, political science, and two branches of sociology: industrial research and social work. Social scientists from these disciplines shared the goal of adapting social behaviour to modern conditions by accumulating and analyzing data from social surveys and then prescribing solutions. They did not necessarily take the same approaches or develop the same kinds of information, but the resulting diversity only served to enrich their discussions further.

Early-twentieth-century economics emerged from the great political-economy tradition of the nineteenth century. In 1900, economics included the British utilitarian political economy school and the German historical school. These traditions, which took as their focus the production and distribution of wealth, shaped the emergence of economics in the United States. American political economists studied the texts coming from these traditions. The writings of political economists in 1900 still reflected influences from these two traditions in the United States. Although I will not discuss the debates between these two schools, it is essential to bear in mind the European origins of American economics.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that between 1900 and 1920 the first generation of professional economists were careful to keep their distance from political economy. The case of Wesley Clair Mitchell offers a case in point in the shift from political economy to economics. Having earned a degree in political economy from Columbia University in 1896, Mitchell went

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<sup>97</sup> Barry D. Karl, "Presidential Planning and Social Science Research: Mr. Hoover's Experts", *Perspectives in American History* 3 (1969): 347-409; Barry D. Karl, *Charles E. Merriam and the Study of Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

on to become president of the American Economic Association in 1925. The most fascinating aspect of Mitchell's career, however, was not his institutional affiliations or his professional achievements, but rather his understanding of the role of economics, the purpose of the social sciences, and the public duty economists and social scientists had to carry out. Mitchell believed that economists had to sway the behaviour of *consumers* in order to encourage a fair redistribution of wealth among the various segments of American society. Economists, who were professional social scientists in Mitchell's mind, could accomplish this end by intervening in governmental spheres—and he called on such notions to justify his collaboration with Hoover. The Depression of the 1930s was ultimately to shake Mitchell's intellectual assumptions to their foundations.

Political science, like economics, had its roots in nineteenth-century political economy. In the nineteenth century, leading political economists discussed the role of the state in the production and distribution of wealth. In the early years of the social sciences, economists like Wesley Mitchell also focused on the production and distribution of wealth. Other political economists, however, were more intent on examining classic questions concerning the state, the source of its power, and its sovereignty—questions that had divided scholars and philosophers for centuries. These philosophical questions interested nineteenth-century political economists in Europe as well as in the United States, where there had been a long tradition of political philosophy and debate around the role of the state. As in economics, however, political thinking changed between 1900 and 1920.

The early thought of Charles Edward Merriam illustrates rather well the shift from classical political philosophy to politics as a science, or political science. Merriam had a career similar to Mitchell's, only in political science. Merriam attempted to understand and influence the political behaviour of American *citizens* in the 1920s. He prescribed the political education and electoral duty of Americans, going as far as suggesting the behaviour Americans should adopt in their political lives. Significantly, Merriam situated his vision of political science in the larger project of the social sciences and, in a functionalist way, considering his work to constitute the political arm of the social science corpus. The contribution of political scientists culminated, he thought, with their active participation in the public sphere. Political scientists had the responsibility, according to Merriam's vision, to bring about a reality in which they could influence social behaviour through governmental means. The Depression of the 1930s confirmed

Merriam's convictions that the public should exert greater control over the conduct of political affairs.

Political economy was not the sole discipline to influence social science. A second nineteenth-century discipline, sociology, also could be found at the head of professional social science. The French tradition of Saint Simon and Auguste Comte crossed the Channel and the Atlantic to inspire British and American intellectuals in the nineteenth century.<sup>98</sup> Social science revolutionized the understanding of social movements by spurring scholars and intellectuals to gather facts before proposing solutions to social problems. Sociology, economics, and political science were not homogeneous disciplines; in fact, a host of schools, each with mentors and disciples, fragmented the scientific landscape. The progressive school in sociology emphasized striving to reform and improve society by gaining knowledge of the nature of social problems. In their magnum opus published in 1927, *The Rise of American Civilization*, historians Charles and Mary Beard asserted that "the idea of progress or the continual improvement in the lot of mankind on this earth" required only "the attainment of knowledge and the subjugation of the material world to the requirement of human welfare."<sup>99</sup> The notion of social progress motivated many social scientists at the end of the nineteenth century.

Mary van Kleeck, a Smith College graduate in sociology, also fervently sought to reform American society. Early in her life, van Kleeck had equated social progress with the adjustment of morals to modern conditions. When she moved from the lower-middle-class town of Northampton, Massachusetts, to early-twentieth-century New York City, she also came to stark realizations about the brutality of modernity upon the toiling masses. She abandoned her studies at Columbia University to work in a vocational bureau and in women trade unions. Later, she honed her industrial-research skills at the Russell Sage Foundation, which she joined one year after its establishment in 1907. Through her industrial surveys, she strove to build better relations between *workers* and *employers*. Not only did she desire fairer treatment of workers by employers, but she also believed that by exposing social inequality and injustice her survey would change both employers' and workers' attitudes. In the same spirit as Merriam and Mitchell, Mary van Kleeck incarnated the obligation that social scientists ideally felt toward the

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<sup>98</sup> Gillis J. Harp, *Positivist Republic: Auguste Comte and the Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1920* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

<sup>99</sup> Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1927): p. 443-444.

public. They had to intervene via government if they sincerely wanted to inculcate new values. Although the events of the late 1920s and early 1930s disillusioned her, she radicalized her views because of them and called for a Stalinist five-year plan in the United States.

This dissertation will tell the story of the collaboration between Herbert Hoover, Wesley Mitchell, Charles Merriam, and Mary van Kleeck by examining the motivation behind their public commitment and their ideas: the adjustment of national values to the modern conditions affecting consumers, citizens, workers, and employers.

## Chapter 1: The Practical Utopian: Herbert Hoover and the Purposes of Social Sciences

In 1910, at age thirty-six, Herbert Clark Hoover (1874-1964) retired from his career as engineer-geologist after a youth and young adulthood evocative of Horatio Alger's characters.<sup>100</sup> Hoover's retirement from private business marked the beginning of the most fascinating period of his life: his public service. Hoover's political orientation was not as clear as other leading politicians of his day. Theodore Roosevelt, for instance, never sought to curry that of favor with Democratic officials when he began political life; nor had Woodrow Wilson been attracted by the spirit and values of the Grand Old Party.

Hoover's political orientation, however, was not as evident as were Roosevelt's and Wilson's. Indeed, both parties appealed to him. When Hoover began to work in the public sphere, he did so as a professional engineer and businessman. Today, in the wake of the Enron scandal, it can be difficult to understand that, eighty years ago, business management represented a highly regarded model of efficient administration.<sup>101</sup> Even prominent progressives critical of business misconduct, such as Charles Merriam and Mary van Kleeck, acknowledged the beneficent contribution certain businessmen had made to public administration. Thus, Hoover's credentials as a successful businessman have been considered an asset for a political career.

Hoover had an unusual view of politics. A staunch believer in the American republic, Hoover viewed his role with the eyes of a moralist. Throughout his correspondence and private papers, he justified his public intervention with the deep conviction of someone who sought to shape American collective morals. Hoover, however, kept his personal values separate from his ideal of a public ethics widely diffused and shared. From Hoover's papers, one can more easily ascertain his social ethics than his private and personal values. Many advisors were later to help Hoover in this quest for a public ethics grounded in American private and public institutions. The social scientists who later collaborated with him in his commissions would follow him in this grand undertaking.

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<sup>100</sup> Ron Limbaugh, "Pragmatic Professional: Herbert Hoover's Formative Years as Mining Engineer, 1895-1908", *Mining History Journal*, 11 (2004): 43-58.

<sup>101</sup> See the classic by Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967)

### The Early Years

Born in 1874 in West Branch, Iowa, Herbert Clark Hoover received a Quaker education from his family and his community. Orphaned at age nine, Hoover moved with his sister and brother to his uncle's farm in Northern California. He entered Stanford University to study geology a year after it opened in 1892.<sup>102</sup> During his Stanford years, Hoover had met his future wife, Lou Henry (1874-1944), a student there in geology.<sup>103</sup> When, four years later, Hoover completed his education, his family's standing and connections brought him few professional opportunities. Mining was a high-growth industry and a profitable occupation for young and ambitious men in the late nineteenth century. In 1895, Hoover took a position as a geologist with Louis Jenin's mining company based in California and Nevada. He occupied this position for fifteen years.

With few attachments in the United States, Hoover began an international career that would take him and his wife Lou from California to Great Britain, South Africa, India, China, and Australia. Known for working long hours, Hoover did not limit himself [only] to his interest in mining. He and Lou, for example, completed a scholarly translation of Georgius Agricola's *De Re Metallica*, a fifteenth-century geology treatise. By the mid 1900s, Hoover and his wife had become international travelers with a network of contacts around the world. This confirmed Hoover's Quaker belief in the value of international friendships for promoting understanding and peace.

By 1910, Hoover's international mining career had earned the couple sufficient wealth and social prominence so that Hoover could consider going into public service full time. To be sure, public service was viewed as virtuous—in part because of the modest incomes that public-sector employees received, but also because it sometimes required post-secondary-school preparation. A trend was emerging among those seeking a life in politics wherein they would first acquire a college degree and then enter the political arena. Yet it was precisely the virtuous aura about public service combined with the educational requirement that appealed to Hoover the Moralizer. Hoover's transition from businessman to politician obviously diverged from this linear course and meant he would have to find a way to balance his competing interests. In much the

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<sup>102</sup> On Hoover's passage at and influence on Stanford University, see George H. Nash, *Herbert Hoover and Stanford University* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1988)

<sup>103</sup> Anne Beiser Allen published the most recent biography of Lou Henry Hoover. See Anne Beiser Allen, *An Independent Woman: The Life of Lou Henry Hoover* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000)

<sup>105</sup> Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965 [1909]), 361

same way that Hoover had kept his personal values distinct from his social ethics, he would also manage to dissociate his business affairs from his public service career. While in political life, for example, Hoover was never known to have made major political decisions that profited the mining industry.

Hoover entered public administration a year after Herbert Croly (1869-1930) published his famous essay on *The Promise of American Life*. Considered the manifesto of the Progressive movement, this essay put forward certain ideas that Hoover cherished and developed later in his career. Hoover expressed his faith in the notion of commission by maintaining that

the need for regulation should not be made the excuse for bestowing upon officials a responsibility which they cannot in the long run properly redeem. . . ° These commissions should be constituted partly as bureaus of information and publicity, and partly as an administrative agency to secure the effective enforcement of the law.<sup>105</sup>

Hoover envisioned commissions and regulation in the progressive spirit of Croly. Nevertheless—and this is where the institutionalist interpretation of Hoover and of the Progressive Era in general falls down—for Hoover, for Croly, and for other progressive leaders, the limited role of commissions did not respond adequately to the fear of big government and state socialism. Naturally, in the early twentieth century the generalized aversion toward big government among the American electorate, with its roots in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Republican thought, translated into a rejection of socialism, which derived from a secular tradition in American political thinking.

Yet another historical tradition, one that is less analyzed than the Republican aversion toward centralized government but that was relevant to Hoover because of his reference to it is the belief in individual intelligence as uniting and forging the American community. Croly superbly defined the national role of individual intelligence. For him,

Economically and politically, the need is for constructive regulation, implying the imposition of certain fruitful limitations upon traditional individual freedom. But the national intellectual development demands above all individual emancipation. American intelligence has still to issue its Declaration of Independence. It has still to proclaim that in a democratic system the intelligence has a discipline, an interest, and a will of its own, and that special discipline and interest call for a new conception both of individual and of national development. For the time being the freedom which Americans need is freedom

of thought. The energy they need is the energy of thought. The moral unity they need cannot be obtained without an integrity of thought.<sup>106</sup>

Traditionally, the absence of large bureaucratic structures explained this faith in the individual. In Croly and in Hoover's thought, however, it was possible to find exactly the opposite position. Institutions must rest upon intelligent elites who were able to understand the needs of the population and assure an efficient handling of social and economic problems. In other words, the intelligence of the elites secured the existence of just public institutions and delineated the role of the state.

Indeed, Hoover is much more famous for his capacity for hard work than for his social philosophy. Indifferent to party affiliation, Hoover served under both the Republican Taft and the Democrat Wilson. As chair of the Commission for the Relief of Belgium (1914-1920), Food Administrator (1917-1920), member of the War Trade Council (1917-1920), chair of the United States Grain Corporation (1917-1919), chair of the Inter-Allied Food Council (1917-1918), chair of the Sugar Equalization Board (1918-1919), director-general of the American Relief Administration in Europe (1918-1920), and member of President Wilson's War Council in 1918<sup>107</sup>, Hoover gained national preeminence through his work as a diplomat during the First World War.

Yet despite his foreign involvements, which had caused Wilson so many domestic problems, Hoover was almost never attacked for his internationalist positions. Indeed, Woodrow Wilson's political doom seemed to contribute to Herbert Hoover's political celebrity. Hoover was able to adapt when the Democratic interventionist atmosphere under Wilson shifted to an isolationist Republican stance. Of course, the Republican party of the 1910s was not a monolithic organization; it was rife with internal divisions. The Progressive faction confronted the Old Guard inside the party.<sup>108</sup> The party of Warren Harding, Andrew Mellon, and Calvin Coolidge, the right wing of the Republican party, also included in its ranks George Norris (Senator from Nebraska), Fiorello La Guardia (Congressman from New York) and Hiram Johnson (Governor

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 421.

<sup>107</sup> Joan Hoff Wilson, "A Reevaluation of Herbert Hoover's Foreign Policy" in Martin L. Fausold and George T. Mazuzan (eds.), *The Hoover Presidency: A Reappraisal* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1974), 169.

<sup>108</sup> On this clash within the Republican Party see Peri E. Arnold, "Roosevelt versus Taft: The Institutional Key to 'the Friendship that Split the Republican Party'", *Miller Center Journal*, 5 (1998): 23-40.

of California), leading the liberal-progressive wing of the GOP.<sup>109</sup> An astute politician, Hoover had managed to penetrate Republican circles by playing on his reputation as a successful businessman and hard-working politician above such factional struggles.

Historians have researched many aspects of Hoover's tenure as Secretary of Commerce (1923-1928) under President Calvin Coolidge. His policies regarding natural resources, radio, aviation, tariffs, foreign and domestic commerce, and agriculture have already been carefully analyzed by other historians, whose analyses have figured in the development of my argument here.<sup>110</sup> But the present work also draws on a rarely exploited collection of letters, memos, and

<sup>109</sup> On the internal tensions of the GOP, see the dated but still valid factual account done by John D. Hicks in his essay on the 1920s. John D. Hicks, *Republican Ascendancy, 1921-1933* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960): 50-106.

<sup>110</sup> Peri E. Arnold, "Ambivalent Leviathan: Herbert Hoover and the Postive State" in J. David Greenstone (ed.), *Public Values and Private Power in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982): 109-136; Peri E. Arnold, "'The Great Engineer' as Administrator: Herbert Hoover and Modern Bureaucracy", *Review of Politics* 42 (1980): 329-348; Peri E. Arnold, "The First Hoover Commission and the Managerial Presidency", *Journal of Politics* 38 (1976): 46-70; Peri Arnold, "Herbert Hoover and the Continuity of American Public Policy", *Public Policy* 20 (1972): 525-544; William J. Barber, *From New Era to New Deal: Herbert Hoover, the economists, and American economic policy, 1921-1933*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Edward D Berkowitz and Kim McQuaid, "Bureaucrats as 'Social Engineers': Federal Welfare Program in Herbert Hoover's America", *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 39 (1980): 321-335; Gary Dean Best, "Food Relief as Price Support: Hoover and American Pork: January-March 1919" *Agricultural History* 45 (1971): 79-84; Gary Dean Best, *The Politics of American Individualism: Herbert Hoover in Transition, 1918-1921*. (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975); Gary Dean Best, "President Wilson's Second Industrial Conference, 1919-1920", *Labor History* 16 (1975): 505-520; Joseph Brandes, *Herbert Hoover and Economic Diplomacy: Department of Commerce Policy 1921-1928*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1962); Kendrick Clements, "Herbert Hoover and Conservation, 1921-1933" *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 67-88; Kendrick Clements, "Herbert Hoover and the Fish", *Journal of Psychohistory* 10 (1982-1983): 333-348; Lloyd Craig, *Aggressive Introvert: A Study of Herbert Hoover and Public Relations Management 1912-1932*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972); Robert D Cuff, "Herbert Hoover, the ideology of Voluntarism and War Organization during the Great War", *Journal of American History*, 64 (1977-78): 358-372; Martin L Fausold, "President Hoover's Farm Policies", *Agricultural History* 51 (1977): 362-377; Daniel E. Garvey, "Secretary Hoover and the Quest for Broadcast Regulation", *Journalism History*, 3 (1976): 66-85; Lawrence E. Gelfand, (ed.), *Herbert Hoover: The Great War and its aftermath 1914-1923*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1979); James L Guth, "Herbert Hoover, the U.S. Food Administration, and the Dairy Industry, 1917-8, *Business History Review*, 55 (1981): 170-187; David E Hamilton, "Herbert Hoover and the Great Drought of 1930", *Journal of American History*, 68 (1981-1982): 850-875; David M Hart, "Herbert Hoover's Last Laugh: The Enduring Significance of the 'Associative State' in the United States", *Journal of Policy History* 10 (1998): 419-444; Ellis W. Hawley, (ed.) *Herbert Hoover As Secretary of Commerce : Studies in New Era Thought and Practice*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1981); Ellis W. Hawley, "Herbert Hoover and the Sherman Act, 1921-1933", *Iowa Law Review*, 74 (1989): 1067-1133; Ellis W. Hawley, "Reappraising the Great Engineer", *Reviews in American History* 7 (1979): 565-570; Ellis W. Hawley, "Herbert Hoover, the Commerce Secretariat, and the Vision of an 'Associative State', 1921-1928", *Journal of American History* 61 (1974): 116-140; J. Joseph Huthmacher and Warren I Susman (eds.), *Herbert Hoover and the Crisis of American Capitalism*. (Cambridge: Schenkman, 1973); Barry Karl, "Presidential Planning and Social Science Research : Mr. Hoover's Experts", *Perspectives in American History* 3 (1969) : 347-409; Gary H. Koerselman, "Secretary Hoover and National Farm Policy: Problems of Leadership", *Agricultural History* 51 (1977): 378-395; Roger C Lambert, "Hoover, the Red Cross and Food for the Hungry" *Annals of Iowa* 44 (1979): 530-540; David D Lee, "Herbert Hoover and the Development of Commercial Aviation, 1921-1926", *Business History Review* 58 (1984): 78-102; Evan B Metcalf, "Secretary Hoover and the Emergence of Macroeconomic Management" *Business History Review* 49 (1975): 60-80;

manuscripts in the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library at West Branch, Iowa. It also includes materials from "Hoover's Bible", a collection Hoover assembled in the early 1960s that included most of his unpublished speeches, article manuscripts of varying lengths (from half a page to twenty pages), and other private documents produced before and after his presidency.

In addition, my research at West Branch revealed a little-known side to Hoover the Great Humanitarian engaged in politics. I will discuss a Hoover influenced by the intellectual debates of the 1920s concerning education, morals, the role of library, science, social sciences, and progress. In his "Bible", Hoover linked these ideas to his familiar notions of business, efficiency, waste, regulation, government, and individualism. It is this very bridge between the private and the public Hoover that explains why this practical politician was fascinated by the intellectual world of social scientists. Documents found in his Bible supply the missing link between Hoover's politics and the social science in the 1920s.

Hoover shared the same ambition of progressive social scientists seeking to cope with the vanishing ethics and values of the nineteenth century. He sought to do so, not by unilaterally removing them, but by adjusting them to the demands of new interests and behaviors. Historians have commented on the relations between social scientists and Hoover primarily by emphasizing their common positivistic faith in science.<sup>111</sup> Certainly, this faith exerted a capital influence on both social scientists and Hoover. Nevertheless, as this chapter and the chapters on three of Hoover's closest associates (Wesley Mitchell, Charles Merriam, and Mary van Kleeck) will illustrate, the ambition to develop a scientific reconstruction of a new social ethics united the Great Humanitarian and publicly engaged intellectuals in a common cause.

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Ronald C. Moe, *The Hoover Commissions Revisited*. (Boulder: Westview, 1982); James S Olson, "The Philosophy of Herbert Hoover: A Contemporary Perspective", *Annals of Iowa* 43 (1976): 181-191; Patrick D. Reagan, "From Depression to Depression: Hooverian National Planning, 1921-1933", *Mid America* 70 (1988): 35-60; Donald R. Stabile, "Herbert Hoover, the FAES and the AF of L", *Technology and Culture* 27 (1986): 819-827; Charles Walcott and Karen M. Hult. "Management Science and the Great Engineer: Governing the White House during the Hoover Administration", *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 20 (1990): 557-579; William Appleman Williams, "The Central Role of Herbert Hoover in the Maturation of an Industrial Gentry" in W. A. Williams, *The Contours of American History* (New York: New Viewpoints, 1961): 425-438; Joan Hoff Wilson, "Hoover's Agricultural Policies: 1921-1928", *Agricultural History* 51 (1977): 335-361; Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975); Robert H Zieger, "Labor, Progressivism and Herbert Hoover in the 1920s", *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 58 (1975): 196-208; Robert H. Zieger, "Herbert Hoover, the Wage Earner and the 'New Economic System' 1919-1929", *Business History Review* 51 (1977): 161-189.

<sup>111</sup> See Barry Karl, *Charles E. Merriam and the Study of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); Mark C. Smith, *Social Science in the Crucible* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994); Sharon Stockton, "Engineering Power: Hoover, Rand, Pound, and the Heroic Architect", *American Literature*, 2000 (72): 1-29.

## First Contacts with Social Scientists

### *Hoover's early Forum of Scholars*

The extent of Hoover's relations with social scientists, before his appointment as Secretary of Commerce, is difficult to ascertain. Evidence suggests that he was in touch with President Wilson, a renowned political scientist from Princeton; however, Wilson's role was not primarily to offer his expertise as a political scientist to Hoover. Even if social scientists played a crucial role in the war effort between 1917 and 1918, they apparently did not make much of an impression on Hoover other than by demonstrating to him that help they could assist in the management of public affairs.<sup>112</sup> The first time that Hoover appears to have made reference to social scientists was in July 1921 when the Secretary of Commerce asked for advice from the Harvard professor of economics Frank William Taussig (1859-1940). Taussig replied to Hoover:

My suggestion to you is that you get together a small conference of good men, and ask them to formulate a comprehensive plan for collecting current data on the industrial, commercial, [and] financial movements. Among economists the two best experts are Wesley Clair Mitchell of New York and Warren M. Pearsons of Harvard University.<sup>113</sup>

Taussig thought that commissions would help to mitigate the ups and downs of industrial production and consumption cycles.<sup>114</sup> This idea was widespread among social scientists of this period. Wesley Mitchell advanced similar ideas in the founding of the National Bureau of Economic Research in 1921. Nevertheless, Frank Taussig suggested arrangements that could be considered the embodiment of Herbert Croly's ideal of commissions.

Commissions developed in the 1920s under Hoover's guidance differed from the commissions of the Progressive Era, such as the Commission on Immigration and the Commission on Industrial Relations. During the Progressive Era, Senators and Congressmen chaired these reform commissions and determined their general schedules and purposes in keeping with their political agendas. The Commission on Immigration was undertaken in the context of the debate around the Immigration Act of 1907. Similarly, the violence surrounding the great waves of strikes and lock-outs profoundly swayed the Commission on Industrial

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<sup>112</sup> See Carol S. Gruber, *Mars and Minerva: World War I and the Uses of the Higher Learning in America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975)

<sup>113</sup> F. W. Taussig to Herbert Hoover, correspondence, July 14, 1921, box 595, folder Taussig, F.W., Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1-2.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

Relations. Hoover's commissions were not held with the same idea of resolving a particularly divisive issue. Conversely, Hoover's political agenda behind his commissions, if it may be called a political agenda, was only to perpetuate economic prosperity, a situation no organization or interest challenged. In addition, even if Hoover was the official chair of the commissions, he did not play an active role in the discussions they held. Senators and Congressmen did not participate in the gatherings of these commissions, which were composed exclusively of social scientists. Their membership and their orientation radically differed from the reform commissions of the 1900s and 1910s.

Following Professor Taussig's advice, in 1921 Hoover called, under the prerogative of President Harding, a Commission on the Elimination of Industrial Waste and a special committee seeking to control the business cycle.<sup>115</sup> Hoover hired a social scientist and put him in charge of his relations with social scientists. He had approached Wesley Mitchell to occupy this function, but Mitchell politely declined Hoover's offer, agreeing to serve as a consultant rather than an employee. Hoover hired Edward Eyre Hunt (1885-1953), a former colleague of Hoover's at the Belgium Relief Commission. Hunt acted as the dispatcher between Hoover and other social scientists. For example, in 1921 Hunt contacted the Russell Sage Foundation industrial researcher Mary van Kleeck to work for the Secretary of Commerce's Commission on Unemployment and Business Cycles.<sup>116</sup> In some revealing correspondence Hoover had with Edwin Gay (1867-1946), Mitchell's colleague at the NBER, the Secretary of Commerce removed the role of interpretation from the general mandate of government. For Hoover, the function of government was to collect information, a function that did not, however, imply that public officers could assign meanings to the information collected. The Secretary of Commerce thought "the kind of work being done by the NBER cannot be adequately undertaken by the Government. It involves, in the first instance, interpretative questions which can only be arrived at in the manner that your Bureau handles them."<sup>117</sup> In other words, for him, government personnel could not interpret data adequately because the ability of social scientists to interpret

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<sup>115</sup> Hoover replied to F. W. Taussig, "I am quietly starting a little service on the lines you suggest and shall endeavor to build it up month by month until I get it somewhere that it is worthy of consideration and, then, I think, it would be a good idea to call in some such committee as you suggest to see how it can be better developed." Herbert Hoover to F.W. Taussig, correspondence, July 20, 1921, box 595, folder Taussig, F.W, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

<sup>116</sup> Edward Eyre Hunt to Mary van Kleeck, correspondence, November 5, 1921, box 618, folder Unemployment Business Cycles, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

<sup>117</sup> Herbert Hoover to Edwin Gay, correspondence, October 20, 1921, box 234, folder 4214, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

such information was unrivaled. Thus, in Hoover's mind, it was the duty of public officials to enact and enforce laws, whereas the role of social scientists was to ascribe meaning to data while keeping their professional neutrality concerning legislation.

Even though Hoover recognized no interpretative mandate for government, he did not reject the necessity of such explanation. For Hoover, social ideas were the fuel of political institutions. In a speech made to the members of the Academy of Political Science, the Secretary of Commerce set forth his views on the role of social ideas. Hoover argued that solutions to social problems

cannot be found through empirical formula; they can only be dealt with through the growth of ideas and of institutions expressing these ideas. We require the development of social thought, of social ideals and it requires time and patience. Ideas and their translation in institutions grow by [a] small accretions and the growths can be accelerated by societies such as [the Academy of Political Science].<sup>118</sup>

Hoover insisted on the necessity of studying the manifestations and the conditions under which social problems evolved in order to bring forward practical solutions. He gave the speech at the Academy of Political Science in the context of the survey of business cycles and unemployment. Expressing his optimism about an imminent solution, Hoover maintained that

I am not the one who regards [the vast calamities of unemployment in the cyclic periods of depression] as insolvable. Thirty years ago our business community considered the cyclic financial panic as inevitable. We know now we have cured it through the Federal Reserve system. The problem requires study; it, like our banking system, requires a solution consonant with American institutions and thought. I know of no European plan that is applicable to American life.<sup>119</sup>

Hoover emphasized two things in this passage. First, he highlighted the uniqueness of the American situation by excluding European influences. Second, Hoover pointed out that no simple solution was at hand and that more study and reflection over social structures would be required. Hoover put forward study and the refinement of social ideas as the two prerequisites of solutions to unemployment and economic fluctuations.

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<sup>118</sup> HH, "Summary of an Address before the Academy of Political Science", Address given at New York City, November 4, 1921, bible 8: 184, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

### *Western Moral Anxiety*

Hoover appeared to many historians to be a hardcore materialist seeking economic prosperity only for the sake of national industrial progress. For many historians in the historiographical tradition of Alfred Chandler, social engineering means the exact application of technical methods to human problems.<sup>120</sup> Hoover, however, stressed a different context, in which the human element undergirded material prosperity, and he explained its impact. In other words, Hoover did not seek the uniform application of engineering methods to human ills. In October 1921, he observed that

we have indeed great problems, yet I cannot but feel that if these problems are considered as human and not as material questions we can find their solution. We are dealing with questions of railways, of farms, of shops, and of instruments of commerce and industry. But in the background of every person's mind there is the fact that we are dealing not with mechanical things but that we are concerned with the problems of men, women, and children. There must be in our discussions of these matters the dominating thought that the better control of economic forces is in fact simply the better comfort of the country.<sup>121</sup>

Hoover explicated more clearly what he meant by "the better comfort of the country" by linking it with the moral anxiety of Western civilization. Better comfort did not exclusively refer to economic benefits. In a statement he made about the twin menaces of international war and industrial relations, Hoover recognized the moral weakness they brought forward:

We want disarmament not alone because of the saving of taxes, of waste, and increase of production, but because the march of civilization will proceed only so fast as we can find tranquillity in both these directions. Nor is it solely the economic benefits of higher standards of living that we seek in both cases. It is also the opportunity for the development of human thought, human culture and increasing moral progress to the world by the decrease in combat.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Alfred Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1977)

<sup>121</sup> Herbert Hoover, Message from Herbert Hoover to National Editorial Conference, Chicago, October 24, 1921, Bible 8: 181A, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

<sup>122</sup> Herbert Hoover, "Summary of an Address before the Academy of Political Science", Address given at New York City, November 4, 1921, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1.

Plainly stated, economic prosperity and international peace allowed the realization of Hoover's fundamental aim: individual and collective moral comfort.

In Hoover's early years as Secretary of Commerce, he did not clearly relate this ambition to the vanishing of past values. In fact, the Secretary of Commerce attempted to discover the links that bound the quest for moral comfort to the achievement of progress. In the New Era, progress was still an elusive notion that led American political and intellectual leaders to believe in a brighter future. The idea of progress was, in the 1920s, a teleological concept that was rooted not in the past but in the ever-promising present. In many teleological systems, the past guarantees the advent of a happier future. For American progressives, the past guaranteed nothing except the conservation of obsolete behaviors and modes of life. For them, the way to a golden future lay in present conditions. For example, Hoover located the seminal source of progress not in economic prosperity but in intellectual and spiritual resources. He argued that:

The social force in which I am interested is far higher and far more precious than all these. It springs from something infinitely more enduring; it springs from the one source of human progress – that each individual may be given the freedom for development of the best with which he has been endowed in heart and mind. There is no other source of progress.<sup>123</sup>

In other words, existing intellectual and spiritual assets determined the capacity of an individual and a collectivity. These intellectual and spiritual conditions did not arise from nothing. They had to be cultivated by individuals in their relations with other persons.

Finally, Hoover believed that the cultivation of individual intellectual and spiritual resources must take place under conditions of economic and social prosperity. Economic prosperity alone is an empty dream if it is not accompanied by what Hoover termed "spiritual advancement":

Men do not live by bread alone. I may repeat that the divine spark does not lie in agreements, in organizations, in institutions, in masses, or in groups. It abides alone in the

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<sup>123</sup> Herbert Hoover, "American Individualism: The Genius of Our Government and of Our Industry Reaffirmed Against Old World Philosophies and Experiments", speech given for the Opening of American universities (no location specified); April 1922, bible 9: 218, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 3.

individual human heart. And in proportion as each individual increases his own store of spirituality, in that proportion each individual increases the idealism of democracy.<sup>124</sup>

Thus, the strength of a person did not reside solely in the possession of certain skills; intelligence and virtue were also necessary for the complete realization of the individual and the world around him.

### *Hoover's "millennium"*

To a certain extent, Hoover founded his vision of the individual and society on a much more radical idealism than other social scientists. Hoover went as far as to define what the "millennium" would be if ever reached. "With the growth of ideals through education, with the higher realization of freedom, of justice, of service," Hoover believed, "the selfish impulses to production become less and less dominant and if we ever reach the millennium, they will disappear in the aspirations and satisfactions of pure altruism."<sup>125</sup> Social scientists working closely with Hoover probably sensed the moral duty that the realization of Hoover's grand ambition imposed on them. In the context of the Survey on Business Cycles and Unemployment, Mary van Kleeck assigned to businessmen the specific task of reflecting on the conditions of their employees. Van Kleeck was of the opinion that

What the committee wants to bring about is more of an intellectual stimulus. The managers are responsible for studying the problem. It was not [the] intention of the Committee to say to employers: you are morally responsible for this situation and we accuse you of backsliding in not having at it long ago. But we are trying to say that here is a problem that you, as managers of business, must study. It is your job.<sup>126</sup>

Although van Kleeck, in this passage, did not go as far as Hoover did in describing his vision of the millennium, she shared Hoover's belief in intellectual acknowledgement of existing conditions as an object of reflection and coming action.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>126</sup> Meeting of economists with the members of the Committee on the Business Cycle, Chicago, 28 December, 1922, box 620, folder Unemployment Business Cycle, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 30.

The research director of the NBER, Wesley Mitchell, actively participated in the process of gathering information for the business cycles survey. Mitchell made his purpose clear to Hoover in a draft sent to him before the final version of the report:

The peak period of boom are times of speculation, overexpansion, extravagance in living, relaxation in effort, wasteful expenditure in industry and commerce, with consequent destruction of capital. It is the wastes, the miscalculations, and maladjustments grown rampant during booms that make inevitable the painful process of liquidation. The way to check the losses and misery of depressions is to check the feverish extremes of 'prosperity'. Control must begin with the boom.<sup>127</sup>

Mitchell had formulated his vision of business cycles a decade before he began working with Hoover. His Veblenian understanding of wealth and his comprehension of the use of social sciences as a way to remedy economic disturbances were evident in his proposal to Hoover. Merely establishing relief programs did not constitute an adequate response for Hoover's closest collaborators. Instead, Mitchell and van Kleeck envisaged an entirely redefined economic system based on a new foundation. Mitchell viewed the appropriate response as being

concerned with prevention, not with relief. Relief is important when unemployment becomes serious, but prevention is more important (...) Our problem is the problem of the boom and not the depression; we are concerned with causes rather than effects<sup>128</sup>

Similarly, van Kleeck affirmed that "what I have in mind is the necessity for more reinforcement of your program of stimulation of local efforts, both in providing work and in the larger program, nor for mere relief, but for the rehabilitation of the victims of unemployment and united effort on a program of prevention."<sup>129</sup> They both agreed on the need to reorient political action so that it had more stable and permanent outcomes.

Herbert Hoover favoured making social ideals the foundation of the new economic system. Wesley Mitchell did not seem to be as confident as Hoover and Hunt in this search for a new social philosophy. In September 1922, Mitchell told Edward Hunt that he considered "[John] Dewey's recent book on Reconstruction and Philosophy [as a] good thing to read before

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<sup>127</sup> Wesley C. Mitchell, Draft of Proposal to Herbert Hoover, 1922, box 654: File Commission on Unemployment, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 2-3.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>129</sup> Mary van Kleeck to Colonel Arthur Woods, November 12, 1921, box 672: File Unemployment and Mary van Kleeck, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

setting to work” on business cycles and unemployment.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, Mitchell was not convinced that any of the dominant social philosophies of the day would allow realizing their project. For the NBER economist, “we don’t know enough yet to know which philosophy is the more effective in the long run.”<sup>131</sup> For the former student and admirer of Thorstein Veblen, the difficulties encountered in establishing a philosophical basis for solving business maladjustments did not mean that searching for such a basis was futile. In fact, it obliged social scientists and politicians to work enthusiastically to develop a philosophical foundation on which the economic and social structure of the country would rest. Herbert Hoover’s own short essay on American individualism may also be considered an attempt to define the intellectual foundation of the country.

As early as 1921, Hoover recognized the urgency of acting to arrest further spiritual decline. He sensed the combined moral and social deterioration that residents of large urban centres were experiencing. In fact, the same year that Charles Merriam was discovering the extent of the alienation felt by the great majority of urban dwellers in Chicago, Hoover acknowledged a similar phenomenon in New York City:

The enormous losses in human happiness and in money which have resulted from lack of city plans which take into account the conditions of modern life, need little proof. . . . Our cities do not produce their full contribution to the sinews of American life and national character. The moral and social issues can only be solved by a new conception of city building.<sup>132</sup>

Even though historians have generally recognized the multiplicity of Hoover’s interests, they do not often include urban planning among them. Yet in his commentary on city organization, Hoover also discussed the problems associated with assimilating large numbers of immigrants. Poor city planning, he reasoned, especially in New York, “the gateway of Europe in the U.S.”, only compounded the difficulties of welcoming immigrants to the United States. It encouraged misconduct and reinforced criminality. As early as 1922, the man who became the so-called spokesman of rural America during the 1928 election had already proposed a model of

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<sup>130</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell to Edward E. Hunt, September 17, 1922, box 654, Commission on Unemployment and Wesley Clair Mitchell, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>132</sup> Herbert Hoover, Plan of New York and its Environs, May 10, 1922; box 534, File: Russell Sage Foundation, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

urban organization,<sup>133</sup> going as far as describing his ideal plan for urban centres. He even foresaw possible challenges to his program. Anticipating criticism, he explained the need for ideals:

The vision of the region around New York as a well planned location of millions of happy homes and a better working center [for] millions of men and women grasp the imagination. A definite plan for its accomplishment may be only an ideal. But [whereas] a people without an ideal degenerates, one with practical ideals is already upon the road to attain them.<sup>134</sup>

Here Hoover's opinion on urban management exemplifies his fundamental search for a social ideal befitting modern urban America.

Hoover pointed out the crying need for social ideals that spoke to the living conditions of the American people. In 1922, he defined what he considered the great American social ideal: individualism. Hoover's notion of individualism embraced the duality of liberalism which Louis Hartz would later identify.<sup>135</sup> In Hoover's individualism, it is possible to trace liberalism in both its conservative and its leftist-liberal senses. In speaking about conservative and leftist-liberal, it is essential to dissociate the European political tradition from the American experience in the nineteenth century. Hoover, in *American Individualism*, explicitly rejected the European conservative and leftist-liberal ideologies on the grounds that America was unique. Hoover dismissed the models advanced by aristocrats and socialists in defining his own. Hoover also purged nineteenth-century laissez-faire liberalism from his new ideological system. He argued that "we have gone a long way toward the abandonment of the 'capitalism' of Adam Smith."<sup>136</sup> Although an ardent anti-statist, Hoover was a severe critic of the laissez-faire economic approach.

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<sup>133</sup> For Hoover, "one part of such a plan must be a realization of each economic group in the community as to its function to the whole great community of which it is a part. With this in mind, residential districts whose interests center largely around the low cost of living and educational and recreational facilities would see their interests in better means of distribution and the development of public utilities." Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955)

<sup>136</sup> Herbert Hoover, *American Individualism* (West Branch, Iowa: Herbert Hoover Presidential Library Association, 1971 [1922]): 24.

### *American Individualism*

The success of a social system rested not only on material progress but also on spiritual inclinations. In *American Individualism*, Hoover combined two major intellectual traditions that had marked the cultural life of the United States in the nineteenth century. The first was the Jeffersonian political idea of equality of opportunity. Hoover adapted this notion, developed in rural eighteenth-century Virginia, to the political, economic, and intellectual life of the 1920s. To it he appended the ideal of free and public access to education.<sup>137</sup> Such open access to education assured, in Hoover's mind, the free intellectual development of leaders.

It is imperative to recognize that Hoover coupled public education with the training of the elite. Paradoxically, the education of the masses assured the success of the few:

Leadership is a quality of the individual. It is the individual alone who can function in the world of intellect and in the field of leadership. If democracy is to secure its authority in morals, religion, and statesmanship, it must stimulate leadership from its own mass.<sup>138</sup>

Hoover's thinking about fostering leadership had a parallel in Charles Merriam's study of the making of leaders. For both Merriam and Hoover, leadership was the key to a flourishing American democracy. When Hoover propounded the idea of "equality of opportunity", he was not intending to apply it to the daily lives of the toiling masses; on the contrary, he understood it to mean the opportunity to rise above the masses. There is a patent elitism in his understanding of masses and leaders. In a very Jeffersonian manner, Hoover argued that "the crowd only feels: it has no mind of its own which can plan. The crowd is credulous, it destroys, it consumes, it hates, and it dreams—but it never builds." Hoover echoed the sentiments of one of his European contemporaries, José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955). In 1922, the Spanish philosopher remarked that

The civilization of the nineteenth century is, then, of such character that it allows the average man to take his place in a world of superabundance, of which he perceives only the lavishness of the means at his disposal, nothing of the pains involved. He finds himself surrounded by marvelous instruments, healing medicines, watchful governments, comfortable privileges. On the other hand, he is ignorant how difficult it is to invent those medicines and those instruments and to assure this production in the future; he does not

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 11.

realize how unstable the organization of the State is and is scarcely aware himself of any obligations.<sup>139</sup>

These two believers in liberal democracy, Hoover and Ortega y Gasset, both denounced the frequent use of violence by the masses.<sup>140</sup> Thus, for Hoover, “equality of opportunity” meant the opportunity to lift oneself above the masses and act as a leader. In Hoover’s social system, leaders that emerged from the masses were the motor of history and the promise of the future.

The second great influence in the social system Hoover wanted to base on individualism was the American Protestant tradition. A Quaker himself, Hoover assigned a personal meaning to the self. Self-realization constituted the primary incentive of individuals. Hoover maintained that

If we examine the impulses that carry us forward, none is so potent for progress as the yearning for individual self-expression, the desire for creation of something. Perhaps the greatest human happiness flows from personal achievement. Here lies the great urge of the constructive instinct of mankind.<sup>141</sup>

Individual motivation depended upon the individual’s own effort. Hoover brought the central idea of Calvinism to his definition of the self: “Our individualism insists upon the divine in each human being. It rests upon the firm faith that the divine spark can be awakened in every heart.”<sup>142</sup> The individual was clearly alone in the search for “spiritual strength”. Hoover was not just padding his comprehension of the self with religious verbiage. A strong tie existed between individual spirituality and the larger world. Hoover stressed that “our social and economic system cannot march toward better days unless it is inspired by things of the spirit.”<sup>143</sup> To a certain extent, Hoover was a spiritual determinist. He frequently emphasized the quest for spiritual force as a requirement for building a better world. Again, Ortega y Gasset cited a similar notion, that of “spiritual forces”, as the moving factor in social life: “This enables us to realize that rule signifies the predominance of an opinion and therefore of a spirit; that rule is, when all

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<sup>139</sup> José Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York: Mentor Book, 1952 [1930]): 74.

<sup>140</sup> For Gasset, see *op.cit.*, p. 48; for Hoover, see his essay on *American Individualism*.

<sup>141</sup> Hoover, *American Individualism*..., 12

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

said and done, nothing else but a spiritual power.”<sup>144</sup> Thus, the economic and social system rested on the ethical system.

Hoover did not limit his evaluation of modern ethics to this point. He valued one specific ideal and hoped it would be incorporated into a new social ethics. “The ideal of service” distinguished the nineteenth century from the twentieth. Hoover sensed “a new valuation of individuals and of groups and of nations” among Americans. Absent from the nineteenth century, Hoover believed, was

a rising vision of service. Indeed if I were to select a social force that above all others has advanced sharply during these past years of suffering, it is that of service – service to those with whom we come in contact, service to the nation , and service to the world itself. If we examine the great mystical forces of the past seven years we find this great spiritual force poured out by our people as never before in the history of the world – the ideal of service.

The ideal of service epitomized Hoover’s “mystical” definition of voluntary and associative work. A central unspoken assumption of Hoover’s social system was that its leaders would adopt self-sacrificing behavior. Leaders have an “uplifting” role to play in social life, and, to achieve it, they have to set aside their own interests and serve their community with all their resources. For Hoover, “those whom we revere are those who triumphed in service, for from them comes the uplift of the human heart and the uplift of the human mind.”<sup>145</sup> To a certain extent, Hoover demanded a kind of missionary service from leaders in the public sphere. Such expectations echoed the decision he had made twelve years earlier when he retired from the private sector.

The social service Hoover asked of leaders can be related to the disinterested role he saw social scientists playing. Hoover brought out this idea by employing a quasi-scientific phraseology in his essay, *American Individualism*. He strove to describe objectively the way the American social system worked. First, he discussed the institutional framework of the government, the economic environment, and the values shared by Americans. Second, he emphasized that theorizing about general problems, even if essential, did not significantly alter the malfunctioning of the system. He extensively enumerated social problems of various

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<sup>144</sup> Ortega y Gasset, *op. cit.*, 93.

<sup>145</sup> Hoover, *American Individualism*..., 13.

kinds.<sup>146</sup> Hoover tempered his optimism by acknowledging social problems. He did believe in remedies for them, but he agreed with social scientists that “many people confuse the exposure of wrongs which were below the surface with degeneration; their very exposure is progress.”<sup>147</sup>

### *Libraries and Professional Press*

Hoover insisted on the need to adjust the social system with modern administrative tools. Again, as a social scientist might do, Hoover delineated the tools available for this task more accurately than what he proposed to achieve with them. Hoover considered that

A great test of the soundness of a social system must be its ability to evolve within itself those orderly shifts in its administration that enable it to apply the new tools of social, economic, and intellectual progress, and to eliminate the malign forces that may grow in the application of these tools.<sup>148</sup>

To a certain extent, Hoover went as far as many social scientists did in their hunt for the perfect instruments with which to realize their new social ethics.

One of Hoover's collaborators, the American Library Association, provided him with information that later would help him and his associates in their quest to gather facts.<sup>149</sup> In 1921, Hoover strongly advocated the organization of business libraries, a project that a growing number of librarians supported. The field of library studies itself was undergoing professionalization in ways similar to what was happening in the social sciences. Founded in 1876, the American Library Association pushed for the extension of the role of libraries into new fields. Special libraries like business libraries acquired roles distinct from public and general libraries in the first decades of the twentieth century. The eclectic Hoover got acquainted with

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<sup>146</sup> Hoover did not deny that "our social system contains faults". and went on to recognize "the faulty results of our system at great length; the spirit of lawlessness; the uncertainty of employment in some callings; the deadening effect of certain repetitive processes of manufacture the 12-hour day in a few industries; unequal voice in bargaining for wage in some employment; arrogant domination by some employers and some labor leaders; child labor in some states; inadequate instruction in some areas; unfair competition in some industries; some fortunes excessive far beyond the needs of stimulation to initiative; survivals of religious intolerance; political debauchery of some cities; weaknesses in our governmental structure." Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>149</sup> Alison M. Parker, *Purifying America: Women, Cultural Reform, and Pro-Censorship Activism, 1873-1933* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Wayne Wiegand, *The Politics of an Emerging Profession: The American Library Association, 1876-1917* (Westport, Conn., Greenwood, 1986); Orvin Lee Shiflett, *Origins of American Academic Librarianship* (Norwood, NJ., Albex, 1981)

the emergence of business libraries. In 1921, Hoover defined precisely the task that the business library would perform in the liberal associative state he was planning:

the function of the business library, as I understand it, is to collect and to preserve data of value to the business executive and to so organize this information that it will be available for use with a minimum of delay. There can be no question of the value of such service to the larger business firms when the work is properly organized and the librarian in charge has a clear conception of the possibilities of his position. The statement that "knowledge is power" is as true for business as for the learned professions, and the business librarian who can make his service an integral part of his firm's organization may become a positive factor, both in the increase of profit and in the development of constructive standard [sic].<sup>150</sup>

Two years after Hoover's statement on the role of business libraries, he received the formal agreement of the American Library Association.<sup>151</sup> The well-organized library and a scientific approach to social research were two of the most effective tools, Hoover believed, for realizing the social reconstruction to which he aspired.

In much the same way he had done for business libraries, Hoover pleaded for the improvement of the business press as a means to spread industrial and economic knowledge. The practical politician raised in the Quaker atmosphere of late-nineteenth-century Iowa was far from being an opponent of bookish learning. Hoover's statement on the role of college education and written knowledge was entirely in keeping with his intellectualism and disclosed an essential but often misunderstood side to his thinking. In a message sent to the publishing company McGraw-Hill, Hoover expressed his enthusiasm about the business press in these terms:

A big change has come in the spirit of American business and for this change you are in part responsible. I mean the change from rule of thumb and laissez-faire to scientific determination of facts and programs of action based on facts. The business press is probably the greatest force in making industrial opinion. The schools and colleges have an important place, the trade associations can do much in the fields of production and

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<sup>150</sup> Herbert Hoover, "Fact Information in Business", A Message to Special Librarians, Bible 6: 140B, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 2.

<sup>151</sup> Herbert Hoover to American Library Association, February 7, 1923, Box 28, folder 486, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

distribution, the government bureaus which keep in contact with business can help to promote sound leadership in industrial and economic thinking. All have an important place, but the business press and technical journals are in a unique position and have a unique opportunity.<sup>152</sup>

Plainly stated, traditional “laissez-faireism” supporters were to make way for scientific determinists and their understanding of the workings of society. Hoover had never urged social scientists to undertake the rapid development of information confirming his own political agenda. As a practical politician involved in the turbulent politics of Washington since Taft’s presidency, the Secretary of Commerce knew that patience in politics was an extremely rare virtue. Nevertheless, his attitude with social scientists was not the same as it was with Republican managers or elected officials. He let social scientists work according to their own agenda, which was not necessarily adapted to his own political schedule. Thus, not only politicians, but also social scientists were slowly but deeply transforming Hoover’s general political plans.

#### Hoover’s Dreams of Social Reconstruction

After two years of working with social scientists, business executives, and other leaders, Hoover clarified the purpose of social studies. The role of the discipline was to gather facts and make interpretations. Historiographically speaking, the middle years of Hoover's tenure as Secretary of Commerce are the most difficult to look at it from a general perspective. His clash with the Secretary of Agriculture Henry C. Wallace (1866-1924), his foreign trade policy, his handling of transportation and the media, his opposition to the McNary-Haugen Farm Relief Bill in 1924, his strained relations first with Vice President and later President Coolidge, and the prevalence of expert commissions all make the mid-1920s a chaotic period in the eyes of historians. It is not an easy task to understand the decisions taken by the man who was officially the Secretary of Commerce, but who was also the unofficial secretary of other agencies.

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<sup>152</sup> Herbert Hoover, message sent to McGraw-Hill Co., January 30, 1925, box 190, folder 3387, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

*The Spiritual Mortar: Statistics and Leadership*

By 1923, however, Hoover had begun to explain the purpose of the tools he had developed in the early 1920s. Research in the social sciences and libraries dedicated to the field gained greater prominence. In a very revealing passage, Hoover tied the role of data to his dreams of rebuilding social ethics:

Mortar is the material that binds the bricks together. A long time ago it was said that you cannot make bricks without straw and it might equally have been said that you cannot bind them together without mortar. The mortar here meant is a spiritual thing. And the lesson is that we cannot continue building America unless we have a binding element within us that holds us together on the common job.<sup>153</sup>

It was in this same spirit that Hoover assigned a precise task to government:

It can help through statistics. The average citizen looking for a crusader in his behalf might be chilled by the suggestion that statistics will help him, for the very word has an icy sound. Not enough even of our shrewd businessmen realize the fighting force of statistics.<sup>154</sup>

Hoover considered statistics to be one of the ingredients of the spiritual mortar of the United States. For him, oversight of this function lay in the hands of government. He linked the spiritual role of government with the scientific instruments available to those who carried out its mission. He argued that

We should have more up to date, more regular and complete information on the current production and consumption and stocks on hand of every great commodity in the United States—and, as far as possible, abroad. We should obtain and publish figures to show what proportion of the total equipment of the more important industries is actually engaged in production and, at the same time, what proportion of the labor in those industries is in service.<sup>155</sup>

Many historians have focused on the third and last part of Hoover's craze for data. Yet, it must be understood from a broader perspective rather than as merely preaching economic

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<sup>153</sup> Herbert Hoover, "Untitled", 1923, box 118, folder 2095, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa. 2.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 6.

prosperity. Of course, Hoover wanted to pursue economic prosperity, as did Mitchell and van Kleeck; nevertheless, these three were shrewd enough to see that economic prosperity was more than just the capacity for purchasing material commodities. Economic prosperity also had a spiritual resonance that touched the intimate lives of the entire population.

In Hoover's time, economic prosperity seemed to be leading to a world based on justice and social equality. A fuzzy scientific utopianism underlay Hoover's vision of a society managed by social experts. To be sure, historians of utopias have emphasized the relations between natural sciences and utopias. Physics, chemistry, and medicine have often seemed more suited to making a better world than sociology, economics or political science.

But in the 1920s, the perception was different. In an address given to chemists and engineers, Hoover clearly recognized the material advances made by chemists:

No human person can evaluate the contribution of the science of chemistry to the advancement of civilization. The enormous advance in standards of living, the greater margins of comfort, the lessening of physical exertion required to attain these things, the relief of suffering, the extension of health and life, have all received the most vital contributions by the applied science of chemistry.<sup>156</sup>

Hoover later stressed the lag between natural sciences and social sciences: "incidentally, the chief job of political and social science is to develop methods of keeping their fields in pace with the changes imposed upon them by industrial chemistry and physics."<sup>157</sup> For the Secretary of Commerce, material advancement must be coupled with spiritual progress in the social sciences. It is important to recall the teleological dimension of the early-twentieth-century understanding of progress. In a manner similar to Marxism and Fascism, Progressivism was leading society toward an accomplished civilization in its fullest meaning.

In Hoover's and Merriam's thought, the training of leaders represented the achievement of progressive civilization. Rising early-twentieth-century ideologies attributed a primary role to leaders. For Marxists, the "avant-garde du prolétariat" would foment an uprising of the masses against the capitalist regime. Fascist leaders aspired to occupy hierarchical positions in which

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<sup>156</sup> Herbert Hoover, "On to Greater Discovery: An Inspiring Message from HH", Industrial and Engineering Chemistry, September 1923, bible 13 folder 321A, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 1.

their use of power embodied the national will. Progressive leaders, however, had to act intelligently to accomplish their mission of instituting social justice among Americans.

The Progressive Hoover ascribed just such a specific duty to leaders. The foundation of their responsibilities was their training. Much as Charles Merriam did, Hoover urged that “If we are to maintain a progressive community and our National ideals we must go even further in education than the routine provision of learning. Education must take upon itself the development of leadership, and leadership calls for character and intelligence.”<sup>158</sup> Hoover explained what he meant by character and intelligence. He did not define a specific curriculum as the required avenue to leadership. Conversely, he insisted on the fact that he was “not one of those who consider that any particular group of subjects in teaching has any very vital bearing on the question [of intelligence and character].”<sup>159</sup> He emphasized that

Training of intelligence as a tool for performance can be accomplished in many lines of subjects. I know many men of high cultivation, character and leadership who do not know the classics. I know plenty who do know the classics who possess these qualities. I know a good many who have the intellectual and moral fiber for leadership who have not the training.<sup>160</sup>

No specific knowledge was thus required for effective leadership in Hoover’s mind. Taken on its own, this position might have sounded anti-intellectual. Yet, Hoover ascribed a clear meaning to knowledge in relation to social ideals and actions.

The character and intelligence of leaders were intimately connected to a certain kind of knowledge. Hoover did not define this knowledge in terms of literary skills or mathematical aptitude; rather, it was the intent behind the knowledge. High ideals must inspire the possessor of knowledge. Knowledge could not be a facade behind which there is no substance. At the same time, the absence of ideals and purposes behind knowledge profoundly undermined the actions and decisions undertaken. There must be a conjunction of both social ideals and practical facts:

Wisdom does not so much consist in knowledge of the ultimate; it consists in knowing what to do next. Frequently those who contribute most to destroy good causes are those

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<sup>158</sup> Herbert Hoover, “Ideals in American Education”, Draft for the National Education Association, March 1923, bible 12, folder 289, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 2.

who refuse to work day by day within the field of practicable accomplishment, and would oppose all progress unless their own particular ideas be adopted in full. Progress in the world must come about through men and women of high aspirations and high ideals. But no less must its real march be achieved through men and women whose feet are upon the ground, whose proposals are devoid of illusions, and above and beyond all that are within the practicability of day to day statesmanship.<sup>161</sup>

Hoover evidenced a moral pragmatism in his vision of knowledge. Coupling practice and theory, Hoover intended to use social data to define values. The duty of leaders was to refashion American morality. Even if he accorded a central responsibility to leaders, Hoover never advocated creating an elite above the rest of the population. In fact, for Hoover, there was room “for literally millions of leaders”.<sup>162</sup> This assertion of the need for “millions of leaders” must be understood in the context of Hoover’s quest for improving standards of living. He stressed that “Our standards of living and the extras of life are the result of the great productive and distributing machinery of our country. Our standards will increase directly in ratio to its efficiency. This machinery requires a vast trained personnel. It also requires a vast army of leaders.”<sup>163</sup> This statement illustrates the ambivalence in Hoover’s relationship with bureaucracy.

#### *Role of the State: Coercive and Voluntary Intervention*

Historians have found it easy to associate Hoover’s name with anti-bureaucratic spokespersons. This tendency is mostly due to Hoover’s harsh denunciation of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal in the mid-1930s. In 1923, however, Hoover had written an eloquent letter to his future political foe, Franklin Roosevelt. Hoover complained to Roosevelt that “the vast sentiment of the business community against government interference tends to destroy even a voluntary effort if it is thought to be carried on at government inspiration.”<sup>164</sup> When Hoover examined the question of leaders, he did not mean specifically bureaucrats; he had also in mind

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<sup>161</sup> Herbert Hoover, “Address before the Annual Convention of National League of Women Voters”, April 11, 1923, Box 431, folder National League of Women Voters, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 9-10.

<sup>162</sup> Herbert Hoover, “Ideals in American Education”..., 2.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>164</sup> Herbert Hoover to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, correspondence, June 12, 1923, box 529, folder Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

business executives, labor leaders, social scientific experts, professional engineers, lawyers, and doctors. The role that the Secretary of Commerce assigned to state officials was more mandatory than voluntary. Expressing his dilemma about coercive state decisions, Hoover observed that

There is somewhere to be found a plan of individualism and associational activities that will preserve the initiative, the inventiveness, the individual, and the character of man and yet will enable us to synchronize this gigantic machine that we have built out of applied science.<sup>165</sup>

In the final analysis, he confided to Roosevelt, "I think a great deal can be done by better use of existing statistics, and that it would be worth while to determine our program at the earliest possible moment."<sup>166</sup> It should be emphasized that voluntary state action implied that certain coercive powers should be held by leaders involved in state affairs. To a certain degree, social scientists committed to Hoover's idea of associative government directly challenged the existence of such voluntary state action. Thus, Hoover's leaders played a central function in his quest for new values and ethics.

The expertise of leaders rested on their formal education. Hoover detailed more specifically the significance of scientific training in his conception of the role of engineer. A geologist by formation, Hoover, in 1921, became president of the Federation of American Engineer Societies (FAES). In that role, the Secretary of Commerce set forth an enlightening definition of the social duty of engineers. Their academic training allowed them to analyze carefully and disinterestedly social, economic, and cultural problems:

Now the engineer really has a contribution to make with his precision of thought, his capacity to analyze conclusions and to obtain the proper perspective of fact and his ability to weigh the forces with which he deals. He has a place beside commerce, a place beside our social problems, that is not yet filled. . . . It is the engineer who can take these

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<sup>165</sup> Herbert Hoover, "The Engineer's Place in the World", Speech before the American Engineering Council, Washington, DC, January 10, 1924, bible 14: 345A, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 3.

<sup>166</sup> Herbert Hoover to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, May 24, 1923, Box 529, folder Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

arguments and weigh them in their human units, and can draw a balance sheet upon which the policies and ideals of the country can be formulated.<sup>167</sup>

The connection between economic problems and engineers' skills can be easily grasped in the thinking of Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929). Veblen, in his essay *The Engineers and the Price System*, portrayed the logic behind Hoover's industrial system. Veblen thought the industrial system to be

eminently a system, self-balanced and comprehensive; and it is a system of interlocking mechanical processes, rather than of skillful manipulation. It is mechanical rather than manual. It is an organization of mechanical powers and material resources, rather than of skilled craftsmen and tools; although the skilled workmen and tools are also an indispensable part of its comprehensive mechanism. It is of an impersonal nature, after the fashion of the material sciences, on which it constantly draws. It runs to 'quantity production' of specialized and standardized goods and services. For all these reasons it lends itself to systematic control under the direction of industrial experts, skilled technologists, who may be called 'production engineers'.<sup>168</sup>

Even if Veblen and Hoover interpreted the industrial system in similar fashion, they did not foresee the future of the economic infrastructure in the same manner. For Veblen, the industrial system only extended the control of absentee owners.<sup>169</sup> Veblen placed a cynical interpretation on the shift from the locally owned shop to the large-scale managed industry. He did not condemn the expanding industrial system, but he did severely evaluate its social consequences.

Hoover's reading of the industrial system was very different from Veblen's. While sharing the same premises, Hoover distanced himself from Veblen's cynicism. Hoover acknowledged that the industrial system presented risks of socially dangerous deviations.

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<sup>167</sup> Herbert Hoover, "The Engineer's Place in the World", Speech before the American Engineering Council, Washington, DC, January 10, 1924, bible 14: 345A, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 3-4.

<sup>168</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Engineers and the Price System* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965 [1921]): p. 52.

<sup>169</sup> Veblen concluded his essay by observing that "absentee ownership is legally sound today. Indeed, as is well known, the Constitution includes a clause which specially safeguards its security. If, and when, the law is changed, in this respect, what is so legal today will of course cease to be legal. There is, in fact, not much more to be said about it; except that, in the last resort, the economic moralities wait on the economic necessities. The economic – moral sense of the American community today runs unequivocally to the effect that absentee ownership is fundamentally and eternally right and good". Ibid., 161.

Nevertheless, in Hoover's opinion, the possibility that the industrial system might malfunction did not call its fundamental existence into question. The social responsibility of engineers was to anticipate and forestall economic reversals. Hoover believed engineers to possess the technical knowledge to foresee and plan the coming disturbances. Engineers should not, he thought, confine their work to merely mechanical devices. In reality, Hoover argued that

We can not be turning men out of our universities as we are in many cases today purely mechanical machines devoted to some theory built on applied sciences. If the engineer is going to take his part in this community, is going to give expression to those things that he can express best, he must start with a sense of his public obligations as well as his professional knowledge.<sup>170</sup>

Hoover's interpretation markedly differed from Veblen's fatalistic conclusion about the industrial system. For the Secretary of Commerce, the vanishing of the traditional workshop orientation could be replaced by a new attitude based on a civic sense of professional service. In an article entitled "What is an Engineer-Economist?" included in Hoover's archives, the economist Herbert Francis Stimpson defined this new civic sense by linking economics and engineering:

Our resources consist of Energy, which acts; and of matter, which is acted upon. Engineering is the application of Energy to Matter. All forms of Commodities are thus produced; all forms of Services are thus rendered; and all forms of Amusement are thus secured. The more we economize in the satisfaction of some needs, the more resources remain with which to satisfy other, future needs. An Engineer-Economist is one who teaches Economy in the Use of Energy.<sup>171</sup>

Hoover was definitely closer to Stimpson than to Veblen in his trust in the future of the industrial system.

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<sup>170</sup> Herbert Hoover., "The Engineer's Place in the World" Speech before the American Engineering Council, Washington, DC, January 10, 1924, Bible 14: 345A, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 3.

<sup>171</sup> Herbert Francis Stimpson, "What is an Engineer-Economist?" 1923, box 621, folder Unemployment Business Cycles – Report Comments, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 3.

### *Hoover and the Scopes' Trial*

Engineers were the primary actors in Hoover's strategy for coping with the evanescence of past values. On the one hand, to judge by his comments in *American Individualism* and in other instances, Hoover was not seeking to create a *tabula rasa* with nineteenth-century ethics and codes of behavior. On the other hand, Hoover and his social scientific associates did want to realign nineteenth-century morals with twentieth-century conditions. This question gained national prominence in one of the most famous events of the 1920s: the Scopes Trial. Very few historians have studied Hoover's stance in this debate. Although himself a product of conservative America, Hoover clashed with William Jennings Bryan, a spokesman for rural and prohibitionist America. From a political standpoint, it is easy to understand Hoover's criticism of the three-time-defeated Democratic presidential candidate. However, Hoover did not condemn Bryan's ultraconservative religiosity merely because of his former Democratic career. Rather, the Secretary of Commerce agreed with Bryan's foes because of his personal convictions about religion. The joint statement about the relationship between science and religion that Hoover co-signed argued that

The purpose of science is to develop, without prejudice or preconception of any kind, a knowledge of the facts, the laws and the processes of nature. The even more important task of religion, on the other hand, is to develop the consciences, the ideals and the aspirations of mankind. Each of these two activities represents a deep and vital function of the soul of man, and both are necessary for the life, the progress, and the happiness of the human race.<sup>172</sup>

Hoover's opinion about the main argument used against John T. Scopes's prosecution revealed his personal beliefs about the roles of both science and religion. The author of an unsigned article found among Hoover's papers delineated the common territory shared by science and religion:

Science provides the means by which human toil and suffering may be alleviated and shows how human life may be lengthened and enhanced. Religion gives inspiration to the individual, an inspiration to high ideals. Science gives eyes to religion. Religion gives heart to science. Knowledge is power. But power is impotent unless set in action and dangerous if set in action by the wrong motive. Religion, unless enlightened by science,

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<sup>172</sup> A Joint Statement upon the Relations of Science and Religion; New York, April 14, 1923, box 54, folder Science and Religion, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

wastes its energies in vague longings or in fruitless and sometimes harmful efforts to remedy bodily or social ills.<sup>173</sup>

This opinion mirrors Hoover's own perception of the roles of science and religion.

In his essay on *American Individualism*, Hoover brought forward his Quaker belief in the individual as the source of self-realization. He depicted the individual as the spiritual fount of initiative. The joint statement he signed with other leaders only exemplified what he already avowed in other addresses. In 1925, for example, Hoover remarked that

the great danger of the world today is that our spiritual advancement shall lag behind our material improvements. A century of scientific discoveries has brought us fabulous contributions to comfort and happiness, but these discoveries have come with such accelerated pace that we have at times not been able to find solutions for the thousands of problems which follow in their path. Our social, economic, and political institutions must constantly shift to accommodate themselves to these new forces and pressures.<sup>174</sup>

Because they thought that no gap should exist between morals and material standards of living, Hoover and his social scientists endeavoured in their daily affairs to realize the alignment of material progress and spiritual well-being.

#### *The Growing Gap between Material and Moral Progress*

Four years after having been named Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover forcefully restated his ambition of refashioning American morals. He presented his vision as a "safeguard" against modern innovations. Hoover stressed that "When all is said and done, the only safeguard we have against the malign forces that come with these great gifts to man is to build up the moral and spiritual forces of the world and to crystallize them into continuing institutions."<sup>175</sup> Spiritual impoverishment worried Hoover to an extreme degree. The growing gap between material progress and morals stood in stark contrast to technological advances. Hoover underscored the growing contradiction between material wealth and spiritual poverty:

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<sup>173</sup> Unsigned, "Scientists, Publicists, and Religious Leaders declare that Science and Religion are Allies, Not Enemies", May 21, 1923, box 541, folder Science and Religion, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 5.

<sup>174</sup> Herbert Hoover, Address of Welcome [in English, one would normally say "Welcome Address"; was this document actually entitled "Address of Welcome"?] before the Quinquennial Session of the International Council of Women, May 4, 1925, Bible 20: 480, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 2.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

We can give to the succeeding generation a vast equipment in plant and machinery, a great store of knowledge of how to run it, and we can leave for their stimulation centuries of art and literature. But the world will march forward only so far as we give to our children strength of body, integrity of character, and training of mind and the inspiration of religion.<sup>176</sup>

Hoover's lumping together of art, literature and religion as spiritual stimuli is noteworthy. Material progress may have been secured for the future, but its spiritual brother enjoys no such guarantee.

Social scientists shared with engineers the responsibility to assure spiritual progress. Hoover was well aware of the potential of the social sciences. Social scientists involved in the Commission on Waste in Industry, on Business Cycles and Unemployment, and in the daily administration of the Foreign Commerce Division of the Secretary of Commerce, had proved their value by performing minute analyses of social and economic problems. In a speech given in 1925, Hoover explicitly associated research in the social sciences with "the advancement of the human mind and spirit". He began by describing the method of social science in positive terms:

The first requisite for the solution of these great problems of ours is accurate knowledge. . . . These problems cannot be solved without painstaking analysis of the facts, and of the experiences we have already gained, nor unless they are met by men with open minds willing to hammer every proposal on the anvil of sincere debate unmixed with debasing alloys of malice and selfishness.<sup>177</sup>

The ultimate achievement promised through this method was economic prosperity, and Hoover thus did not see his emphasis on economics as a liability:

I make no apology for my emphasis upon economics, for it is our economic evolution that overshadows our social, our political, and our spiritual progress. Yet all our efforts to bring increased prosperity, to elevate the standard of living, to maintain an equality of opportunity, all our study of economics and our plans to use and direct economic forces,

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>177</sup> Herbert Hoover, "Proposals of Our Economic Evolution", Address to Stanford University Seniors, June 22 1925; Bible 20: 499, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 8.

all our great organization of industry, our whole carefully coordinated and systematized material endeavor, are [a] means to an end, not an end in themselves.<sup>178</sup>

And this “end” was nothing less than

human happiness and the advancement of the human mind and spirit. There is a very close and vital connection between human happiness, mental and spiritual advancement, and material well-being. The higher qualities of human nature, the qualities of character which we hold [to be] the choicest attributes of humanity, flowered when men met a measure of success in his economic struggle. Starvation does not produce these things.<sup>179</sup>

Hoover’s vision of the social sciences as applied to politics had three aspects. First, their “painstaking” and neutral methodology determined the quality of what they achieved. Second, social scientists were to target economic prosperity as the primary condition for realizing their final aim. Third—and this was the most neglected aspect of social sciences—they defined accomplishment and success in intellectual and spiritual terms. Economic prosperity had, in the 1920s, a teleological goal: intellectual and ethical enrichment. Thus, the task of the social sciences could not be reduced merely to the production of statistics. These latter were only an instrument for reconstructing social ethics.

### *Defining Standards*

The hunt for uniform standards profoundly swayed political and economic attitudes in the first decades of the twentieth century. Wesley Mitchell emphasized the notion of socially just standards in the economic distribution of wealth. Mary van Kleeck demanded similar fair standards in the regulation of labor and trade conflicts. Hoover definitely agreed with them on standardization. Traditionally, however, historians have interpreted such research on standards as an open attempt to rationalize and regiment disparate efforts under one monolithic project. The great individualist Hoover, a firm believer in personal initiative and equal opportunity for all, paradoxically led the movement toward such regimentation. The explanation for this contradiction went beyond Hoover’s personal inconsistencies. First, to understand how Hoover understood standardization, we must set aside the classical association between uniform standardization and collective regimentation. Second, it is important to remember that the craze

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 11.

for standards corresponded to the search for a code of conduct. Standards, defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “principles of honorable [and] decent behavior”, clearly meant something more than uniform conduct.<sup>180</sup> Third, Hoover called on standardization in his war against waste. In a letter to A.S. Donaldson, an executive leader of large company, Hoover stated that

All divisions of the business world are today faced with the necessity for examining the structure of their organizations for the purpose of eliminating waste motion and unnecessary expense. One of the first essentials in such a course is the knowledge of business facts and practice to serve as standards, against which present performances can be measured. The commercial world has in recent years shown a laudable effort to increase its knowledge of safe practices founded upon accurately determined data.<sup>181</sup>

Knowledge of business practices led to the establishment of fair standards for reducing waste in industry. Mitchell developed the rest of Hoover’s logic by arguing that the elimination of waste during economic boom paved the way to the eradication of economic depressions following such booms. But Hoover’s quest for standards had implications that led elsewhere than to the institution of an authoritarian Mussolinian state.

By instituting fairer standards, Hoover wanted to reorient the conduct of business regarding social and economic matters. The purging of wasteful practices was one such standard. Respect for public morality was another one. In correspondence Hoover had with Frank L. Carey of the Chicago Board of Trade, the Secretary of Commerce cited misconduct among businessmen in regard to basic necessities. In this letter, Hoover criticized businessmen not for their “conspicuous consumption”, but for their mismanagement of a vital product: wheat. Hoover urged Carey to give serious consideration to unfair practices in the selling of wheat:

The question is going to come to the [forefront] of [the] public mind sooner or later as to whether or not the very machinery of the Board of Trade does not itself facilitate speculation in the primary necessities of life, wheat. The idea that gigantic operations are carried on by people who make no contribution to the real marketing of the product,

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<sup>180</sup> “Standards”, *Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 10<sup>th</sup> edition, 1999), 1399.

<sup>181</sup> Herbert Hoover to A.S. Donaldson, correspondence, March 20, 1925, box 191, folder 3389, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

perform no public service and yet gain millions of dollars, is repugnant to public morals.<sup>182</sup>

Hoover disparaged the absence of standards in the management of wheat and threatened to intervene if the Chicago Board of Trade did nothing to reverse the current trend. The spokesman for voluntary state intervention acknowledged that

Some of us devoted many years to the endeavor to secure that American business should cure its own abuse, and thereby avoid the constant encroachment of Government into private business. If I see the signs aright, the public will be convinced that there is here a great abuse, and unless constructive work is done by the Board itself there will sooner or later be more restrictive action by law.<sup>183</sup>

In other words, for Hoover, the establishment of standards constituted the business version of his campaign to refashion social ethics. Fair standards in business practices were part of the revamping of values he and his associates wanted to introduce into twentieth-century human relations.

Actually, the implementation of an efficient code of conduct in business, or the reduction of wasteful practices, represented a collective goal that not only businessmen and farmers had to attain in their respective fields; it was clear, for Hoover, that it could be achieved only through national efforts. Reduction of waste guaranteed economic prosperity and equal distribution of wealth in Hoover's scheme. Hoover maintained that

The reduction of waste means that a considerable part of our population who are busily employed in this unnecessary motion can be directed towards the production of other commodities and thus their addition to the national standard of living; it means a lowering in cost of living; or it means more goods for the same money. To our workers it means less labor, more time for recreation, and no attack upon wage levels; to our farmers it means an increased proportion of the consumers' dollar as the returns which he receives from his produce are subject to the deductions of the cost of marketing. . . . To

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<sup>182</sup> Herbert Hoover to Frank L. Carey, May 6, 1925, box 705, folder Wheat, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

our industrial and commercial men there is an increase in stability and a sounder foundation under our entire business fabric. The elimination of waste is a total asset.<sup>184</sup>

Here Hoover clarified the purpose of his new standards in economic and social relations. The underpinning of fair standards was not the sole responsibility of government officials. In an eloquent statement, Hoover stressed that “you cannot catch an economic force with a policeman.”<sup>185</sup> Nevertheless, he recalled his belief in the role of government as the principal fact-gathering agent. Rather than emphasizing its policing function, the Secretary of Commerce perceived the role of government as “a sort of economic laboratory.”<sup>186</sup> Hoover’s comparison accorded with the social scientists’ understanding of the laboratory. The social scientists around Hoover acknowledged the impossibility of creating a social science laboratory along the lines of chemistry or biology laboratories because social phenomena could not be recreated outside the comprehensive social entity in which they were embedded.

### *Social Scientific Laboratories*

Hoover believed that the treatment of social and economic forces could be organized and influenced more effectively than through the application of rules of thumb. To be clear on this point, Hoover was fully aware of the limited impact that he and the social scientists could have on social trends. He did not seek to acquire the same control over society that physicians or biologists were achieving in their laboratories.

Yet Hoover’s laboratory had the same goal as the natural science laboratories: to establish facts. For him, “the fundamental of every action is first to determine the facts. Moreover, as business is a moving thing, the facts must be recurrent in short statistics.”<sup>187</sup> This grounding of action in statistical fact made economic misrepresentations much less feasible. He considered statistics to be “a counterpoise to ‘psychology’ in business—an anchor of basic facts to tie to—not hunches or contagious optimism or equally contagious pessimism, both of which directly affect the volume of production and business wrongfully and produce in them instability.”<sup>188</sup> The role of statistics was decisive in obliterating false impressions.

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<sup>184</sup> Herbert Hoover, “A Problem of Distribution”, Opening Speech given at the National Distribution Conference, box 49, folder 435 (2), Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 4-5.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 6.

Finally, Hoover concluded that “the government can do much in collection and distribution of statistical information”<sup>189</sup>, a primordial tenet of Hoover’s vision of social sciences and the role of the state. Statistics could affect economic and social trends. The state, in Hoover’s mind, could shape social and economic conditions by diffusing this information.

Statistics in themselves change little in social and economic matters. A practical politician, Hoover recognized that statistical information alone could not bring about profound changes. Hoover acknowledged these limits by anticipating future criticism:

Right here some tormentors of progress will rise to say that the collection of statistics by the trades may be used to flimflam the public. They can be so used. They have been so used. Likewise automobiles have been used for purposes of bootlegging but it is not necessary to suppress the use of automobiles on this account, nor is it necessary to allow them bootlegging privileges.<sup>190</sup>

In order to be effective, statistics must be used in relation to standards to accomplish their task. Hoover maintained that “next to statistics as a power to eliminate waste come standards.”<sup>191</sup> In other words, statistics are the flesh on the bones of standards. Statistical data can fulfil their purpose of influencing economic and social conditions only if they are oriented toward clearly defined standards.

The relationship between statistics and science can be compared to the link between science and religion. Both seek to achieve an end through a specific kind of action, while contrasting because of their fundamentally different natures. One unknown author whose essay Hoover esteemed highly enough to include with his papers wrote that

Science may discover what conduct is most conducive to human welfare in the future. But science as such cannot go beyond this. It can point out the best way but it cannot inspire the individual voluntarily to follow it against his personal interest. Mere knowledge cannot of itself supply the motive for self-sacrifice for others or for the future.

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 8.

It cannot make a mother risk her life for her child or a man risk his for his country. The altruistic impulse is religious instinct, whether it is recognized as such or not.<sup>192</sup>

Statistics and standards must be understood in a similar fashion. Statistics describe human welfare, but in themselves they cannot motivate. Standards can inspire service-oriented behavior, in ways similar to the altruistic aims of religion.

Hoover explicitly asked Wesley Mitchell to be a leading member of this grand project. When appointing a Committee on Distribution Statistics, Hoover asked Mitchell to serve on the committee. Hoover articulated his expectations in a letter sent to Mitchell in 1925:

There is a phase of statistical service that has not been fully studied or fully explored. We are almost wholly lacking in the basic data as to distribution. It is my hope that this committee may sponsor and direct a broad inquiry into the business statistics now available and into the needs of the various branches of industry in the collection of additional figures, and make recommendations as to the best methods, public and private, of obtaining a more accurate knowledge of the marketing areas and so approach more intelligently a discussion of waste in distribution.

Hoover considered the standardized distribution of wealth as the foundation for more equitable socioeconomic interrelations. Mitchell's role in this context was to furnish the information necessary to realize this ideal.

To recapitulate, Herbert Hoover considered it the responsibility of the state to collect statistics. These statistics were put to use in the economic training of leaders in business, trade unions, industry, and politics. Hoover wrote to Raymond Fosdick of the Rockefeller Foundation that "in sum I am carrying on a great educational campaign of vital importance to our whole people. Its success will depend upon building it into the voluntary fabric of the community rather than government, and I need preachers and managers."<sup>193</sup> The Secretary of Commerce paid as much attention to the makers of statistics as to their final role. Hoover, however, was very practical in his vision of social statistics. The rigorous compilation and diffusion of statistics by social scientists were the first steps in building the influence that the government sought to

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<sup>192</sup> Unsigned, "Scientists, Publicists, and Religious Leaders declare that Science and Religion are Allies, Not Enemies", May 21, 1923, box 541, folder Science and Religion, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 5.

<sup>193</sup> Herbert Hoover to Raymond Fosdick, correspondence, March 28, 1925, box 528, folder Rockefeller Foundation, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 3

exercise. The role of the state rested on a well-defined conception of science. The fundamental aim of Hoover's science was to re-orient social ethics around modernized values. The fundamental role of government was to diffuse these values throughout the population. This goal, however, was not an easy one to accomplish from day to day.

### The Widening Gap between Social Ethics and Social Policies

#### *Pure Scientific Research*

The mid-1920s were a period when social survey activity flagged. In comparison to the early years of the 1920s or the last years of the same decade, there were fewer general inquiries similar to *Waste in Industry* (1921) or *Recent Economic Changes* (1928). The absence of such general surveys did not mean that Hoover had lost interest in research. On the contrary, among his private papers were documents that revealed an entire facet of Hoover almost forgotten in historical studies. In 1926 and 1927, Hoover actively campaigned for pure scientific research in both natural and social disciplines. The focus on pure scientific research was a relatively recent notion in Hoover's thinking. Before the mid-1920s, Hoover did not frequently embrace this idea. From then on, however, pure scientific research began to pave the way for both material and spiritual advances:

If we could command the advance of our material, and to a considerable degree, of our spiritual life, we must maintain the earnest and organized search for truth. We could well put such an appeal wholly upon moral and spiritual grounds; the unfolding of beauty, the aspiration of knowledge, the ever widening penetration into the unknown, the discovery of truth, and finally, as Huxley says, 'the inculcation of veracity of thought'.<sup>194</sup>

To be sure, this statement is a very general and optimistic vision of scientific research. Hoover's positivist vision of science supposed a solid bond between abstract knowledge and practical application: "Obviously there must first be a pure science before there can be an application."<sup>195</sup> But when it came to the practical application of knowledge, Hoover was very critical of industrial laboratories. Such laboratories in large corporate settings like General Electric and

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<sup>194</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Vital Need for Greater Financial Support to Pure Science Research* (An Address by Secretary Hoover before the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, NYC, December 1, 1925, box 541, folder Scientific Research, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

Bell, as well as in petroleum and chemical companies, were endangering the pursuit of fundamental research.<sup>196</sup> The increasing disinterest in fundamental research threatened, to Hoover's way of thinking, "the progress of civilization".

Hoover saw American society marching toward a greater and finer civilization. He insisted that American civilization was at a higher level materially than it was intellectually and spiritually. In the early 1920s, social sciences held the solution for reducing the discrepancy between material achievement and spiritual and intellectual conditions. In the mid-1920s, Hoover broadened his conception of civilization by grounding it in "fundamental discoveries". He believed that

The progress of civilization, as all clear-thinking historians recognize, depends in large degree upon 'the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men'. . . . We must add to knowledge, both for the intellectual and spiritual satisfaction that comes from widening the range of human understanding, and for the direct practical utilization of these fundamental discoveries.<sup>197</sup>

Of course, pure scientific research was originally considered to be almost a calling. As such, it was not considered ethical for pure researchers to seek profit. Hoover, who profited handsomely from his knowledge of geology, saw little irony in his asking young researchers to be guided by the beauty and the promise of pure knowledge:

It is on the men in independent research and in our educational institutions that the great burden of scientific advancement must always rest, and from them that the inspiration of the younger generation of oncoming scientific workers is derived. What we need above all things is the better support of these men. They should not, by the necessities of living and the cost of equipment, be forced into our industrial laboratories.<sup>198</sup>

Hoover's defiance of industrial laboratories reflected his fundamental aim for science. In February 1926, Hoover requested \$200,000 in funding from the president of American Telegraph

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<sup>196</sup> For Hoover, "the sudden growth of industrial laboratories has in itself endangered pure science research by drafting the personnel of pure science into their ranks—depleting at the same time not only our fundamental research staff, but also our university faculties, and thus to some degree drying the stream of creative men at the source." *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

and Telephone Company for the purpose of basic research, but he received no reply.<sup>200</sup> In the 1920s, the aim of pure scientific research, which Hoover acknowledged, was the search for truth. Hoover wanted, in addition, to establish modern values on research, which he considered the best instrument for realigning ethics with a modern understanding of social phenomena.

Pure scientific research did not rest on the acquisition of technical skills so much as on "mental training". Hoover thus encouraged the development of the intellectual and moral capacity for reflection. In a letter written in 1925, Hoover urged an educator to ponder the nature of intellectual rigor. In a revealing passage in this letter, Hoover, the translator of the sixteenth-century geologist Agricola and a self-made millionaire, recommended the learning of Latin as a means to build intellectual and moral ability and disparaged exclusively monetary motives:

We don't have to value everything on earth in money. Most of our thinking life we have to keep our own company, and it's worth while having a store of things in our minds that are good company. A knowledge of the stature and origins of our language is one of them, and that cannot be had without some understanding of Latin. I don't assume that many of us learn Latin so perfectly that we open our mental windows to the great literature of that language. Latin has a great value as a fine basis for mental training.<sup>201</sup>

Special note should be given to Hoover's phrase "having a store of things in our minds that are good company", which makes it clear that Hoover dissociated material affluence from intellectual and moral wealth. These were not, for Hoover, mutually exclusive, but neither were their origins the same. The most profound source of intellectual and moral well-being thus remained education.

### *Education*

In the mid-1920s, Hoover began to appraise the educational contribution his department was making to economic prosperity. In his mind, it was partly due to his decisions as the Secretary of Commerce that the United States was enjoying a period of economic prosperity. Writing to Dr. V. Verunac, the general secretary of the International Permanent Delegation of Management Congresses in Prague, Hoover stated that "the marked progress which has been

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<sup>200</sup> Herbert Hoover to Walter S. Gifford, President of ATT Co., correspondence, February 17 1926, box 425, folder NAS – National Research Endowment, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

<sup>201</sup> Herbert Hoover to Ruth McDowell, May 13, 1926 box 189 folder 3355 - Education, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa..

made in America since the war in increasing productivity and raising standards of living is due, in large degree, to the increasing recognition of the importance of science in business.”<sup>202</sup> In his correspondence with James H. Brookmire of Shell Union Oil Corporation, he was even clearer about the benefic contributions of his own initiatives as the Secretary of Commerce:

We have obviously to deal in all questions like [the business cycle] with a vast morass of economic illiteracy. During the last four years I have tried to use the Department of Commerce as a sort of educational agency in this direction. It has seemed to me that one of the first things to be done was to perfect our statistical service and then to get people to use it. This does not necessarily mean that we have to engage in forecasting because any economic literate should be able to take the perfected statistical service and arrive at pretty sound conclusions for himself. And obviously a large enough number of people coming to the same conclusion will do more to mitigate the business cycle than anything I know of.<sup>203</sup>

In other words, by the mid-1920s, social scientists had achieved Hoover's initial goals by increasing productivity and expanding the numbers of those who were profiting from economic prosperity.

Actually, Hoover rephrased the dilemma between material wealth and moral poverty in his thinking about the role of higher learning in society. Materials and morals found common expression in standards of living. Inconsistency between them only undermined the complete expression of individual and collective fundamentals. Hoover advanced the idea of education as the instrument to bridge the gap between these opposing dimensions:

We need learning and the development of science apart from material rewards, disinterested public service, moral and spiritual leadership in America rather than the notion of a country madly devoted to the invention of machines, to the production of goods and the acquisition of material wealth. Machines, goods, and wealth, when their

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<sup>202</sup> Herbert Hoover to Dr. V. Verunac, April 12, 1926, bible 23: 569B, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1.

<sup>203</sup> Herbert Hoover to James H. Brookmire, correspondence, February 9, 1925, box 618, folder Unemployment Business Cycle Conference, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.

benefits are economically distributed, raise our standard of living. But it requires the higher concept to elevate our whole standard of life.<sup>204</sup>

In his essay on college education in the nineteenth century, the historian D. H. Meyer, one of the champions of technical and vocational training, described the main intention of nineteenth-century instruction in moral philosophy:

Moral philosophy was not considered merely an analytical discipline, like modern ethics, but a study of the 'ends' toward which our actions 'ought to be directed'. Its aim was not to arrive at some interpretative conclusions, but to come to a moral judgment, a statement of duty. As it was taught in the American colleges, moral philosophy was in fact frankly exhortative, intended more to instruct the conscience than to stimulate the intellect.<sup>205</sup>

Hoover shared the goal of education as depicted by Meyer in the nineteenth century: "In this moral and spiritual side our universities and colleges have a momentous responsibility, for it is from them that the leaders, the standards, and methods must be established for the whole gigantic public school system."<sup>206</sup> Obviously, Hoover, in his interpretation of the school system, proposed to align his early-twentieth-century program with the moral duty of mid-nineteenth-century college education.

A traditional-religious world no longer in opposition to a modern-scientific one. In the mid-nineteenth century, science already held enough importance to be taught in school. Conversely, religion remained a key discipline in early-twentieth-century education. Hoover would not advocate adopting the curriculum taught in schools seventy years earlier. The teaching of technical skills was an indispensable component of Hoover's educational plan; nevertheless, Hoover's conception of leaders as experts must not be reduced to their mastery of techniques. On the contrary, he believed,

Indeed one of the greatest problems of democracy—and civilization for that matter—is to provide sustained leadership in all avenues of life. If it can maintain virile, capable leadership, true to high moral standards and devoted to the ideals of democracy, there

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<sup>204</sup> Herbert Hoover, Commencement Address, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Al., May 24 1926, Bible 24: 586, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 12.

<sup>205</sup> D. H. Meyer, *The Instructed Conscience: The Shaping of the American National Ethics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972), XI.

<sup>206</sup> Herbert Hoover, Commencement Address, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Al., May 24, 1926, Bible 24: 586, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 12.

will not be degeneration within our nation. There will be continuous economic, social, and moral progress.<sup>207</sup>

In particular, leaders guided the campaign “to maintain the moral and spiritual fiber of our people [and] to sustain the skill required to use the tools which great discoveries in science have given us.”<sup>208</sup> Thus, the role Hoover eloquently attributed to leaders was another manifestation of his search for a new social ethics. It was the role of leaders to mold the dominant values in society so as to lessen the influence of the materialistic model.

By associating materialistic ethics with applied science, Hoover emphasized the polarity of applied and fundamental research. In an article published in *Nation and Science*, the Secretary of Commerce explicitly associated applied science with the pursuit of profit:

There is a wide difference in the mental approach of the men engaged in these two fields of scientific work. The men in pure science are exploring the frontiers of knowledge and they must necessarily do so without respect to reward or to its so-called practical benefits, whereas the men engaged in applied science research have long since demonstrated that it pays in immediate returns. It brings such direct rewards as to generate its own steam mostly through the Patent Office. There is seldom any direct financial profit in pure science research. Although its ultimate results are the maintenance of our modern civilization and are the hopes for the future.<sup>209</sup>

The desire to go beyond the mere production of goods drove Hoover's discussion of the role of science and research. Hoover considered the pursuit of science in the name of material profit to be a pointless business:

The dangers of America are not economic or from foreign foes; they are moral and spiritual. Social and moral and spiritual values outrank economic values. Economic gains,

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<sup>207</sup> Herbert Hoover, Higher Education and the State Government – Address at Commencement Exercises of University of Georgia, Athens, GA, 1926, Bible 24: 595, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 9-10.

<sup>208</sup> Herbert Hoover, Commencement Address, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Al., May 24 1926, Bible 24: 586, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 13.

<sup>209</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Nation and Science*, December 28, 1926, Box 426, folder National Academy of Science, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 3.

even scientific gains, are worse than useless if they accrue to a people unfitted by trained character to use, and not to abuse them.<sup>210</sup>

It was clear to Hoover that pure research secured richer social and moral results than applied research, which aimed basically to generate financial profits.

### *Pure Social Sciences Research*

The vision of pure research that Hoover propounded was manifestly idealistic. Still, Hoover did not throw out the practical effect of scientific inquiry. He undoubtedly expected applied science to be driven by fundamental research. In the context of social science, applied science's implications differed from those for the natural sciences. Hoover never emphasized the fundamental differences between the social and natural sciences. Hoover considered both fields to have the same goal: understanding and reconstructing natural and social structures around modern principles. These modern principles dealt with fundamental laws discovered through fundamental research. But in Hoover's mind one was more elevated than the other because "underlying applied or commercial science is pure or fundamental science. Pure science pursues the truth, hunts down the laws, the methods, the facts, the powers and capacities of nature without regard to use or to profit. Pure science is truth for truth's sake."<sup>211</sup> Wesley Mitchell and Charles Merriam both believed that socio-psychological laws profoundly determined the acts of consumers and citizens in society. Exploring the dilemma between the social and natural sciences, Hoover considered his own bureau as an economic laboratory.

Hoover patronized fundamental research in every scientific discipline, including the social sciences. The search for fundamental laws and its corollary, the establishment of values around these principles, was foremost in the minds of Hoover and his social science associates. For example, the great engineer linked higher standards in leadership with the diffusion and grasp of statistics. If leaders in 1926 were able to evaluate complex economic forces intelligently, he reasoned, it was mostly due to their daily usage of statistics.<sup>212</sup> Economic

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<sup>210</sup> Herbert Hoover, Commencement Address, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Al., May 24, 1926, Bible 24: 586, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 14.

<sup>211</sup> Herbert Hoover, "The Basis of Progress", Daily Interview – Editorial with Big Men. Today's Interview with Herbert Hoover, 1926, Bible 25: 603, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1.

<sup>212</sup> For Hoover, "statistics are now available on production, distribution, stocks, credits, employment, prices, and a thousand other phases which make for more intelligent judgment in the conduct of business and of the judgment of the individuals is better than the whole nation is more stable. [The preceding sentence seems to be missing a word or two, or perhaps some punctuation. I do not quite get its meaning.] Nor is it apart from this phase of discussion to

prosperity and industrial peace were not, however, the final objectives sought by the officials of the Department of Commerce:

[An economic leader] would be a rash man who would state that we are finally upon the golden stairs to the industrial millennium, but there is great hope that America is finding herself upon the road to a solution of the greatest of all her problems. That is, the method by which social satisfaction is to be attained with the preservation of private industry, initiative, and a full opportunity for the development of the individual. It is true that these economic things are not the objective of life itself. If by their steady improvement we shall yet further reduce poverty, shall create and secure more happy homes, we shall have served under God to make better men and women.<sup>213</sup>

Hoover thus reaffirmed his overall objective of securing the economic prosperity that would assure material and spiritual well-being.

In applying his theoretical framework, however, Hoover came up against the limits of social and economic knowledge. In the first months of 1926, Hoover began to envisage a second survey of the business cycle. "[At] an appropriate time in the future," he wrote to Arthur Robinson, "it might be well to reconvene the conference on business cycles in order to survey anew the effects of measures that have been taken to control them."<sup>214</sup> Hoover, however, did not clarify what he expected from such an economic account of business trends for a year after first mentioning a second inquiry. The Secretary of Commerce, it turned out, wanted to discover the forces that undergirded economic interrelations. In 1927, Hoover charged Wesley Mitchell with setting down the fundamental laws of economic interaction. Hoover wrote to F. P. Keppel of the Carnegie Corporation of the need for "a critical appraisal of the new factors in our economic life and of the shifts in the importance of the older factors. We need to know more about the foundation of our prosperity and how to maintain it."<sup>215</sup>

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mention the powerful stimulus which all these forces have given to the creation of higher leadership in industry and commerce. At no time in history has this leadership been more virile than today in America.", Herbert Hoover, Chamber of Commerce of the United States – Address before the Fourteenth Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C. May 12, 1926, Bible 24: 579, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 17-18.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>214</sup> Herbert Hoover to Arthur Robinson (P. F. Collier & Son Co.), correspondence, April 22, 1926, box 439, folder Newspapers – Colliers, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 3.

<sup>215</sup> Herbert Hoover to F. P. Keppel (Carnegie Corporation, NYC), correspondence, October 25, 1927, box 71, folder 1321, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 2.

The search for economic fundamentals must be understood in Hoover's general vision of pure scientific research. The application of fundamental research was the key to Hoover's notion of scientific inquiry. Hoover and his colleagues would proceed with the implementation of social science knowledge once a solid base of economic prosperity existed. The scope of this second major survey, "An Examination of Recent Economic Changes", was to include "lay[ing] the foundation for an overhauling of some of our basic statistics and for the strengthening of industrial, commercial and financial policy, looking toward further steadying of business and reduction of unemployment."<sup>216</sup> In other words, Hoover intended the study of economic fundamentals to allow social scientists and public officials to discover the laws of economic prosperity, although he already knew on the first day of the commission on Recent Economic Changes the fundamental law he was seeking. The Secretary of Commerce, who had praised pure research for the sake of truth, had commissioned a survey the political and economic orientation of which he had determined before it had begun.

In October 1927, Hoover's long-time associate Wesley Mitchell met Hoover's expectations with his assessment of the seeds of economic prosperity. Social scientists could not restrict their focus merely to social and economic turmoil. Mitchell was unequivocal about the purpose of that project. To develop his thinking about economic booms in the business cycle further, the Columbia economist proposed to unearth the basic determinants of economic prosperity. Mitchell wrote to Hoover's social science advisor, Edward Eyre Hunt, that

Ordinarily people propose to investigate matters which have gone awry. The present proposal is to find out why matters have gone so well. Whether one thinks in terms of business prosperity or of social welfare, it is of great importance to determine as accurately as possible what factors have cooperated to maintain economic activity at so high a level for so long a period.<sup>217</sup>

Mitchell stated explicitly that the pursuit of economic fundamentals was his grand intellectual ambition. He confided to Hunt,

In our opinion, the proposed investigation possesses a measure of scientific interest and practical significance scarcely matched by any past undertaking of a similar sort.

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>217</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell to Edward Eyre Hunt, October 24, 1927, box 1, folder 1927, Edward Eyre Hunt Collection, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1.

Obviously it deals with economic fundamentals, the great processes by which the country's myriad workers are cooperating to supply each other's wants. It centers upon changes in the organization through which these processes are carried on.<sup>218</sup>

Here Mitchell clarifies his expectations about the Commission on Recent Economic Changes. This statement is crucial because it is one of the rare personal acknowledgements made about the intellectual aspirations of social scientists. In their published documents, Merriam, van Kleeck, and even Mitchell were obscure about the intellectual purpose behind the projects they carried out daily for government officials.

#### *Recent Economic Changes and Recent Social Trends*

The definitive analysis of the two most important commissions of Hoover's tenure as Secretary of Commerce and his presidency remains to be done. One interesting approach to such an analysis would be to list their participants and to compare their articles in *Recent Economic Changes* (REC) and *Recent Social Trends* (RST) with their published essays and archives. Such a study would illuminate the intentions of major social scientists of the pre-New Deal Era. It would be too simplistic to interpret REC and RST as a patchwork of articles stuck together in huge volumes. Moreover, dissociating Hoover's intellectual comprehension of social sciences from the publication of REC and RST would be too facile. Hoover perceived these two commissions as the final accomplishments of his grand desire to lay the foundation of a revised value system. The firm stance against political interference taken by the majority of social scientists composing these commissions cannot be interpreted as a declaration of war against Hoover and the Federal government. Certainly, social scientists pushed hard to be able to operate beyond the reach of Hoover's political agenda. They nonetheless all agreed on the necessity of redesigning modern values. Because of the comprehensiveness of their objective, they needed general means to bring it into being. The Federal government, through the Department of Commerce, played such an educational role in promoting new values.

Even before such historiographical excavation actually gets underway, we can still lay groundwork for the potential work site. In 1929, Charles Merriam, Wesley Mitchell, and William Ogburn (1886-1959) signed an important document that has seldom been examined by historians, a few months after the publication of *Recent Economic Changes*. Produced under the

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

auspices of the Social Science Research Council, the unpublished document (“Consumption according to Incomes: An Inquiry into the Economic and Social Well-Being of the American People”) covered the few months between REC and RST. The two years between October 1927 and September 1929 were fruitful ones for social scientists, as they were for Herbert Hoover. The Mississippi flood, the radio and aviation regulation commissions, the building of the Hoover Dam, and the presidential campaign of 1928 absorbed most of Hoover’s and his closest associates’ efforts, and, after a while, the energy of the great majority of historians. Social sciences were unquestionably less exciting than an environmental catastrophe or a milestone presidential election that pitted two progressive leaders against each other. Private documents written by Hoover himself after 1927 on the role of social sciences are a rarity. For example, in Hoover’s Bible, very few documents came from the presidential years, including Hoover’s preparation for the campaign. Nevertheless, social scientists did not cease working for the government merely because Hoover was seeking the presidency. In fact, the document on “Consumption According to Incomes” came from this turbulent period.

Once *Recent Economic Changes* appeared, the chair of the committee admitted the constraints that the data collection had imposed. The committee faced the contradiction of at once having neutral economic facts and yet not knowing the intent motivating the economic behavior of Americans. In the introduction of “Consumption According to Incomes”, Wesley Mitchell conceded the partial failure of their previous works:

Today [in September 1929] we know more than ever about economic affairs ‘in the mass’. Nevertheless aggregate figures on production and consumption reveal little about the daily behavior of people. We can guess quite accurately about many of the habits of the ‘average man’ but we can only draw inferences about the actual living habits of real individuals and households. We know how the mass behaves, but we do not know who does the behaving. . . . Our society has produced and experienced the economic changes of which we so often speak, but *much of the significance of the experience* remains embedded in the daily life of individuals and of family groups.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell and others, “Consumption according to Incomes: An Inquiry into the Economic and Social Well-Being of the American People” September, 1929; Report prepared by the SSRC for the Secretary of the Interior, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 6. Emphasis added.

Using REC, they found factual information, and now were seeking to develop interpretations for these facts. The Commission on Recent Economic Changes did not generate all the results envisaged. The outcomes sought by REC commissioners were to understand and inspire the daily behavior of the masses:

The welfare of the people depends ultimately upon two things: first, how much do people earn? and second, how do they spend their money? The investigation here outlined is concerned chiefly with the second, how do they spend their money? The investigation here outlined is concerned chiefly with the second of these two investigations. We need to know in detail more about how incomes are spent, and what kind of life incomes can purchase. We want to know more about the competition between different commodities, desires, and values in the daily life of the people. To learn what economic progress has meant for their health and welfare will require a new first-hand investigation.<sup>220</sup>

Thus, in early 1929, social scientists still intended to shape collective behavior.

The investigation began with the identical principle: economic prosperity. Researchers launched their investigation motivated by the prospect of deciphering behaviour during an economic boom. In the introduction, they stated that “the plan submitted below constitutes a concrete suggestion for further examination of the bases and meaning of American prosperity.”<sup>221</sup> They had intended to explore the impact of economic prosperity on vanishing traditional modes of conduct. But the flow of economic wealth was making such an assessment very difficult. Social scientists considered it “highly important to learn more about the influence of new inventions and about the impact of changing productivity and changing price levels upon consumption habits.”<sup>222</sup> Beginning with the underlying principle of economic prosperity, this survey would cover areas other than just economic issues. Social scientists intended to discern the effect of economic transformation upon collective and individual conduct.

Indeed, it is possible to question the origins and nature of the economic prosperity the majority of the American population enjoyed. It can be interpreted as a “moving myth”, to

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 9.

borrow Gérard Bouchard's expression.<sup>223</sup> Nonetheless, the social scientists who instigated the Commission on Recent Social Trends undertook to understand the fundamental impact of modern material conditions upon habits of behavior. For example, the emergence of the consumer culture piqued their curiosity. The authors of "Consumption According to Incomes" emphasized that "the growing emphasis upon leisure as a good-in-itself—a welcome by-product of modern civilization to be conserved and turned to good purpose—raises many questions which should be illuminated by this investigation."<sup>224</sup> In addition, the blurring of trends for manual and clerical wages generated unfamiliar forms of consumption. The researchers remarked that

The extent to which expenditures for clothing and rent actually diverge is a question worthy of a good deal of attention in the analysis, for it is apparently coming to be increasingly difficult to distinguish between a 'white collared' worker and a manual worker 'after hours'. To an increasing extent wage earners are demanding and maintaining standards of comfort and luxury which in the past have been popularly supposed to be the prerogatives of other groups in the community.<sup>225</sup>

These are the kinds of transformations social scientists proposed to map out. They continued to try to explain the impact of emerging social conditions on the American psyche.

The prevailing idea of general welfare, which was winning converts, motivated the social scientists involved in the drafting of "Consumption According to Incomes", which foretold the formation of the Commission on Recent Social Trends. Wesley Mitchell explained his personal motivation to Edward E. Hunt, saying that welfare should be the economic objective because it would allow further improvements in standards of living. One of Mitchell's close associates in the Commission on Recent Social Trends, William Ogburn, a colleague of Charles Merriam's at the University of Chicago, had come to the same conclusion. Ogburn confided to French Strother (1883-1933), who had replaced Hoover advisor Edward E. Hunt, that "such a conference would be one on human welfare. The general conference ought to have a unifying idea. The idea of human welfare for instance is hardly closely enough knit to furnish alone a unifying

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<sup>223</sup> For Bouchard, "le trait qui doit retenir ici l'attention, ce n'est pas le mythe comme distorsion ou falsificateur du réel, mais comme producteur de cohérence et, plus encore, comme catalyseur efficace, comme opérateur." Gérard Bouchard, *Raison et contradiction: Le mythe au secours de la pensée* (Québec: Éditions Nota Bene, 2003), 42.

<sup>224</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell and others, "Consumption according to Incomes...", p. 10.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

principle.”<sup>226</sup> Welfare was a compelling notion, but it was in itself not sufficient to fulfil the expectations of social scientists. Ogburn pointed out the survey’s potential:

The point of interest is in determining social objectives. Since freedom of the will is restricted by social forces, social objectives cannot be determined solely by what ought to be done. They must also be determined by what can be done. The Greeks could not invent the aeroplane. Indeed, a very good plan for practical action is not to ask first what ought to be done but to ask what is going to happen, and then follow by asking in what way can these probable events be prevented, encouraged or modified.<sup>227</sup>

Thus, for Ogburn, social forces molded collective behavior. By managing social forces, it became possible to grasp and orient individual and collective conduct. His statement amounted to a paraphrasing of the earlier aim social scientists, that of reshaping ethics and the value system.

### Conclusion

As *Recent Social Trends* took shape, the notion of collective and individual welfare replaced the reconstruction of social ethics. Evidence for the shift from ethics to welfare can be found in many documents written by Merriam, Mitchell, and van Kleeck, although no precise date for this intellectual conversion can be fixed. Certainly, the cataclysmic impact of the Depression made material relief more urgent than spiritual relief. In the following chapters, I will illustrate this transformation through the works of some of the major social scientists who collaborated closely with Hoover. Intellectually and politically, the Depression profoundly altered the vision of the social sciences in Mitchell’s economics, in Merriam’s political science, and in van Kleeck’s industrial research and social work.

A similar shift occurred in President Hoover’s entourage. Initially, French Strother, Hoover’s advisor on the social sciences, explicitly envisaged the Commission on Recent Social Trends as fundamental social science research. Strother wrote to The Honorable E. F. Morgan, solicitor of the Department of Commerce that

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<sup>226</sup> William Fielding Ogburn to French Strother, correspondence, September 23, 1929. Box 3, French Strother Papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

No scientific research has ever been undertaken in this country . . . either fundamental or comprehensive, into the facts concerning the very rapid changes in the social structure in America due to the effects of industrial advance, technical adaptation of scientific discovery, the enlargement of means of transportation and communication, etc., etc. All social scientists feel that these mechanical aspects of life have advanced at such a rapid pace that our social institutions have not been able to adjust themselves at anything like the same rate.<sup>228</sup>

Strother's correspondence with Morgan was quite representative of the spirit of the 1920s. Thus, the shift from ethics to welfare gradually took place in the early years of the 1930s.

Begun in 1930, the Commission on Recent Social Trends was staffed by social scientists from a wide array of disciplines. From the outset they proceeded by working individually on their respective topics. Each of them produced one report of one volume. After a year and a half of working this way, approximately twenty volumes of two hundred pages each had been produced. The final report was a summary of these volumes.

The minutes of the Executive Committee found in Hoover's archives illustrated the dilemma this survey brought out. Strother and Ogburn perceived RST as fundamental social studies. Other social scientists, however, found the nature of RST to be less evident. One of these was Harvard economist Edmund E. Day (1883-1951), who wrote in 1932:

Social science is on trial [because] there was skepticism in many quarters as to the ability of the social scientists to [define proper courses of action]. . . . The undertaking would not be a success if it simply imposes information without bringing into the open its relationship to public policy. There is danger that the report will be a purely academic document.<sup>229</sup>

Pure research in the social sciences was less popular in 1932 than it had been a few years before. Ogburn and Mitchell reformulated the fundamental character of the survey.<sup>230</sup> Significant tension existed between those social scientists desiring public policy oriented toward

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<sup>228</sup> French Strother to The Honorable E. F. Morgan, Solicitor, Department of Commerce, correspondence, December 3, 1929, box 3, French Strother papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 1-2.

<sup>229</sup> Summary of Minutes of the Meeting of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends held at the SSRC Council, NYC, February 13, 1932 box 3 French Strother papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 8-9.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-3.

material welfare and those believing that fundamental research would reveal the general truths necessary for founding a revised value system. The intellectual experiences of Mitchell, Merriam, and van Kleeck embodied this dilemma.

The re-emergence of social policies in the Depression Era marked the end of the ethical and moral traditions of political economy and the early social sciences. Under President Hoover and, after 1932, under President Franklin Roosevelt, social scientists in various fields set aside their concerns with morality in order to work more actively on public policies. Edward Hunt, the former social science advisor to Herbert Hoover, brilliantly described the purpose of public policies in the early 1930s:

The result has been that astonishing contrasts in organization and disorganization are to be found side by side in American life: amazing technical proficiency in some incredible skyscraper and monstrous backwardness in some equally incredible slum. The outstanding American problem might be stated as that of bringing about a realization of the interdependence of the factors of our complicated social structure, and of interrelating the advancing sections of our forward movement so that agriculture, labor, industry, government, education, religion and science may develop a higher degree of coordination in the next phase of national growth.<sup>231</sup>

The enactment of social policies by interventionist state officials became the great solution to cure social ills in the 1930s. For intellectuals, it also became the model to follow in order to foster material welfare.

Welfare as an idea had existed before the 1930s, as far back as the Progressive Era and the 1920s. In the 1920s, however, the notion of welfare was a corollary of the idea of reconstructing the value system. In the early 1930s, welfare as the enactment of public policies supplanted welfare as vehicle to promote ethics. But a declining hegemonic concept could not disappear in a single year. In the same 1932 document, Hunt recalled the moral ambition of the social sciences: “The spiritual values of life are among the most profound of those affected by developments in technology and organization. They are the slowest to change to meet altered

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<sup>231</sup> Edward E. Hunt, Draft of Introduction of RST in the US, October 1, 1932, box 3, French Strother papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa.4.

conditions. Moral guidance is peculiarly difficult when the future is markedly different from the past.”<sup>232</sup>

A few months after his electoral defeat, Herbert Hoover vividly reiterated the desire to revive what Hunt had termed “moral guidance”:

Thus the government still does, and increasingly should lead the way by example toward the discovery of new knowledge to free mankind from ignorance, superstition, needless fears and poverty. Nor should it be unremarked that a spiritual value accrues in all this labor, for science requires a degree of unselfishness and devotion which calls out the finest qualities of the human spirit, and, since its goal is truth, the noblest aspirations of mankind.<sup>233</sup>

The nostalgic tone adopted by Hoover revealed the shift in his understanding of the purpose of the social sciences. For Hoover and Hunt in 1932, moral guidance based on the disinterested search for truth must remain the ultimate goal of the social sciences, even if unattainable. The practical intent to rebuild social ethics and thus establish an improved value system ultimately lost its appeal in the day-to-day work of social scientists. Bolstered by the political agenda of Roosevelt, social scientists applied their disciplines to devise public policies that were oriented toward material well-being.

Herbert Hoover’s vision of the social sciences issued largely from the ideas expressed by his closest associates. As the Secretary of Commerce, he had hired Edward Hunt, and as President, he had hired French Strother to counsel him on social scientific issues. These close advisors did not, however, have a monopoly on Hoover’s opinion about the purpose of the social sciences. Other social scientists participated actively in Hoover’s commissions and influenced his understanding of this emerging field. I will not review the details of the developments that the social scientists who had worked with Hoover experienced between 1921 and 1932. For those interested in an extensive account of Hoover’s principal associates, I recommend Barry

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>233</sup> Herbert Hoover, Draft of “The Scientific Work of the Government of the United States”, *Scientific Monthly*, January 1933, Bible 63: 2102, Hoover papers, Herbert Hoover Presidential Library, West Branch, Iowa, 2.

Karl's old but excellent article and Guy Alchon's well-documented essay on presidential planning.<sup>234</sup>

I have selected three social scientists who worked closely with Hoover—Wesley Mitchell, Charles Merriam, and Mary van Kleeck—to show the effect they had on Hoover's conception of the social sciences and on the role he accorded academic knowledge in his political decision-making. In the final analysis, Hoover acquiesced to the social scientists by endorsing the academic quest for a modernized social ethics. Throughout his tenure as head of the Department of Commerce, Hoover offered them a forum for promoting an altruistic "sense of service" and for educating American leaders and the American populace. Wesley Mitchell, Charles Merriam, and Mary van Kleeck inspired, and were inspired by, Hoover's vision of the state as moral guide.

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<sup>234</sup> Barry Karl, "Presidential Planning and Social Science Research : Mr. Hoover's Experts", *Perspectives in American History* 3 (1969) : 347-409; Guy Alchon, *The Invisible Hand of Planning: Capitalism, Social Science, and the State in the 1920s*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985)

## Chapter 2: Wesley Clair Mitchell: A Progressive and Eclectic Economist

‘Enlightened Egoism,’ never so luminous, is not the rule by which man’s life can be led. That ‘Laissez-faire,’ ‘Supply-and-demand,’ ‘Cash-payment for the sole nexus,’ and so forth, were not, are not, and will never be, a practicable Law of Union for a Society of Men.<sup>235</sup>

Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present*, 1843

The quest for rules by which to govern social life was one of Wesley Clair Mitchell’s (1874-1948) most profound intellectual ambitions. His study of economics and the social sciences and his interventions in public affairs embodied this search for a new ethical system. Indeed, refashioning American social ethics was a focal point throughout his various academic and political careers. Mitchell, who taught economics at Columbia University between 1913 and 1944, was also a leading economic theorist and commentator on American and international economic fluctuations. He published articles for British and American national newspapers. He joined other economists to found the research program of the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). Because he had been a prominent member of this agency, the U.S. Federal government hired him to analyze the state of the American economy. And in 1923, Wesley Mitchell became one of the founding members of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), a scientific association promoting multidisciplinary cooperation among the social sciences. In the 1920s, Mitchell also collaborated in the preparation of major surveys commissioned by the Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Clark Hoover. Mitchell’s eclecticism reflected his interest in different, though complementary, subjects: politics, economics, the social sciences, and social ethics.

In 1944, the Columbia sociologist Robert S. Lynd (1892-1970), the author of *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture*, acknowledged the transformation of Mitchell’s thought when he commented that there seemed to be two Wesley Mitchells:

- 1) the man of the ‘Backward Art of Spending Money’ and ‘Human Behavior in Economics’; and 2) the man who committed himself to empiricism in part due to your

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<sup>235</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Past and Present* (1843). Quotation by Wesley Clair Mitchell in a scrapbook, box APP 54-63. Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

experience in Washington twenty five years ago. A lot of us younger men . . . would like to see the earlier Wesley Mitchell come to the fore again.<sup>236</sup>

This duality in Mitchell explains how two economists with radically divergent orientations like John Kenneth Galbraith (1908–) and Milton Friedman (1912–) could share the same intellectual mentor. Lynd’s comment also confirmed the complex nature of Mitchell’s work. To limit the essence of his thought to business cycles and his quantitative method misses one of the salient aspects of his early career: Mitchell the idealist attributing moral purpose to his economics and social sciences. The Mitchell of business cycles and statistics is well-known; however, the early Mitchell, the one influenced by Dewey and Veblen, is less studied, to the point of being neglected.

#### Wesley Clair Mitchell (1874-1948): A Short Biography

Born in 1874 in Rushville, Illinois, Wesley Clair Mitchell came from a rural family living on a small but prosperous farm. Mitchell’s upbringing was similar to that of many in the Progressive generation. His parents were not poor, but in his early years Mitchell’s family frequently lived on “close to nothing”.<sup>237</sup> During his Midwestern years, Mitchell was outstanding from an early age for his intelligence, curiosity, and interest in literature. When he started as an undergraduate student at the University of Chicago, he intended to pursue studies in philosophy and literature. After meeting the professor of philosophy John Dewey (1859-1952) and the professor of political economy Thorstein Veblen at the University of Chicago, Mitchell changed his mind and decided to study economics with John Lawrence Laughlin (1850-1933). Mitchell was one of the first American social scientists who did not earn his Ph.D. in Germany.<sup>238</sup> He graduated in 1899 from the University of Chicago.

After completing his Ph.D., Mitchell worked for the Federal government as a statistical expert during the Cuban and Puerto Rican censuses done by the War Department in 1900 and the

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<sup>236</sup> Robert S. Lynd to Wesley Clair Mitchell, Correspondence, May 30, 1944, , C-40. Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>237</sup> Arthur Burns, *Wesley Clair Mitchell: The Economic Scientist* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1952), 8.

<sup>238</sup> On this, see Daniel Rodgers’ discussion about the influence of German thought on American social sciences in Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998)

twelfth Census in 1903.<sup>239</sup> During the latter year Mitchell began his career as a junior professor of political economy at the University of California at Berkeley. The days he spent at Berkeley were to be among the most significant of his life. It was here that Mitchell met his future wife, Lucy Sprague (1878-1967), while she was Dean of Women; they married in 1912.<sup>240</sup> Mitchell also met for the first time a young, prosperous, and ambitious geologist—the engineer Herbert C. Hoover, formerly a student at Stanford University and now director of a mining company doing business in the West and the Pacific. While forging these notable early alliances, Mitchell put his early years at Berkeley to good use, earning a reputation as a prolific scholar. Mitchell developed an interpretation of business cycles that was all his own, which was to make him the American authority on the topic. In 1913, at the age of thirty-five, he published his magnum opus: *Business Cycles: The Problem and its Setting*<sup>241</sup>.

Mitchell's academic career appears to have followed a classic trajectory. His work on the fluidity of business cycles established him as a promising economist in the United States.<sup>242</sup> The same year he published this essay, after he had made the traditional academic tour of Harvard, Oxford, and Cambridge where he presented his ideas to other scholars, Columbia University offered him a permanent chair. Mitchell occupied this position from 1913 to 1944, when he retired as Professor Emeritus.

But Wesley Mitchell was more than just an ambitious careerist.<sup>243</sup> During the First World War, he held high rank as the Chief of the Price Section for the War Industry Board. There Mitchell applied the price system that he had conceived during his Ph.D. years to the challenges of America at war, referring to the “working hypotheses” of his doctoral thesis.<sup>244</sup> It was in the aftermath of this wartime collaboration that Mitchell and other economists, such as Edwin F. Gay (1867-1946), developed the idea of establishing a permanent body of economists that could

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<sup>239</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Preparations for the Twelfth Census”, *Journal of Political Economy*, 8 (June 1900): 378-84; “The Census of Cuba”, *Journal of Political Economy*, 8 (December 1900): 125-131; Wesley Clair Mitchell, “The Census of Puerto Rico” *Journal of Political Economy*, 9 (March 1901): 282-5.

<sup>240</sup> On the life and career of Lucy Sprague, see Joyce Antler, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The Making of a Modern Woman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>241</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, *Business Cycles : The Problems and its Settings* (New York : National Bureau of Economic Research, 1930 [1913]).

<sup>242</sup> In 1957, John Kenneth Galbraith praised Mitchell's pioneering work on the business cycle in his classic essay *The Affluent Society*. See J. K. Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958).

<sup>243</sup> William Leach interpreted Mitchell's career as a manifestation of pure careerism. See William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 361.

<sup>244</sup> War Industry Board, Division of Planning and Statistics, *A Comparison of Prices during the Civil War and Present War* (Washington: Government Printing, 1918).

advise the government, as well as companies, trade unions, and philanthropic associations. Led by Mitchell and Gay, in 1919 the group founded the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan agency mandated to conduct research of interest to policy-makers and others in the economic sphere.

Mitchell followed developments in disciplines other than economics with great interest. He corresponded with John Dewey, debated with psychologists about their contribution to the progress of the social sciences, kept abreast of the gradual shift from traditional ethnology to scientific anthropology, and read Charles (1874-1948) and Mary (1876-1958) Beard's revolutionary and controversial reinterpretation of American history. Together with Charles A. Beard, James Harvey Robinson (1863-1935), and Alvin Johnson (1874-1971), Mitchell helped establish the New School for Social Research in 1918.<sup>245</sup> Thus, even before the 1920s, Mitchell considered himself not only an economist and public advisor, but also a member of a larger community of thinkers, experts, and professors who sought both to challenge the conventional wisdom of the day and to modify social institutions.

The 1920s were probably Wesley Mitchell's most creative years. Because his interests were diverse, he did not confine his work to only one or two projects. His commentaries appeared in many newspapers, and he published articles in scholarly periodicals. He worked on a number of commissions headed by Herbert Hoover while pursuing and expanding his collaboration with the NBER. He was one of the founders of the Social Science Research Council. Meanwhile, he continued to teach economics at Columbia University.

Mitchell was not an original thinker of the same order as the great nineteenth-century economic philosophers. He did, however, translate his original, insightful thinking into assertive action. The most interesting aspects of Mitchell's work were thus neither the generally conservative answers he proposed for social problems nor his skill in coordinating scientific associations, but contributions he made to both his discipline and his field by raising questions and pointing out paradoxes, as well as the way he interpreted his public role.

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<sup>245</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "The New School for Social Research", *New York Evening Post*, 8 April 1920, 8.

## The Economics of Wesley Mitchell: A Flexible Discipline

### *Sociology of Economics*

Throughout his career, Wesley Mitchell developed and refined his understanding of economic change and an epistemology of economics. He analyzed the principal events affecting the American and international economies and devised an original quantitative method that clarified economic fluctuations. Not only did Mitchell compile key economic data, but he also attempted to explain human behaviour by analyzing social institutions. Mitchell's institutional economics sought to reorient human behaviour on grounds other than self-serving, monetary interests.

Early in his career, Mitchell made clear his belief that economists were not just collectors of facts. In 1908, in a review of a monograph by the British economist George Randall Lewis, Mitchell criticized Lewis's inquiry as incomplete:

Dr. Lewis misses an admirable opportunity to present vividly the process of cumulative change undergone by the habits of thought prevalent among a curiously distinct community. His conception of his task is scholarly rather than scientific; and while he sets forth minute details upon certain matters of minor import, he does not make clear what manner of man the Cornish tinner [the topic of Lewis's monograph] has been and is today, and how he has developed into his present estate. But when a young scholar has shown the competent skill and thoroughness of an artisan, it is perhaps ungracious to complain because he does not also show the wider grasp and deeper insight of an artist.<sup>246</sup>

Mitchell's intent was to describe the sociological implications of the economic functions he was monitoring.<sup>247</sup> To a certain extent, he did not exclude imagination from economic commentaries on past and actual events:

[Our] interest in economics is derived from our interest in great practical problem of social organization which we hope economics may help us to solve. . . . Economics lacks the severe beauty of mathematics, subtlety of philosophy, romantic attraction of history, definiteness of physical sciences, [and] intimacy of literary studies.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, Review of George Randall Lewis' *The Stanneries: A Study of the English Tin Miner*, *Journal of Political Economy*, 16 (June 1908): 387.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 388-389.

<sup>248</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Syllabus", October 2, 1916, box 1898-1917: 2, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

Here Mitchell refutes the sort of general interpretation he often termed "super-empiricist".<sup>249</sup> In fact, he did not exclude speculation from his understanding of economics.

Moreover, Mitchell approached economics from two sides. First, he considered economics to have explanatory power for experts—in this case economists—who were trying to depict daily individual experience. Second, Mitchell did not take economics for granted; on the contrary, he considered it “a body of knowledge” that incorporated economists’ biases and premises:

We take postulates up, plan with them, and drop them for others. They are external to us and we feel no affection for them. But preconceptions are part of us. . . . Even in our most rigorous work we are influenced by them.<sup>250</sup>

Economists have never been entirely detached observers of the economic world. They bring with them personal experiences and life contexts that affect how they forge their knowledge into the discipline of economics.

### Premises and Influences

Wesley Mitchell did not consider himself an exception to the subjective rule he advocated. At first, Mitchell had based his economic interpretations upon the insights of other thinkers and economists. He organized the early classes he taught around the philosophers and political economists he considered the most influential. For example, in his treatment of the British political economist Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), Mitchell highlighted his moral arithmetic.<sup>251</sup> The interest Bentham held for Mitchell resided in the ethical system he had developed and the

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<sup>249</sup> See the article by Jeff Biddle, “Social Science and the Making of Social Policy: Wesley Clair Mitchell’s Vision” in Malcolm Rutherford (ed.), *The Economic Mind in American Economics: Perspectives on the History of Economic Thought* (London: Routledge, 1998), 43-79.

<sup>250</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Postulates and Preconceptions of Ricardian Economics” in Thomas V. Smith and William K. Wright, *Essays in Philosophy* (New York: The Open Court Publishing Co, 1929) reprinted in WCM, *The Backward Art of Spending Money, and Other Essays* (New York: A. M. Kelly, 1950), 205.

<sup>251</sup> Mitchell stressed the need to study Bentham’s moral system carefully to his colleague the economist Friedrich von Hayek: “I am putting in also a reprint of a slightly later article on Bentham’s Felicific Calculus. I have long cherished a belief, which you probably don’t share, that a clearer insight into Bentham’s Artificial Psychology might have saved our economic theorists not a little ingenious labor”. Wesley Clair Mitchell to Friedrich von Hayek, correspondence, December 12, 1923, box C-30, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

psychological interpretation Mitchell made of it rather than in Bentham's utilitarianism and hedonism.<sup>252</sup>

### *Wesley Mitchell's Mentors*

The contemporary thinkers who exerted the most influences on Mitchell's ideas were John Dewey and Thorstein Veblen. After all, it had been Mitchell's meeting Dewey and Veblen that led him to study economics rather than philosophy and literature. Mitchell referred explicitly to these authors and their influence early in his career. In 1919, for example, Mitchell referred to John Dewey's interpretation of the impact of the war upon "the state of mind".<sup>253</sup>

What was even more relevant than Mitchell's explicit references to these authors, however, was the way Mitchell integrated concepts from these thinkers into his own interpretation. Mitchell paraphrased Veblen's famous critique of the "nouveaux riches" and their conspicuous consumption<sup>254</sup>, observing that

No less important than these material facts of demand and supply was the mental attitude of different sections of the public. Very many customers had more money to spend than they had been accustomed to, many of them had been subjected to months of voluntary restraint or actual privation; they wanted the "grand and glorious feeling" of free spending. Most soldiers on being mustered out received a substantial lump sum and thought themselves entitled to get all the fun they could out of it. The newly rich are always the most conspicuous wasters, and the war had produced a large number of such gentry.<sup>255</sup>

Mitchell thus took up Veblen's caution against excessive spending in his war against waste, especially in his writings published during the 1920s. Mitchell also denounced the behaviour and excessive spending of the "nouveau riches", which he saw as having contributed to the boom that

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<sup>252</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Syllabus" October 6, 1913, box 1898-1916, Section A, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>253</sup> For Wesley Clair Mitchell, "we are all subject to emotional reactions, and, as John Dewey has pointed out, the state of mind produced by the return of peace differs from that produced by the outbreak of war just as widely as peace differs from war. No, we cannot depend on any carryover of 'war psychology' to organize democratically in peace". Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Statistics and Government", *Quarterly Publications of the American Statistical Association*, 16 (March 1919): 228.

<sup>254</sup> Thorstein Veblen formulated this critique in his most famous book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study in the Evolution of Institutions* (New York: Macmillan, 1899).

<sup>255</sup> "Prices and Reconstruction", *American Economic Review*, Supplement, 10 (March 1920): 145.

caused the Depression. Indeed, he considered excessive spending one of the most damaging factors in business fluctuations, an idea that lay at the core of his definition of the business cycle.

Mitchell reinterpreted the pragmatist philosophy of theory and history eloquently articulated by his former professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago, John Dewey.<sup>256</sup> Dewey believed that analysts of concrete reality needed to focus on both theory and history: the former as the manifestation of the abstract world of ideas; the latter as the expression of experience through past events. Mitchell adapted Dewey's philosophical hypothesis to his understanding of economics by inserting his concept of statistics into the Deweyan dialectic of theory and history. Mitchell reasoned that not only did economists manipulate ideas and investigate past events, but through statistics they also captured actual experience quantitatively. Mitchell clarified the tridimensional relationship between theory, history, and statistics—topics that shaped Mitchell's economics—in his classic *Business Cycles*:

Many of the statisticians pay little heed to current theories of business cycles, and many of the theorists make little use of statistical methods. . . . Experimentalists and pure theorists often have difficulty in understanding each other; but in the long run each group is grist for the other's mill, and scientific progress is a joint product of the two lines of attack upon the unknown.<sup>257</sup>

### *The Historical School of Economics*

In addition, the dominant school of economics in the late nineteenth century swayed Mitchell when he was a graduate student. This school, called the Historical School of Economics, focused on the role of historical experience as the expression of fundamental economic laws. Later in his career, Mitchell was to become much more sceptical about this school, but as a graduate student he was definitely a staunch advocate. The Historical School of Economics was a product of German and Austrian economic thinking. Mitchell had read many of the leading late-nineteenth-

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<sup>256</sup> In 1934, Mitchell expressed his view to John Dewey himself on the use of Dewey's approach: "there is no one to whom I feel under heavier intellectual obligation than yourself. Nothing could promote the growth of the social sciences, which we need so desperately, more than the development of a contact between the young people who are devoting themselves to work in these fields and courses in philosophy of the sort you were giving when I was a graduate student." Wesley Clair Mitchell to John Dewey, Correspondence, December 7, 1934, box C-17, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>257</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, *Business Cycles: The Problems and its Setting* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1913), 189.

century German and Austrian economists and reviewed some of their essays in the *Journal of Political Economy* published by the University of Chicago.<sup>258</sup>

The sharpest example of Mitchell's interest in the interpretation of the Historical School of Economics was his own Ph.D. dissertation, written between 1896 and 1899. In his dissertation, Mitchell analyzed the economic policy of the Federal government in 1861, the first year of the American Civil War, to understand its impact on the economy of the time. In his discussion of the quantity theory of money, Mitchell explicitly related business fluctuations to the government decision to enact the legal tender acts. In an article published one year after he graduated, Mitchell argued that

While the amount of currency in circulation is not and cannot be known, it is evident from the discussion that not least among the unhappy consequences of the legal tender acts was to throw the circulating medium into disorder and cause much inconvenience to the business public.<sup>259</sup>

Here Mitchell mentioned for the first time that "disorder" existed in the economy. He came to employ the concept of historical disorder and inconvenience to explain business fluctuations, which altered the way he would see them from then on. Indeed, twenty years after finishing his dissertation, Mitchell had integrated his historical method into his own definition of business cycles:

Like all historical phenomena each cycle is strictly speaking a unique phase of human experience. Yet history repeats itself, repeats itself with a difference, and it is no less important to recognize the similarity between successive phases of the historical process than it is to recognize the differences which make each phase unique.<sup>260</sup>

### *Business fluctuations*

Mitchell had first examined business fluctuations during the Civil War. In the published version of his Ph.D. thesis, Mitchell related specific policies to abstract economic forces. For example, in

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<sup>258</sup> Mitchell reviewed the essays of Eugen v. Böhm-Bawerk, Max Prager, Carl Steinbrück, Iwan Drenkoff, Fritz Demuth, Anton von Kostanecki, Georg von Mayr, Carl Bücher, and Hans Koch.

<sup>259</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "The Circulating Medium during the Civil War", *Journal of Political Economy*, 10 (September 1902): 574.

<sup>260</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "The Evidence for the Business Cycle: Its Length, Amplitude, and Regularity", paper read before a special meeting of the American Statistical Association, New York, December 15, 1922, box 4, section b. Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 3

the first section of his *History of the Greenbacks*, Mitchell described the political and military context at the time the legal tender acts were passed.<sup>261</sup> In the next section, Mitchell shifted his tone and focus to economic concepts such as the quantity of money circulating in the country, the price system, and the distribution of wealth. He concluded his analysis by assessing the political impact the legal tender acts had had on general economic welfare:

The war-time fortunes resulted in a very large measure from the mere transfer of wealth from a wide circle of persons to the relatively small number of residual claimants to the proceeds of business enterprises. The enlarged consumption of wealth which the paper currency made possible for the fortunate few was therefore contrasted with a diminished consumption on the part of the unfortunate many on whose slender means the greenbacks levied contributions for the benefit of their employers. . . . [the greenback currency created] an artificial alteration of the distribution of wealth.<sup>262</sup>

Before reaching his progressive message in the conclusion, Mitchell had explicitly applied the model used by disciples of the Historical School of Economics. In the first section, as was the practice, he laid out the most important political and military events of the time.<sup>263</sup> In the last section, he applied historical analysis to his interpretation of economic forces. Mitchell concluded that the sources of economic disturbances were principally due to historical (i.e., political) factors.

The political context in which Mitchell lived, however, left its mark on his understanding of economic problems. The great economic debate of the late nineteenth century in the United States had to do with the gold or bimetal (silver and gold) standard. Mitchell did not remain neutral on this divisive question, delving into the proposition enacted in the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1898 in response to the same problem.<sup>264</sup> In his review of economist Max Prager's (1880-1943) discussion of the adoption of bimetallism, Mitchell implicitly supported the gold standard. In 1900, he subtly defended it by asserting that

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<sup>261</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, *A History of the Greenbacks, with Special Reference to the Economic Consequences of their Issue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1903), 18.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 401.

<sup>263</sup> For a discussion of positivist history, see Charles Seignobos and Charles Victor Langlois, *Introduction aux Études Historiques* (Paris: Kimé, 1992, [1898])

<sup>264</sup> See Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Resumption of Specie Payments in Austria-Hungary", *Journal of Political Economy*, 7 (December 1898): 106-113.

Fortunately . . . , it will be at least four years before a free-silver secretary can have the opportunity to demonstrate to those who think as does Dr. Prager how flimsy the safeguards with which the gold standard is surrounded still are.<sup>265</sup>

Mitchell was, at the same time, supporting the Republican stance on the gold standard and rejecting the position of free-silver economists. In another article in the same vein, Mitchell objected to the quantity theory of money by arguing that too much circulation of currency only increased the danger of unbridled economic disorder. Mitchell did not explicitly envisage the problem of bimetallism, but he did seriously undermine the free-silver rationale. For Mitchell, more money in the economy meant more money for the rich and not for the rest of the population.<sup>266</sup>

To support his controversial line of reasoning, rather than rely on simple averages Mitchell founded his rationale on social statistics, considered by the leading specialists of the day a full-fledged social science and the most sophisticated method for such a purpose.<sup>267</sup> In 1905, Mitchell made known his agreement with the statisticians “[who] recognize that averages may give a faulty impression of the facts they are supposed to represent, and that, when possible, it is desirable to provide a fuller exhibit than the averages afford.”<sup>268</sup> Mitchell believed that social statistics furnished this “fuller exhibit” of social reality by depicting reality in all its complexity without masking relevant details omitted in averages: “[the] general use [of the classified – wage – table method] would make it easy to cultivate a field of statistical investigation at present neglected by economists; namely differences in the uniformity and range of fluctuations. . . .”<sup>269</sup>

### *Social statistics*

In order to realize his scientific aims, Mitchell had developed his own method of social statistics, published in 1908 as a statistical supplement to his dissertation. In *Gold, Prices and Wages*

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<sup>265</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Review of Max Prager’s *Die Währungs- und Bankreform in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*”, *Journal of Political Economy*, 9 (December 1900): 152.

<sup>266</sup> Mitchell stated this point in his dissertation, arguing that “the evidence has been found to support the conclusion that in almost all cases the sums of money, wages, rent and interest received by laborers, landlords and capitalists increased much less rapidly than did the general price level.” Mitchell is not naive on who profited the most from these increased profits. WCM, *History of Greenbacks* . . . , 382.

<sup>267</sup> See Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), Theodore M. Porter, *Trusts in Number: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

<sup>268</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Methods of Presenting Statistics of Wages”, *Quarterly Publication of the American Statistical Association*, 72 (December 1905): 332.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

*under the Greenback Standard*, the young scholar exposed the statistical table upon which he based the conclusions in his dissertation.<sup>270</sup> This lengthy essay, composed primarily of statistical tables, demonstrated Mitchell's understanding of social statistics. In it he refined the concept of economic disturbance by relating it to price fluctuations and linked the economic concept of fluctuation to the statistical method.<sup>271</sup> His use of statistical deciles brought out changes in the price system under study.<sup>272</sup>

Mitchell justified his choice of method by arguing that economists had a dynamic object of study. The unstable nature of the price system made it impossible to consider economic structures as fixed and eternally determined.<sup>273</sup> To catch a moving reality, Mitchell recognized, economists would need a method that took into account economic fluctuations:

Measurement is one of the outstanding characteristics of science at large, whether in the field of inorganic matter or life processes. Social statistics, which is concerned with the measurement of social phenomena, has many of the progressive features of the physical sciences. It shows forthright progress in knowledge of fact, in technique of analysis, and in refinement of results. It is amenable to mathematical formulation. It is capable of forecasting group phenomena. It is objective. . . .<sup>274</sup>

Thus, Mitchell had aligned his method with his dynamic notion of complex reality.<sup>275</sup> The fact that Mitchell considered change and variation as determinants in economics explained why Mitchell considered the statistical method he had developed to be a breakthrough: it could be applied to shifting economic realities.

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<sup>270</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, *Gold, Prices and Wages under the Greenback Standard* (New York : A.M. Kelley, 1966 [1908])

<sup>271</sup> For example, Mitchell affirmed that "though the deciles are usually separated by intervals of several points, they generally rise and fall together, maintaining much the same relations. Thus the table shows an almost universal rise of wages during the [Civil] War – *though a rise far from equal* to the advance of wholesale or retail prices." (emphasis added) Wesley Clair Mitchell, *Gold, Prices and Wages* ..., 102. This work is an interesting example of the variation expressed through statistics.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>274</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Statistics and Government", *Quarterly Publications of the American Statistical Association*, 16 (March 1919): 231.

<sup>275</sup> For Mitchell, "changes in the distribution of wealth, particularly changes in profits, in their turn influenced the production of wealth.", *Gold, Prices and Wages* ..., 283.

### A Dynamic Economics

Starting from these historical, philosophical, and methodological premises, Mitchell developed complex definitions and constructed a corpus of economic theories and practices. As alluded to above, Mitchell's economics had two main dimensions: his interpretation of the principal economic trends affecting American and world affairs, and his "sociology of economic knowledge" (to borrow Karl Mannheim's expression), which postmodernist philosophers might have termed an epistemology of economics. Mitchell juxtaposed these two facets of his economic thought, which were not mutually exclusive.

To begin with, the Columbia economist viewed his own discipline as a psychological science. In his writings, Mitchell associated economics with the study of the human mind, which he considered the principal determinant of behaviour. "Economics is a psychological science," he asserted, "i.e., its laws rest logically upon certain assumptions concerning the way in which the mind works."<sup>276</sup> The mind and human nature were the basic elements of Mitchell's economics. To influence collective and individual behaviour, the economist, and more generally the social scientist, had to understand the human spirit through its tangible expression: social institutions.<sup>277</sup>

Mitchell began his economic thinking by rejecting the quantity theory of money that was in vogue in late-nineteenth-century economic thought. His work on the quantity theory led Mitchell to attempt an economic explanation of the price system in which all the key elements were a form of price:

Wages is the price paid for labor; interest the price for the use of loan-funds; rent the price paid for the use of material goods which must be returned without substantial deterioration; and profits is the residue of the aggregate prices paid for the factors of production for materials [and so on].<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> WCM, "Economic Origins", draft of an article, Undated, box 37, folder O-71: 2, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>277</sup> For Mitchell, "the profundity of the task will grow upon us as we realize that an understanding of human nature is involved in controlling our own behavior." WCM, "The University and Economic Change", manuscript of a discussion at NYU Centennial Conference, November 17, 1932, box 15, Section N: 7, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>278</sup> WCM, *Gold, Prices and Wages...*, 280.

Mitchell formulated his economic postulates based on this understanding of the price system. Between 1909 and 1913, he studied the course general prices had taken and what had influenced them during these years.<sup>279</sup> Mitchell viewed the price system as

a highly complex system of many parts connected with one another in diverse ways, a system infinitely flexible in details yet with a fairly stable equilibrium among its parts, a system like a living organism in its capacity to repair the serious disorders into which it currently falls.<sup>280</sup>

The relevance of the price system in Mitchell's economics is apparent from the overall economic role he attributed to it as one of the most important ways that economic fluctuations and, in some cases, business cycles manifested. To understand Mitchell's definition of business cycles, it is essential to begin with his discussion of the price system; he considered these two systems to be complementary. Mitchell openly recognized that establishing the existence of business cycles was problematic:

We have no statistical evidence of business cycles as wholes. . . . The more intensively we work, the more we realize that this term is a synthetic product of the imagination—a product whose history is characteristic of our ways of learning.<sup>281</sup>

Despite the artificial nature of business cycles, Mitchell firmly believed that it was possible to trace fluctuations by analyzing profits, costs, wages, and rents.<sup>282</sup> Mitchell reminded his readers, however, that even with the most thorough economic understanding of the price system, economists still faced the problem of containing recurrent business cycles:

Thus statistical technique in its present state enables us to picture cyclical fluctuations only in a distorting combination with irregular fluctuations which we cannot measure. It

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<sup>279</sup> See WCM, "The Courses of Prices from 1893 to 1908", *Journal of Commerce and Commercial Bulletin*, 4-5 (January 1909): 5; WCM, "The Prices of American Stocks: 1890-1909", *Journal of Political Economy*, 18 (May 1910): 345-380; WCM, "The Prices of Preferred and Common Stocks: 1890-1909", *Journal of Political Economy*, 18 (July 1910): 513-524; WCM, "Rates of Interest and the Prices of Investment Securities: 1890-1909", *Journal of Political Economy*, 19 (April 1911): 269-308; "Security Prices and Interest Rates in 1910-12", *Journal of Political Economy*, 21 (June 1913): 500-522.

<sup>280</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, *Business Cycles...*, 116

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

seems legitimate to believe that the cyclical factor or factors operate with greater regularity than the curves suggest.<sup>283</sup>

Mitchell's faith in refined scientific analyses was thus tempered by his knowledge of their limits. His understanding of business cycles issued from his definition of the price system as an organic entity.

### *The Price System*

Later in his career, the price system became a central element of his economics. In fact, Mitchell considered the determination of prices to be the key to controlling the entire economic structure:

Since the economic welfare of the individual depends on the prices he receives and the prices he pays, these changes introduce an element of uncertainty into his economic life, and since the production of wealth is carried on to secure money profits[,] and [since] profits depend on prices, these changes affect the rate of production—sometimes stimulating it, sometimes depressing it. . . . Men have not attained complete control over the social mechanism of prices; the mechanism controls its makers and warps their activities to suit its exigencies.<sup>284</sup>

In other words, prices controlled the economic trends that affected the lives of millions of people. Mitchell saw that only by mastering economic fluctuations could prices in turn be controlled. Mitchell's analysis of prices earned him the reputation as an economist whose insights offered strategies for controlling economic change rather than being subordinated to it.

During the First World War, the War Industry Board (WIB), led by Bernard Baruch (1870-1965), hired Mitchell to head its price division. In 1918, he published a public report in which he compared the state of the price system in the aftermath of the Civil War with that at the end of the Great War. His work for the WIB only served to reconfirm Mitchell's perception of the price system as indefinable in general terms:

While these developments at the close of the Civil War show that wage reductions and business demoralization are not inevitable concomitants of demobilization, it by no

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>284</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Money Economy and Efficiency", manuscript of the article, 1923 or 1924, box 35, MPP 11-19, Folder M 126, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 24.

means follows that our experience in 1919-26 will be like that of 1865-72. The difference in the controlling economic factors which was forced upward in the two wars may well result in widely different sequels on the return of peace.<sup>285</sup>

Mitchell thus refused to forecast prices on the basis of historical antecedents. His experience during the war as an expert on the price system was significant primarily because it had established the limits to his understanding of the price system.

### *Business Cycles*

Wesley Mitchell is more famous for his explanation of business cycles than for his knowledge of the price system. He forged his own concept of the business cycle when he was a professor at the University of California in the early 1910s. Mitchell had been fascinated by economic disorders and disturbances from his early days as a graduate student at the University of Chicago, and he ultimately gave his theories expression in his essay *Business Cycles* in 1913, which he later refined. He promoted his ideas about business cycles in articles published in journals, national newspapers, and encyclopedias; at conferences; and as a commissioner for Herbert Hoover. At the time of his death in 1948, Mitchell was completing a reinterpretation of business cycles.

To understand Mitchell's approach to business cycles, it is best to start with the tool he first employed to design the concept: theory. In the late 1920s, he confided his curiosity about theory and subtle philosophical systems to his colleague, the economist John Maurice Clark (1884-1963). Mitchell recalled that he

began studying philosophy and economics about the same time. The similarity of the two disciplines struck me at once. I found no difficulty in grasping the great philosophical systems as they were presented by our text-books and our teachers. Economic theory was still easier. Indeed, I thought the successive systems of economics were rather crude affairs compared with the subtleties of the metaphysicians.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> War Industry Board, Division of Planning and Statistics, *A Comparison of Prices during the Civil War and Present War* (Washington: Government Printing, 1918), 6.

<sup>286</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell to John Maurice Clark, Correspondence, August 9, 1928, box C-11, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 2.

In his classic *Business Cycles*, Mitchell relied heavily on economic theory. Rather than adopt and champion a particular business cycle theory, he attempted to merge many theories, some of which contradicted others, into a single comprehensive explanatory scheme:

We found so many [theoretical] processes involved and have collected so many explanations that the materials threaten to be confusing rather than illuminating. What we sought was aid toward solving one problem: we find now in our hands a new puzzle—to determine the relations among a lot of theories. What explanations are incompatible with each other, what are complementary? Each theory taken by itself seems plausible; but how can we work with so many hypotheses?<sup>287</sup>

Mitchell interpreted this multiplicity of theories as further support for business cycle complexity.<sup>288</sup> After reviewing the principal theories about business cycles, Mitchell linked them with historical developments and statistics in an attempt to explain their causes.<sup>289</sup> Finally, after expounding his theoretical explanations and fact-gathering methods, Mitchell specified the sequence of business cycle events: “crisis, depression, revival, prosperity, and another crisis (recession)”.<sup>290</sup> This short definition represents the core of Mitchell’s economics, on which he established his reputation, his career, his work, and his profound understanding of economic reality and human behaviour.

It would be a mistake to view the rest of Mitchell’s work and experience as motivated and inspired only by this concise but compelling definition of business cycles. It is true that, between 1913 and the early 1940s, Mitchell continuously grasped the meaning examined economic problems through the lens of this cogent explanation. For example, during the short but intense economic crisis in 1921, he incorporated the problem of unemployment into the logical framework of his business cycle theory. He pointed out that “unemployment on a vast scale is always a result of business depression. The problem of preventing and mitigating unemployment is therefore part of the larger problem of preventing or mitigating alternations of business activity and stagnation.”<sup>291</sup> (This anticipates Coolidge’s much-derided explanation that

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<sup>287</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, *Business Cycles...*, 47.

<sup>288</sup> For Mitchell, “embarrassing as the multiplicity of explanations may seem at this stage, it is an embarrassment which must be faced, because it arises from the complexity of the problem itself.” Ibid., 48.

<sup>289</sup> See his discussion of statistics and history in *Business Cycles...*, 55-58.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>291</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Business Cycles and Everyman’s Job”, *New York Evening Post*, 25 October 1921, 13.

when business is bad and many people are laid off, unemployment results). In the same article, he suggested at what point actions could still be taken to diminish the impact of business cycles:

The time to act is before a crisis has become inevitable. . . . It is the waste, the miscalculations and the maladjustment grown rampant during booms that make inevitable the painful process of liquidation. The most hopeful way to check the losses and misery of depression is therefore to check the feverish extremes of prosperity.<sup>292</sup>

Mitchell argued many times during the 1920s for restricting prosperity as a way to limit the onset and severity of economic depression. For instance, he suggested strategies for controlling prosperity when he sat on the Presidential Commission on Unemployment and Business Cycles in 1921.<sup>293</sup>

Mitchell fleshed out his description of business cycles with new elements. One such element was his insistence on the ultimate influence businessmen exercised as the “most potent actor[s]” in this economic process.<sup>294</sup> He also clarified his solution for tempering the negative effects of business cycles: “the long-range planning of public works, with intent to get a larger part of such undertakings executed in periods of depression [in order to keep industries producing and maintain the standard of living of workers].”<sup>295</sup> In general terms, eliminating secular trends and seasonal variations through application of economic analysis could soften the extremes of business cycles.<sup>296</sup>

Nor did Mitchell scrutinize only the domestic American economic situation. He also studied the American economy in its international business context because he did not consider the American economy as being isolated from the complexities of global business cycles:

The record shows that despite our continental spread, the variety of our resources, the richness of our home markets, and the aloofness of our foreign policy, the United States

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>293</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, *Seasonal Operation in the Construction Industries: Summary of Report and Recommendations of A Committee of the President's Conference on Unemployment* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924)

<sup>294</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Business Revival Shows Signs of Developing into Prosperity”, *New York Evening Post*, 30 December 1922, Sec. 2, Part 1, p.1, 9.

<sup>295</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “The Crisis of 1920 and the Problem of Controlling Business Cycles”, *American Economic Review*, 12 (March 1922): 26.

<sup>296</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, Prefatory Note to Simon Kuznets, *Cyclical Fluctuations: Retail and Wholesale Trade, United States: 1919-1925* (New York: Adelphi Co., 1926), iv.

suffers a business reaction, slight or severe, every time that world business feels the shock of good or bad times. Our isolation is less economic than geographic.<sup>297</sup>

Politicians and businessmen were not the only ones to be concerned about the economic disruptions that business cycles caused. Economists often had difficulty finding adequate data to formulate recommendations for politicians and businessmen:

The elements of variety, of uncertainty, of imperfect approximation are more prominent in the statistical work of the social sciences than in the statistical work of the natural sciences. And because our statistical results are so marked by these imperfections they do not approach so closely to the results of our reasoning on the basis of assumed premises.<sup>298</sup>

Mitchell, an ardent believer in the statistical method, here recognizes its limits in economics and the implications for meeting the expectations of political and business leaders: “It is a commonplace that no statistical average represents adequately the array of data from which it is computed.”<sup>299</sup> Mitchell nevertheless still remained confident that he could ease the impact of business cycles through rigorous statistical and economic analysis.<sup>300</sup>

Finally, the Columbia economist reminded the general public, and particularly politicians and businessmen, that the theory of business cycles was not a panacea:

Many men have become converted to the theory [of business cycles], and new converts are apt to be overzealous. The word ‘cycle’ suggests a series of regular waves following each other at standard intervals. . . . Half consciously, [new converts] assume that this

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<sup>297</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “A Chart of World Business”, *Nation*, 12 January 1927, 48.

<sup>298</sup> “Quantitative Analysis in Economic Theory”, *American Economic Review*, (15) March 1925: 11-12 reprinted in *The Backward Art of Spending Money, and Other Essays* (New York, A. M. Kelly, 1950), 35.

<sup>299</sup> “Introduction: Business Cycles as Revealed by Business Annals” in Willard L. Thorp, *Business Annals* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1926), 23.

<sup>300</sup> “The most satisfactory materials for studying business cycles are statistical data – not mere business indexes . . . , but numerous series of materials . . . showing month by month the fluctuations of many types of economic activity – the production of raw materials, the manufacture of producers’ and consumers’ goods, transportation by rail and water, supplies on hand, orders booked, sales by wholesale and retail merchants, employment in different trades, the disbursement of money incomes, the prices of all kinds of goods from farm products to securities, interest rates, bank loans, deposits and reserves, the turnover of money, profits, bankruptcies, new investments and so on.” *Ibid.*, 30.

typical cycle keeps repeating itself, with some variations perhaps, but variations that can be neglected.<sup>301</sup>

Mitchell had earnestly stressed that business cycle was not a fixed economic law but a “working hypothesis”.<sup>302</sup> He emphasized the dangers inherent in deterministic terminology. The interpreters and users of business cycle theory needed to exercise care when they referred to “prosperity” and “depression” because there were no perfect models of prosperity and depression.<sup>303</sup> Mitchell’s formulation of business cycles thus did not possess the strength of a physical or mathematical law, and Mitchell himself acknowledged its uncertainty and ambiguity.

Although it constituted a key aspect of his general definition of economics, the concept of the business cycle that Mitchell developed was not his ultimate accomplishment in economics, nor was it his only one. Mitchell’s work had early on recognized economics as a bedrock theory that took in more than the simple exchange of money between individuals. “The attempt to simplify economic theory by abstracting from it the use of money,” he wrote in 1916, “has proved itself a failure”.<sup>304</sup> Economics instead represented an attempt to analyze human efforts to achieve material and spiritual well-being:

Economics is concerned precisely with this problem of means. It undertakes to show how men deal with the material requisites for attaining the wide variety of ends which they set themselves. Indeed, one may fairly call economics the science of ways and means.<sup>305</sup>

This early definition of economics was crucial to Mitchell’s understanding of economics because it prescribed the basic logic of his discipline: the social interaction between the material and the human mind.

### *Economics: A Psychological Science*

In his epistemology of economics, Mitchell focused on the psychological angle of the collective socio-psychological condition. From the outset, he had rejected the economic paradigm of

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<sup>301</sup> “Business During 1924 Likely to Be Generally Satisfactory”, *New York Evening Post*, 31 December 1923, Sec.2 Part 1, 1.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>303</sup> “We need terms which fit the facts,” Mitchell asserted, “and one important fact is that as often as not the passing of prosperity is a gradual fading away.” *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>304</sup> “Economics”, *American Year Book*, 1916: 347.

<sup>305</sup> “The Rationality of Economic Activity”, *Journal of Political Economy*, 18 (February 1910): 199.

hedonism; economics, in his mind, implied more than the individual satisfaction of needs and the enjoyment of pleasure.<sup>306</sup> One mistake economists commonly made, he believed, was “their neglect of psychology by taking human nature for granted.”<sup>307</sup> Human nature played an important role in Mitchell’s understanding of economic behaviour.<sup>308</sup> Because economists studied groups rather than individuals, he often employed socio-psychological facts and methods.<sup>310</sup> “The conspicuous psychological facts here,” he insisted, “are facts of habits, amenability to suggestion, tendency toward imitation, and the instinct of construction.”<sup>311</sup> He justified this interest in human psychology by pointing out that human nature was not rational but social.<sup>312</sup> “Human nature is in large measure a social product,” Mitchell wrote in 1914, “and among the social activities that shape it the most fundamental is the particular set of activities with which the economist deals.”<sup>313</sup>

Coming from the champion of the rational method, this line of reasoning can at first appear disconcerting. Mitchell, however, clarified his point of view by adding that rationality was a social and cultural trait imposed by the daily use of money.<sup>314</sup> Indeed, economic life was a struggle between the rational use of money and the irrational act of spending and making money:

The use of money is one of these rationalizing habits. It gives society the technical machinery of exchange, the opportunity to combine personal freedom with orderly cooperation on a grand scale, and the basis of that system of accountancy which Sombart appropriately calls “economic rationalism”. . . . Since it molds [individual’s] objective behavior, it becomes part of his subjective life, giving him the relative importance of

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>310</sup> Mitchell taught that “as a science economics cares nothing for the individual but everything for the group”. “Syllabus”, May 14-16, 1917, box 1898-1917, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 9.

<sup>311</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “The Rationality of Economic Activity”, *Journal of Political Economy*, 18 (February 1910): 200.

<sup>312</sup> For Mitchell, “the assumption of rationality is inadequate to explain the facts.” Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Human Behavior and Economics: A Survey of Recent Literature”, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 29 (November 1914): 3.

<sup>314</sup> Mitchell affirmed, “to find the basis of rationality, then we must not look inside the individual at his capacity to abstract from the totality of experience of the feeling elements, and to compare their magnitudes. Rather we must look outside the individual to the habits of behavior slowly evolved by society and painfully learned by himself.” “The Role of Money in Economic Theory”, *American Economic Review*, 6 (March 1916) reprinted in *The Backward Art of Spending Money, and Other Essays* (New York, A. M. Kelly, 1950), 170.

dissimilar goods in varying quantities, and affecting the interests in terms of which he makes his valuation.<sup>315</sup>

Subjectivity occupied a central place in Mitchell's economics. Even though he challenged the classic view that the human mind was an organ of reason, he did not deny the significance of rationality; he merely nuanced the way it manifested in human nature.

Mitchell's understanding of rationality inspired him to add another element to his theory: human behaviour. Because economics was first and foremost a behavioural science, to understand how individuals acted as economic agents, Mitchell interpreted human behaviour in relation to social institutions.<sup>317</sup> He maintained that

The behavior that concerns the economist is directed chiefly by certain social institutions, that is, by certain widely shared habits of feeling, thinking and acting in frequently recurring situations. These habits, like our space perceptions, have elaborate implications that are not immediately apparent.<sup>318</sup>

These institutions determined habits by imposing their main values and attitudes. For example, Mitchell pointed out that "rationality [is] an imperfectly acquired attitude—something men *learn*. . . This learning consists chiefly in acquiring habits, thinking, feeling, [and] acting – institutions."<sup>319</sup> Mitchell's definitions of social habits, institutions, and learning resemble the notions of "habitus" and "symbolic violence" expounded fifty years later by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. Mitchell was even more explicit when he claimed that "we all know that our wants are standardized by certain social habits, that these social habits present

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 170-171.

<sup>317</sup> Mitchell believed that "studies of tropism, reflexes, instincts, and intelligence; of the relations between an individual's original and acquired capacities; of the cultural roles played by racial endowments and social institutions are vastly more significant for economics than classifications of conscious states, investigations of the special senses, and disquisition on the relations between soul and body". Ibid., 47.

<sup>318</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell CM, "Wieser's Theory of Social Economics", *Political Science Quarterly*, 32 (March 1917) reproduced in *The Backward Art of Spending Money, and Other Essays* (New York, A. M. Kelly, 1950), 255.

<sup>319</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Syllabus", 24 May, 1916, box 1898-1917, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

remarkable uniformities, and that they have a long recorded history.”<sup>320</sup> His notion of human behaviour deterministically centered on social institutions rather than on biological factors.

### *The Quest of Working Theories*

Illustrations and demonstrations mattered to early twentieth-century social scientists, especially in the United States. They did not just enunciate theories and ideas for the sake and the beauty of philosophy. They expected to formulate theories, but they had to be working theories. Inspired by this pragmatism, Mitchell structured his economic interpretations around theory, history, and experience. The difference between history and experience paralleled that between past events and statistics.<sup>321</sup> Mitchell’s love of theory led him to devote a hundred pages of his magnum opus to the analysis and explanation of the most important business cycle theories. In 1923, Mitchell, who was teaching a course on the principal economic theories at Columbia University and demanded solid explanations for the emergence and the transformation of ideas, severely criticized a historical essay for merely cataloguing the most influential ideas on the development of monetary theory before Adam Smith.<sup>322</sup> He also wrote articles about the thought of David Ricardo, Jeremy Bentham, and Thomas Malthus, and he wrote the biographical entry for Alfred Marshall in the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* in 1932. Thus, even though he considered them problematic and flawed, classical economic theory held great significance for Mitchell.

Historical and statistical accounts also improved the effectiveness of social theories. For a class he taught in 1925, Mitchell precisely described how to use statistical data: “[Statistical data] will generally show us how men do behave, and our quantitative analysis will be generalizations about the trend of behavior. Qualitative analysis is mainly generalization about how men are expected to behave under guidance of certain motives.”<sup>323</sup> History and statistics broadened the possibilities that theories offered for economic discussion. Statistics served to

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<sup>320</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Wieser’s Theory of Social Economics”, *Political Science Quarterly*, 32 (March 1917) reproduced in *The Backward Art of Spending Money, and Other Essays* (New York, A. M. Kelly, 1950), 257.

<sup>321</sup> “Associated with the prudence which has tempered enterprise is a more systematic effort to learn from experience. Here there seems to be a new emphasis, if not a new practice. Most can be learned from experience when it is exactly known and seen in relation to its environment. The most exact records of economic experience are statistical in form.” Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Forces that Make for American Prosperity”, *New York Times*, 12 May 1929, Sec. 10, p. 3.

<sup>322</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “History of Theories: A Review of Arthur Eli Monroe, *Monetary Theory Before Adam Smith*”, *New York Evening Post, Literary Review*, 1 December 1923, 306.

<sup>323</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Syllabus”, March 9, 1925, box 2: 1918-1931, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 3.

verify theoretical hypotheses such as the concept of business cycles.<sup>324</sup> Once theories were tested, social scientists could revise their explanations and propose new theories and new codes of conduct.

For Mitchell, this adaptation of theory to facts was a critical step in the progress of knowledge. Mitchell compared the relationship between statistician and economist to that between engineer and businessman: "Engineers by virtue of their scientific training and their intimate relations with businessmen are likely to take an active share in testing these schemes and perfecting the best among them."<sup>325</sup> The best way to improve statistical accuracy was in effect to apply them to everyday projects and thereby constantly confirm their precision.<sup>326</sup> The job of statisticians was to advise economists about adjusting abstract interpretations, much as engineers informed businessmen of technical problems related to the management of companies. The engineer metaphor was popular among social scientists working closely with "the great engineer", Herbert Hoover, in the late 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>327</sup>

Whereas statistics depicted economic experience as a way to accommodate theories to reality, history, the last element in Mitchell's general economic epistemology, molded social institutions by dictating values and fashioning the "social will". In Mitchell's economics, history exerted an abstract and determinant force upon social institutions. For example, as he pointed out to Herbert Hoover's advisor Edwin Gay,

What you have to say about the domination of the social motive during the Middle Ages, of the laissez-faire motive during the eighteenth century, and the resurgence of social

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<sup>324</sup> "Our knowledge of business cycles is most unsatisfactory so long as it consists of an unsystematically collection of hypotheses which are plausible rather than proven. The present need is for testing every explanation to find how well it accords with the relevant facts. Such testing requires close study of inter-relations among the fluctuations of all the process involved." WCM, "Prefatory Note" in Simon Kuznets, *Cyclical Fluctuations: Retail and Wholesale Trade, United States: 1919-1925* (New York: Adelphi Co., 1926), iii-iv.

<sup>325</sup> "Making Goods and Making Money", *Mechanical Engineering*, 45 (January 1923) reprinted in *The Backward Art of Spending Money, and Other Essays* (New York, A. M. Kelly, 1950) : 146.

<sup>326</sup> "One of the best way to promote the improvement of statistics to make the best use we can of the figures now available. The roughness, the uncertainty, and the limited scope of the conclusions drawn here show how much we need fuller and more accurate data concerning the occupations of the people, the regularity of their work, their products in physical terms and in dollars, their money incomes and living expenses." WCM, "Wages Considered in Relation to Products", *New York Evening Post*, 7 June 1922, 7.

<sup>327</sup> On the metaphor of the engineer, see the works by Peri E. Arnold, "'The Great Engineer' as Administrator: Herbert Hoover and Modern Bureaucracy", *Review of Politics* 42 (1980): 329-348; Peri E. Arnold, "The First Hoover Commission and the Managerial Presidency", *Journal of Politics* 38 (1976): 46-70; Edward D. Berkowitz and Kim McQuaid, "Bureaucrats as 'Social Engineers': Federal Welfare Programs in Herbert Hoover's America", *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, (39) 1980: 321-335; David Noble, *America by Design : Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York : Knopf, 1977).

interests in recent times seems to me not only illuminating but also so strong as to lend support to the psychological analysis from which you proceed.<sup>328</sup>

Historical motives thus revealed the psychological state of a given population. An indirect historical determinism appeared in his description of social trends, where social institutions predominated. Mitchell was a confirmed socio-institutional determinist. Because he believed in the absolute influence of social institutions on human behaviour, Mitchell saw a central role for history in his economics:

Through the initiative of leaders and through initiative acceptance by the masses, society develops certain institutions serving the common needs so well as to seem like the creation of an organized social will. Money, markets, division of labor, the social economy itself are such creations. They make up an essential part of the historical situation into which the individual is born, bonds which unite him to his fellows and establish conditions to which his individual efforts are subjected.<sup>329</sup>

Mitchell's use of history nevertheless ran counter to his vision of it. He saw history as the prevailing force shaping social institutions. He did not, however, advance historical accounts of a sophistication equal to his theoretical and statistical discussions. Although he recognized how essential history was to his economics, apart from his early analysis of the legal-tender acts in the 1860s he did not develop economic history theories. His Ph.D. dissertation and the tables he published in 1908 were works of economic history, but history did not thereafter figure prominently in his work, other than the history of economic ideas. Even though history was prominent in his thought, economic theories and statistics prevailed in his works.

Whatever his disciplinary inconsistencies, Mitchell was more than an academic who associated mainly with political and business leaders. His work also betrayed a desire to popularize his economic discoveries so that he might realize his goal of shaping collective and individual behaviour through social institutions. But doing so, in Mitchell's opinion, required making economic data widely available. In 1918, Mitchell had remarked that

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<sup>328</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell to Edwin Gay, Correspondence, May 10, 1923, box C-24, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>329</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Wieser's Theory of Social Economics", *Political Science Quarterly*, (32) March 1917 reproduced in *The Backward Art of Spending Money, and Other Essays* (New York, A. M. Kelly, 1950), 239.

As we approach the period of reconstruction . . . , it seems probable that information concerning price changes will become a matter of pressing interest to large circles. There is therefore ground for hoping that the permanently valuable part of the data, including significant summaries of the general trend, may be made accessible to all economists.<sup>330</sup>

In the 1920s, he broadened this “large circle” by including people who were unfamiliar with these questions, to whom he referred as “laymen”. “If these facts were left to speak for themselves,” Mitchell observed, “they would not speak plainly to laymen. It is highly desirable that the man who has put the facts together shall state what they mean in plain English.”<sup>331</sup> (presumably by laymen he meant non-economists or non-academics)

Clear and simple language was one means of overcoming the isolation of academics from the rest of the population, but it was not the only one. The high cost of specialized books also limited access to academic knowledge, including economic research. For example, Mitchell directed the NBER to make its publications easy to read, short, and inexpensive. “By issuing a little book that can be sold for \$1.50, and that anyone can read in an evening,” Mitchell illustrated, “we are securing a wide circulation for our chief results.”<sup>332</sup>

One major trend in the progressive social sciences was the belief that accumulating diverse knowledge was the source of progress. Mitchell praised eclectic intellectuals who displayed a catholicity of interests, such as the Swedish economist Karl Gustav Cassell (1866-1945) and his mentor Thorstein Veblen.<sup>333</sup> Concomitantly, Mitchell diversified his interests by surveying economics and other disciplines.<sup>334</sup> In fact, Mitchell supplemented his knowledge of economics with studies on sex roles in society, forestry, political representation, foreign policy,

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<sup>330</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “War Prices in the United States”, *The Economic Journal*, December (28) 1918: 463.

<sup>331</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, *History of Prices during the War* (Washington: Government Printing Offices, 1919), 8.

<sup>332</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, *A Bold Experiment: The Story of the National Bureau of Economic Research* (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1922), 8.

<sup>333</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Review of Gustav Cassel, *Money and Foreign Exchange after 1914*” *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, (18) June 1923: 820-822; WCM, “Thorstein Veblen: 1857-1929”, *Economic Journal*, (39) December 1929: 646-650. On Gustav Cassel, see the portrait made by Walter Jackson in *Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience: Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1937-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990)

<sup>334</sup> In Mitchell's papers, I found a list of his favourite essays. It includes, among other works, Charles Darwin, *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited during the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle round the world* (London, 1836), Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (London: J.M. Dent & sons, 1911), and Alexander Sutherland, *The Origin and Growth of the Moral Instinct* (London: Longmans, 1898). The entire list of Mitchell's readings may be found in box 36 O-55, OPP 1-6, .

and philosophy.<sup>335</sup> These themes, far from being remote from his economics, coloured and deepened his understanding of it.<sup>336</sup>

By expanding into other fields of knowledge, Mitchell was refining his holistic comprehension of economics. The more knowledge he acquired, the greater the enhancement to his economics. The narrow knowledge that experts developed made it all the harder for them to control waste and business-cycle fluctuations:

Wise decisions must be based on knowledge of such facts as can be accurately known and on careful study of probable developments. The investigations required must continue as the situation develops, and must cover all the phases of the problem.<sup>337</sup>

The relationship between knowledge and action informed Mitchell's conception of political and economic measures. Decisive action required the most perfect knowledge available. To achieve this ideal, ongoing surveys were necessary, which in turn raised dilemmas for Mitchell. How was it possible to depict economic reality in short and straightforward publications when its complexity was practically infinite? Mitchell never asked this question in such explicit terms, but he did integrate economics into the broader framework of the social sciences. In developing his theory of economic knowledge, Mitchell had had to come to terms with the purpose of the social sciences. He could now situate his conception of economic knowledge perfectly in his epistemology of the social sciences.

The classic pragmatic paradox of theory and practice plagued Mitchell's economics. Since his early years at the University of Chicago, conceptual problems had fascinated him. He wanted to study theories as cultural and social manifestations of the past, which he implicitly accomplished in his Ph.D. dissertation. After his graduate studies, he continued to ponder the

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<sup>335</sup> "The purpose of discussion of ethnological materials shows how gradual was the development of the simplest form of economic organization and acquisition of most rudimentary acts. It gives some notion of the first step in economic behavior." Wesley Clair Mitchell, Untitled, Undated, WCM Papers, box 37, O-80, OPP 7-12, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>336</sup> On sex roles in society, see his discussion about household management and gender in Wesley Clair Mitchell, "The Backward Art of Spending Money", *American Economic Review*, (2) June 1912: 269-281; on forestry, see his Review of Raphael Zon and William N. Sparhawk, *Forest Resources of the World* in *Political Science Quarterly* (39) March 1924: 168-169; on philosophy see "Social Evolution", a review of Bertrand Russell, *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization* in *New York Evening Post, Literary Review*, February 9, 1924: 505; on foreign policy, see "How Can We Dispose of the Allied Debts", *New York Times*, November 19, 1922, Sec. 8: 8 and "Herr Rathenau's Philosophy", a review of Walter Rathenau, *In Days to Come* in *New York Evening Post, Literary Review*, Sec. 3, November 12, 1921: 166-167;

<sup>337</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell "How Can We Dispose of the Allied Debts?" *New York Times*, November 19, 1922, Sec. 8: 8.

relationship between economic theories and the realities of daily life. As a theorist of business cycles, Mitchell was bound to the human context he chose to investigate. As a statistician and president of the American Statistical Association, his interests in theoretical and abstract problematics went beyond the dynamics of business cycles, which for Mitchell were simply a way to understand how individuals interacted in social situations: “The business cycle is a cycle of human behavior.”<sup>338</sup> Yet Mitchell never tried to mask the human complexity behind such grand generalizations. Having delved into their many facets, he fully recognized the fundamental complexity of the subjects he studied. To resolve the inherent contradiction between social complexity and straightforward explanation, he envisaged an interdisciplinary field of social sciences that would survey individual and collective behaviour.

#### Wesley Mitchell’s Social Science: An Ethical Discipline

For with all its efficiency the money economy has a fundamental defect—the aim of our economic activity. What we want as human beings is to make serviceable goods. What we are compelled to do as citizens of the money economy is to make money. And when for any reason it is not profitable to make goods, we are forced to sacrifice our will as human beings to our will as money makers. That is the heart of the paradox.<sup>339</sup>

Here Mitchell briefly alludes to his inner conflict as a moral economist interested in the contradictory topics of money and human welfare. His scepticism about the extent to which businessmen were interested in social welfare had already touched off a similar moral struggle. For Mitchell, one of the most listened-to of Herbert Hoover’s advisors, businessmen incarnated the dark side of the money economy. Rephrasing in his own words the traditional critique progressives made against the selfishness of business leaders, Mitchell emphasized mercantile egotism in his descriptions of the competitive, commercial disposition of *homo sapiens*<sup>340</sup>:

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<sup>338</sup> A Discussion of “The Outlook for 1923”, papers by A. A. Young, H. P. Willis, and A. H. Hansen, *American Economic Review*, March 1923 (13), Supplement: 33.

<sup>339</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “The Problem of Controlling Business Cycles” in Lionel D. Edie (ed.), *The Stabilization of Business* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 52.

<sup>340</sup> He criticized Herbert Joseph Davenport’s unfinished inquiry into the interrelationships existing between pecuniary logic and human nature. He thought it crucial to explain this relationship in greater depth. See his Review of Herbert Joseph Davenport’s *The Economics of Enterprise* in *American Economic Review*, September (4) 1914: 602-605.

The effect of competition on productive efficiency deserves notice here because of the intimate relation between competition and the three defects of the economic organizations . . . —opportunities for individual profits won in ways detrimental to social efficiency, the imperfect functioning of self-interest as a stimulus to individual efficiency, and the waste arising from imperfect co-ordination of productive efforts.<sup>341</sup>

### *Mitchell's Critique of Businessmen's Behaviour*

Mitchell had also challenged the pretensions of businessmen who claimed the ability to incarnate the role of social actors.<sup>342</sup> The business attitude of profit-seeking undermined the general distribution of goods because

As the great nations of the world are organized now, the businessman is the man in authority, and the engineer is his servant. In many ways this situation is unfortunate for society. It means that our supply of food, clothing, fuel, housing, transportation and the like is frequently disturbed by purely technical considerations of profit.<sup>343</sup>

Businessmen needed professional advice if they were to manage efficiently the resources they controlled. They made decisions much too rapidly, and for emotional reasons that often led to erroneous judgements. In addition, businessmen were too inclined toward pecuniary gains to be trusted as effective social actors.<sup>344</sup> Mitchell lamented that “to effect improvement we must work through the controlling factor, the business man.”<sup>345</sup> To him, scientific management did not mean increasing profit, but rather improving the redistribution of wealth.

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<sup>341</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Money Economy and Efficiency”, Manuscript of the article, 1923 or 1924, box 35, MPP 11-19, Folder M 126, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 11.

<sup>342</sup> See his critique of the economist Mario Alberti, who had written an essay for businessmen, and his harsh review of the book published by the manufacturer Hugo Bilgram. See Review of Hugo Bilgram’s *The Cause of Business Depressions*, in *Political Science Quarterly*, (29) September 1914: pp. 539-541; Review of Mario Alberti’s *Verso la crisi? Le Tendenze economiche fondamentali del momento presente e gli per la previsione economica* in *American Economic Review*, (4) December 1914: 906-907.

<sup>343</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Accountants and Economics with Reference to the Business Cycle”, *Journal of Accountancy*, 35 (March 1923): 163.

<sup>344</sup> Mitchell believed that “since the present regime sets up money making as the immediate end of economic activity, the men who direct production are constrained to ask, not what goods are most needed by consumers, but what goods will bring them the largest profits. Their guiding principle is, therefore, not relative social needs, but relative money prices and costs.” WCM, “Money Economy and Efficiency”, Manuscript of the article, 1923 or 1924, box 35, MPP 11-19, Folder M 126, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 12.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

Mitchell offered more than merely a critique of the selfish behaviour that he found so common among businessmen. His observations shaped his larger theory of economics and social sciences. Economists were closer to political scientists, psychologists, and anthropologists than to businessmen, even though both economists and businessmen dealt with the money economy. The main difference between them lay in the way they took human nature into consideration. Businessmen showed little interest in or aptitude for the human dimensions of business, a defect Mitchell believed needed to be corrected:

[In business] all these operations are designed to induce human beings to behave in a way conducive to the profits of the business enterprise. . . . The business men can't know how they will react to certain inducements with anything like the certainty which the engineer feels about the metal he is planning to use. Psychologists cannot answer the business man's questions with anything like the assurance with which metallurgists can answer the mechanical engineer's question. It is not because the psychologist is less a capable inquirer than the metallurgist, but because the scientific problems which confront him are more difficult than the problems of physical chemistry.<sup>346</sup>

Economists were thus better equipped to handle the human angle that businessmen neglected. In fact, Mitchell thought it the duty of economists to explain human behaviour as manifested in monetary exchanges.<sup>347</sup> To Mitchell's way of thinking, business elites needed to be more conscious of the links between the welfare of their employees and the financial health of their companies. Mitchell called into question the predominance of engineers as advisors of businessmen. Even though Mitchell agreed that efficiency was essential in business, he did not share the engineers' conception of efficient administration.

### *The Pivotal Purpose of Social Sciences*

The ultimate mandate of social scientists was, for Mitchell, to understand human behaviour and prescribe codes of conduct. In 1923, he advised social scientists to steer clear of the pecuniary interests that motivated business leaders. Mitchell stressed that "[T]he social sciences have

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<sup>346</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Science in Business", in *Fundamental Objectives of Business Management* (New York: Bureau of Personnel Management, 1929), 14.

<sup>347</sup> "Money," Mitchell wrote, "permits to grasp human behavior from the inside and outside perspective. . . . The unit of organization for making money is the basis enterprise. [Human] conduct is managed by profit – not by production." November 23, 1920, box 34, section M PP, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

copied the mistake which most of us commit as individuals—the mistake of concentrating upon the activities of money-making to the neglect of the activities concerned with what is gained.”<sup>348</sup> Mitchell posed a similar question to his sociologist colleague William Fielding Ogburn about the future of social sciences:

Do you think that there is any substantial prospect of reducing the lag in adjusting culture to new material conditions through the development of the social sciences? . . . Isn't it quite conceivable that the development of quantitative methods in the social sciences may lead to changes scarcely less momentous than those which followed the application of physics and chemistry to the productive processes?<sup>349</sup>

For the first time in his career, Mitchell began displaying interdisciplinary views of the social sciences, asserting in 1926 that

We have had aspirations of accomplishing not only more work of the type we had been doing as separate sets of historians and political scientists, anthropologists, statisticians, economists and psychologists, but also aspirations that we might by common effort get marked increase of insight.<sup>350</sup>

Mitchell's quest for a common effort made by social scientists began before the 1920s.

The primary concern of the social sciences was human behaviour in society. In 1916, Mitchell pointedly attributed the uncertain progress in social affairs to the lack of influence from the social sciences: “What we need is a really scientific economics, scientific ethics, scientific psychology, scientific education, and scientific administration—in sum, scientific sociology.”<sup>351</sup> With such a broad perspective as their point of departure, the social sciences could not expect to simplify and generalize plainly stated conclusions.<sup>352</sup> He fleshed out his integrated social sciences' program shortly after the founding of the National Bureau of Economic Research in 1921, as the Social Science Research Council took shape in 1923. In a review he wrote of an

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<sup>348</sup> WCM, “The Uses made of Money and Leisure: Suggestion for a Series of Investigations”, January 28, 1923, box 34, Section M.P.P, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 2.

<sup>349</sup> WCM to William Fielding Ogburn, Correspondence, February 19, box C-49, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 2.

<sup>350</sup> “Opportunity and Problems of the SSRC”, 1926, 55.

<sup>351</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Untitled”, draft of article, October 2, 1916, box 1898-1916, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 4.

<sup>352</sup> See Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Review of A. M. Carr-Saunders, *The Population Problem: A Study in Human Evolution*” in *Birth Control Review*, 7 (February 1923): 48.

essay by Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), Mitchell challenged the interpretations offered by the great British philosopher of science:

Is the cumulative process of social change so simple that it can be represented by the paths of a few straight lines or simple curves? Who can be sure that he has rated correctly the relative importance of the forces whose course he plots? Who can gauge the complicated interactions among the forces? Are the numberless factors consciously set aside really negligible?<sup>353</sup>

Finally, Mitchell called into question the role of speculation in the social sciences by pointing out that banal generalizations ran the risk of obscuring important aspects of the reality they were committed to examining.<sup>354</sup>

But Mitchell did not limit his vision of the social sciences to timid positivistic reservations about general conclusions. He also clarified the promise of the social sciences in the quest to understand human nature. The objective common to all social scientists—inquiring into human nature—attested to their mutual commitment to cooperation:

The fundamental reason which justifies our efforts to work on certain problems together is that all the social sciences have at bottom one common problem. They are all concerned with gaining clearer knowledge of human behavior.<sup>355</sup>

This shared interest in human behaviour bestowed a certain complementarity on the work of social scientists.

Mitchell saw this interdisciplinary project in an idealistic light. In fact, he considered social scientists not only as inquirers but also as prescribers of social conduct:

Yet the great services of the social sciences lie in the future, and are, therefore, matters uncertain. . . . If we succeed in getting clearer insight into human nature, we may do more to promote human welfare than the Industrial Revolution, built upon the applications of

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<sup>353</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Social Evolution" (a review of Bertrand Russell's *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*) in *New York Evening Post, Literary Review*, February 9, 1924: 505.

<sup>354</sup> "Why talk of science in this field of speculation?", Mitchell asked. *Ibid.*, 506.

<sup>355</sup> "Opportunity and Problems of the SSRC", (1926): 57.

natural science, accomplished for generations which knew not how to use the opportunities it opened.<sup>356</sup>

The possession of social knowledge assured control over the distribution of welfare. “We desire knowledge mainly as an instrument of control,” Mitchell observed. “Control means the alluring possibility of shaping the evolution of economic life to fit the developing purposes of our race.”<sup>357</sup> The imprecision around the notion of welfare only reinforced the need Mitchell felt for social scientists to define it more clearly:

At present welfare thus conceived is rather vague, but it is capable of being made objective and definite in reference to such matters as food, clothing, shelter, sanitation, education, fatigue, leisure. And this realm of the definite in welfare will be expanded steadily by quantitative methods, so that we shall develop a criterion of welfare applicable to many lines of effort.<sup>358</sup>

The refinement of method in the social sciences was the best means to enhance the precision, the quality, and the amount of information available to experts for understanding social realities. The common goal of gathering more knowledge about human nature thus constituted a moral and scientific guarantee that the lot of human beings would improve.

In this vein, Mitchell faced the problem of structuring coherent explanations based on incoherent and incomplete information. Social scientists frequently discovered that information was unavailable or too voluminous to be compiled in an easily understood format. On the one hand, knowledge would be “better served by publishing these carefully made approximations than by doing nothing until the data have become satisfactory,” although the wait “might be long”.<sup>359</sup> On the other hand, “[o]nly the reader who has abundant leisure, endless patience, and considerable training in research . . . can work up the elaborate tables and the painstaking text into a lifelike picture.”<sup>360</sup> This dual problem of incomplete or overabundant knowledge was

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<sup>356</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “The Contribution of the Social Sciences in Solving Social Problems”, *American Labor Legislation Review*, 16 (March 1926): 85.

<sup>357</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “The Prospects of Economics” in Rexford G. Tugwell and F.S. Crofts, *The Trend of Economics* (New York: A. Knopf, 1924) reprinted in *The Backward Art of Spending Money, and Other Essays* (New York: A. M. Kelly, 1950), 372.

<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>359</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, Foreword to Leo Wolman, *The Growth of American Trade Unions, 1880-1923* (New York: NBER, 1924), 7.

<sup>360</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, Foreword to Willard L. Thorp, *The Integration of Industrial Operation: A Statistical and Descriptive Analysis of the Development and Growth of Industrial Establishments and of the Size, Scope and*

fundamentally the same as the problem of turning information into a “lifelike picture”. Mitchell’s concern about the latter challenge suggests how much trouble he had had formulating coherent explanations. Coherence depended on the quality of the data to be analyzed. The contradictions in Mitchell’s definition of knowledge corresponded to the problems inherent in choosing the right amounts of “specific data” and then weaving them into a “lifelike picture”.

The solution to this contradiction lay in the content of the “lifelike picture”. In Mitchell’s mind, social scientists sought to explain the workings of human nature and behaviour:

[The psychologist’s] attempts to build up a technique of experiment favor the spread of the conception that all of the social sciences have a common aim—the understanding of human behavior; a common method—the quantitative analysis of behavior records; and a common aspiration—to devise ways of experimenting upon behavior.<sup>361</sup>

Here Mitchell summarized his understanding of the social sciences as a scientific discipline based on a rigorous method for prescribing codes of conduct. In the last element in this summary, Mitchell recognized for the first time the necessity of having an active social discipline. In fact, Mitchell acknowledged the pivotal influence that the social sciences were to have on the substance of individual action. The power of the social sciences, he believed, lay in their potential to sway human values and behaviour. The most significant aspect of the pro-active dimension of the social sciences was the effect it had on the purposes that social scientists assigned to their disciplines.

Social science consisted of more than tedious inquiries into voluminous documentation and data, which was only the first part of the task of social scientists. Once they had compiled their information, social scientists had to arrange this information so as to frame what the British philosopher of science Karl Popper (1902-1994) called “a social scientific explanation”.<sup>362</sup> This explanation, to Mitchell’s way of thinking, was in fact a generalization designed to forecast and influence later behaviours. He showed the high esteem he held for social scientific forecasting by making risky economic predictions about the business cycle:

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*Structure of Combinations of Industrial Establishments Operated from Central Offices* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), 9.

<sup>361</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Quantitative Analysis in Economic Theory”, *American Economic Review*, (15) March 1925 reproduced in *The Backward Art of Spending Money, and Other Essays* (New York: A. M. Kelly, 1950), 27.

<sup>362</sup> Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism* (London: Routledge, 1957)

All business forecasts at present are subject to a margin of error; but I disagree most heartily with those who hold that no one is justified at present in making forecasts. On the contrary, if forecasts are based upon the best analysis which can now be made of past business experience, they constitute a step in the process of winning more knowledge. *No forecast is more instructive than one which proves wrong*, provided the reason for its failure can be ascertained.<sup>363</sup> (emphasis added)

In other words, forecasting was relevant not because it determined future trends with precision, but because it actually applied theory and, in so doing, uncovered hidden information. Mitchell called this peculiar forecasting process "social experimentation":

If we never act in social matters until we have perfect assurance regarding the consequences which will follow, we shall never act. Social experimentation, based on clearly thought out hypotheses and accompanied by careful record-keeping, is one of the essential processes in increasing social knowledge and gaining control. Neither do I think that a community is wise in refusing to make experiments of a rational type. Indeed, no nation ever does or can hold to the policy of no experimentation.<sup>364</sup>

Social experimentation was not the ultimate goal of Mitchell's social science. Indeed, he associated it instead with his method. By developing facts, social scientists could test their theories and thereby discover new and unanticipated facts that led to revisions in their work. The concept of social experimentation, as elaborated by Mitchell, spoke to the problem of never-ending inquiry that he had encountered earlier in his work on the business cycle. Social experimentation took the form of a constantly repeating cycle of knowledge acquisition and action. Mitchell's reasoning exemplifies the progressive orientation of the social sciences toward improving social welfare through the acquisition of knowledge.

#### *The Effect of the Depression of 1929 on Mitchell's ideas*

Although Mitchell had worked out clear views on social experimentation and forecasting in the early and mid-1920s, these views changed in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The critical change in Mitchell's thinking occurred in 1929, probably because of the impact of the world economic

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<sup>363</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Unemployment and Business Fluctuations", *American Labor Legislation Review*, 13 (March 1923): 17.

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

crisis. Ever since his Berkeley years, the regulation of business disorders had dominated Mitchell's economic and social science thought. As a young scholar, he had sought a scientific understanding of the circumstances that political progressives had been hoping to manage efficiently: the living conditions of the American population. In the 1920s, as a leading authority on economic cycles, Mitchell was confident that his scientific approach would lead to mastery of these conditions. In 1927, he had concluded that "we may expect business cycles of the next generation or two in the U.S. to be on the whole less violent than the beginning cycles of the last century".<sup>365</sup> In the first months of 1929, Mitchell continued to believe in science, intelligence, and management as the foundation of economic prosperity and social harmony. Whereas science assured this general harmony, selfishness undermined it. In his classic manifesto of the economic optimism of the 1920s, *Recent Economic Changes*, Mitchell reaffirmed that

The whole process of gaining new knowledge and putting it to use [which is science] has had to make headway against human interest—particularly man's interest in getting the better of his fellow men. Business friction, class struggles, and national wars check science and the peaceful art; they impoverish the participants and usually injure the bystanders as well.<sup>366</sup>

For Mitchell, science was thus carrying out the quasi-sacrosanct mission of elevating human destiny. He had reiterated, moreover, his belief in experience and statistics as the perfect form of knowledge.<sup>367</sup> Before October 1929, Mitchell still maintained confidence in the promise of economics and the social sciences.

Mitchell felt the Great Depression intellectually more than economically. His situation as professor and as presidential advisor did not change with the crisis. On the contrary, the Depression had only confirmed the necessity of professional counsel and teaching on economic matters. Mitchell had, however, called into question many of his former ideas. Between 1930 and 1932, Mitchell practically stopped publishing essays and articles. While a visiting scholar at Oxford in the 1931-32 academic year, his economic and social science inquiries became more uncertain and confused. His dream of social experimentation based on forecasting and

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<sup>365</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Are Business Cycles Disappearing?" Talks to the Bankers Trust Co., New York, January 19, 1927, box 4: 6, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>366</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "A Review", in *Recent Economic Changes in the United States* (New York: NBER, 1929), 845.

<sup>367</sup> "Most can be learned from experience when it is exactly known, and seen in relation to its environment. The most exact records of economic experience are statistical in form." Ibid., 865.

generalization had vanished, and he began to emphasize the inherent ambiguity of the social sciences:

Real research is always exploration of the unknown and therefore is an uncertain venture. . . . The fact that laboratory research has produced great results in dealing with the simple phenomena of physics, chemistry and biology does not guarantee that it will yield similar results when applied to the complex phenomena of the social sciences.<sup>368</sup>

Mitchell questioned the fundamental purpose he and other social scientists had once ascribed to their fields.

Mitchell's social sciences and economics, now under assault during the Great Depression, were losing clarity. His uneasiness when dealing with social problems was evident in his 1930 redefinition of the business cycle:

Indeed the question as to what constitutes a business cycle . . . now becomes complicated. The statistical investigator had to develop a sharper concept of the cyclical component in the changes of a given series; he had also to discover what sort of whole the cyclical fluctuations of different series make up. These are problems on which investigators are actively working, spurred on by critics who hold that the 'so-called business cycle' is a myth.<sup>369</sup>

Mitchell exercised much more care in his readings of business fluctuations in the 1930s than he had done in the 1920s. He also challenged speculations about business cycles by other observers of the economy.

The Great Depression was not the only reason that social scientists became much more cautious in their analyses. Even before the economic crisis of the late 1920s and the 1930s, Mitchell had been hesitant to make long-range predictions. His exposure to the natural sciences led him to concede the limits of economic forecasting. Mitchell had never attempted to replicate the method and aim of the natural sciences in the social sciences. On the contrary, social scientists felt obliged to structure their rationales soundly because they were, to borrow

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<sup>368</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Institutes for Research in the Social Sciences", *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses of the Association of American Universities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1930) reprinted in *The Backward Art of Spending Money, and Other Essays* (New York: A. M. Kelly, 1950), 68.

<sup>369</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Business Cycles", *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, 1930 ed.

Mitchell's expression, "in their tentative stage".<sup>370</sup> The Columbia economist considered the social sciences to be far less well developed than the natural sciences. This relative backwardness affected both social scientists and those seeking practical applications for their knowledge. In fact, Mitchell stressed that

The efforts to apply scientific methods to such matters are in an early stage of development. The sciences which underlie these efforts—psychology, sociology, and economics—are far less advanced than physics and chemistry. The experts who are making the applications—personal managers, advertising specialists, sales directors, business economists and statisticians—are less rigorously trained than engineers.<sup>371</sup>

This developmental differential did not, however, mean that the social sciences were not useful for solving social problems.

#### *Social Sciences vs. Natural Sciences*

The differences existing between the social sciences and the natural sciences were most pronounced in their ultimate purposes and in the complexity of their objects of study and their experimental methods. Wesley Mitchell perceived natural scientists as mainly interested in unsophisticated problems:

Commodities are far more simpler than human behavior. Because they are simpler we have been able to learn more about them. It sounds a bit paradoxical, but it is soberly true that our most complex sciences deal with the simplest subjects, and our simplest sciences deal with the most complex objects.<sup>372</sup>

The contrast in purpose and complexity between the natural and the social sciences suggests why less was known about basic human nature. Likewise, differences in their objects of study called for dissimilar methods. Nor were experimentation and laboratory verification as feasible in the social sciences.<sup>373</sup> The social sciences thus lagged behind the natural sciences in the degree of prestige accorded to their respective accomplishments.

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<sup>370</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "A Review", *Recent Economic Changes in the United States* (New York: NBER, 1929), 863.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 863.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 863.

<sup>373</sup> Mitchell expressed this point of view to Herbert Hoover's advisor Edwin Gay in 1924: "To me the essential feature of experimentation is the creation of artificial situations arranged to facilitate observation. The isolation of

Mitchell chose not to pit the social and natural sciences against each other. The two fields of science were not competing for the same resources or influence. They were more like two faces of a single mountain: “[After the Industrial Revolution] science spread from its ancient stronghold of mathematics into a systematic study of the most varied phenomena of living processes and consciousness.”<sup>374</sup> Mitchell went beyond situating the appearance of science in the Industrial Revolution. For him, science—especially physics—was the “daughter” of philosophy. In his mind, the social sciences would do well to follow the path of physics, which Mitchell considered the most successful of the sciences:

It is true that we have made but a beginning in applying science to the understanding of human behaviour and the attainment of social control. But modest as our present results are, we believe that our best hope of dealing with the perplexities which confront society is to push farther along the trail which has led to such remarkable achievements in our dealings with physical problems.<sup>375</sup>

Thus, even if they were fundamentally different, physics and the natural sciences could still serve as the inspiration for the social sciences.

The main difference between these two fields manifested in the way social scientists collected and analyzed information. Social scientists were inextricably linked to the complex realities of social events, which did not directly concern the natural sciences. Mitchell wrote that “most can be learned from experience when it is exactly known and seen in relation to its environment.”<sup>376</sup> In Mitchell’s mind, this dimension was peculiar to the social sciences and distinguished them from the more abstract natural sciences. The natural sciences, it seemed to him, dealt with fixed laws that constantly repeated themselves and became detached from social reality. Mitchell’s view of the natural sciences was related to the pragmatist notion that theories

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processes, so far as it can be affected, is a means toward this end. Of course, there isn’t much present prospect that we shall be able to carry the processes anything like as far in the social sciences as men who are dealing with inanimate materials or lower organisms can do.” WCM to Edwin Gay, Correspondence, November 18, 1924, box C-24, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>374</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Americans All”, *Survey*, June 1, 1929 (62): 296.

<sup>375</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “The Economic Basis for Social Progress”, *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work, Fifty-seventh Annual Meeting, June 1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 34.

<sup>376</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Forces that Make for American Prosperity”, *New York Times*, May 12, 1929, Sec. 10: 3.

were simple by comparison with the complexity of reality.<sup>377</sup> Reality was the foundation of the social sciences whereas the natural sciences established themselves on theory.

Social scientists were actors in this complex reality. As the possessors of social knowledge, they were obliged to mold and fashion collective values and behaviours. Mitchell did not consider social scientists as objective observers of events; conversely, knowledge empowered social scientists just as technical expertise legitimized the role of engineers in enterprises:

Social changes in the past history of mankind have seldom been the results of conscious planning. For the most part they have come about from the clash of social and natural forces. . . . Even today our knowledge of the forces which are shaping our social destiny is elementary and uncertain. . . . If men can gain sufficient knowledge of themselves and of the world in which they live, they should become more able to guide social changes in the directions they desire.<sup>378</sup>

Social scientists were the ones who related knowledge to society. Mitchell attributed a dynamic mission to them similar to that of the *intellectuel engagé*.

Mitchell had addressed the role of the social scientist earlier in his career. In 1908, he had identified the skills most instrumental for social scientists if they were to realize the promise of their discipline. Before getting involved in the political aspects of his profession, Mitchell had already charged intellectuals with social responsibilities based on subjective insights and objective methods.<sup>379</sup> In other words, the Columbia economist had never considered social scientists as merely a means for achieving specific tasks. Conversely, he had commended intellectuals for their creativity, reemphasizing in 1920 the importance of imagination and creativity for social scientists:

Where facts can be definitely ascertained, as in science, engineering and most lines of business, flashes of insight have inestimable value, but their value lies in showing new

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<sup>377</sup> He had illustrated this dualism between complex reality and simple theory in his presentation of the notion that business cycles were based on many theories as the best way to explain the complexity of business cycles. It is impossible to find one complex theory that circumscribed the whole reality of business cycles. See *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, 1930 ed., s.v. "Business Cycles."

<sup>378</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "The Problem of Business Instability", *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, 12 (July 1927): 649.

<sup>379</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Review of George Randall Lewis' *The Stanneries: A Study of the English Tin Miner* in the *Journal of Political Economy*, 16 (June 1908), 387.

facts to look for or new ways of putting old facts together. The most successful men in these fields have combined lively imagination with a stern investigator's conscience.<sup>380</sup>

By recognizing the subjectivity of intellectuals, Mitchell made them responsible for becoming directly involved with events around them.

It would be easy to apply the traditional definition of progressive reformer to Mitchell. But he did not consider himself a reformer in the same vein as Jane Addams (1860-1935), Robert La Follette (1855-1925), or Louis Brandeis (1856-1941). Mitchell instead saw himself first and foremost as a scholar who dedicated his intelligence, knowledge, and method to serving the public good.

#### Economics, the Social Sciences, and Politics: Wesley Mitchell the Public Intellectual

From his graduate school years on, Mitchell had been concerned about public problems. In the late 1890s, he took part in the debate about the gold standard then raging in the United States. On completing his studies in 1899, he went to work for the government as a member of the twelfth national census. In 1903, he began his career as a junior professor but remained fond of public controversies. During the First World War, he was Chief of the Price Section of the War Industry Board while also serving as president of the American Statistical Association (ASA). Mitchell's presidency of the ASA offered him a way to express his curiosity about governmental questions because he believed that, in the 1910s, public policy was most effective when supplemented by statistical information.

In the 1920s, as the Director of Research of the National Bureau of Economic Research, Mitchell collaborated even more closely with the Federal government, especially with the Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover. With Mary van Kleeck and other social scientists, he was an advisor to the Presidential Commission on Unemployment and Business Cycles. Six years later, he chaired the Committee on Recent Economic Changes. He wrote the most influential section of the report: the conclusion submitted by the research committee. Finally, as a Hoover appointee, he served with Charles Merriam as the vice-chairman of the Commission on Recent Social Trends.

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<sup>380</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "The New School for Social Research", *New York Evening Post*, April 8, 1920, p. 8

### *Women in Mitchell's Economics*

Besides his official positions, Mitchell participated in many debates on issues that were dividing the country. For example, in the 1910s, the political and economic status of women was a topic that polarized American public opinion. American suffragists loudly championed a complementary but equal role for women in American society.<sup>381</sup> Without taking a clear position on the political aspects of the debate, Mitchell had laid out the complex responsibilities falling to women in their role as primary household managers:

Doubtless if men had to do the work [done by women] they would do it otherwise in some ways, and doubtless they would think their ways better. But if men had to spend money under the limitations now imposed upon women by family life, they would certainly find the task exceedingly difficult. It is the character of the work more than the character of the women which is responsible for poor results.<sup>382</sup>

Mitchell pushed his argument further by comparing the professional lives men led with the “undifferentiated” nature of the tasks performed by women. For the economist, “household management, under the conditions of family life, is not sufficiently differentiated from other parts of the housewife’s life to be prosecuted with the keen technical interest which men develop in their trades.”<sup>383</sup> In this article, Mitchell referred to the “human part” of women’s business and acknowledged that it was easier to make money than to spend it efficiently. He also subtly gave voice to the feminist critique of reason, which feminists considered a male concept. He pointed out that

A woman can indeed compare costs so long as they consist solely in the money prices she is charged for goods. But she cannot make a precise comparison between the price of a ready-to-wear frock, and the price of the materials plus her own work in making them. Still less she can compare costs and gains. For her gains are not reducible to dollars as are

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<sup>381</sup> On this, see the excellent chapter on “Women and Modernity” in Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks 1997 [1989]), 145-173.

<sup>382</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “The Backward Art of Spending Money”, *American Economic Review*, 2 (June 1912): 271.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

the profits of a business enterprise, but consist in the bodily and mental well-being of her family.<sup>384</sup>

To be sure, Mitchell can hardly be considered a feminist, but he did recognize women's daily struggles to meet their responsibilities. Although he agreed with the Victorian notion of separate spheres, he did not believe that this dichotomy legitimized a lower status for women.

### *Immigration*

Mitchell intervened in another highly controversial debate: immigration. In the 1910s and early 1920s, many groups contested the "open door" policy that the U.S. government had adopted toward immigration. These were the decades when the strictest immigration laws in U.S. history became law. In 1907, while working with the Commission on Immigration, Mitchell had examined the economic and cultural contributions of immigrants. In 1911, Mitchell acknowledged that

The immigrants as a class are physically fit and morally enterprising; and employers have taken advantage of their presence in the labor market to develop a system of intense specialization which enables them to utilize a large number of untrained men in work which elsewhere would be performed by skilled hands.<sup>385</sup>

Indeed, Mitchell had never been a partisan of racial determinism:

Since we have come to discredit the inheritance of acquired characteristics, the possibility of reforming human nature turns largely on what part of the nature is inherited and hence presumably unchangeable, and what part is formed by experience and hence presumably capable of modifications.<sup>386</sup>

Social institutions were thus more influential in Mitchell's eyes than any inherited biological traits.<sup>387</sup> He had challenged the racial determinists and behaviourists who were tempted to

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>385</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "The British Report upon Real Wages in America and England", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 26 (November 1911), 163.

<sup>386</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Human Behavior and Economics: A Survey of Recent Literature", *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 29 (November 1914), 6.

<sup>387</sup> "As I see things, the economic effect of immigration depends largely upon the economic fitness of the immigrants. Presumably we should as a nation gain by adding to the number of our artisans from foreign countries." Wesley Clair Mitchell to Sidney A. Reeves, Correspondence, May 5 1925, box C-53, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

associate certain behaviours with specific nationalities.<sup>388</sup> Mitchell understood immigration in its economic impact. As in so many other areas of his thought, the social environment and social institutions were the guiding forces in Mitchell's rationales concerning immigration and race.

### *State Intervention*

The public and private control of social institutions was another issue of interest to Mitchell. The theme of control was a crucial one in Mitchell's time and coloured his contribution to economics. For economist and Nobel Prize laureate Milton Friedman, the main contributions of Mitchell to economics were twofold. First, Friedman recognized the methodological revolution begun by Mitchell with his quantitative interpretation of economic fluctuations. Second, and more important, Friedman paid particular attention to Mitchell's vision of voluntary cooperation. In his popular essay *Free to Choose*, Friedman argued that

if we will, from building a society that relies primarily on voluntary cooperation to organize both economic and other activity, a society that preserves and expands human freedom, that keeps government in its place, keeping it our servant and not letting it become our master.<sup>389</sup>

Interestingly, the economist of the Great Society, John Kenneth Galbraith, and the economist of the Reagan Era, Milton Friedman, both cited elements of Mitchell's economics in support of their opposing views.

Friedman's interpretation of Mitchell's economics did not do justice to the Columbia economist's vision of economic control. Friedman found in Mitchell a proponent of his anti-statist stance. Nevertheless, Mitchell's early private documents reveal a deep scepticism about the social responsibility of private businesses. In the heyday of the Progressive Era, Mitchell observed that "[w]e don't know how far we can trust business enterprise as an agent for producing and distributing goods."<sup>390</sup> Indeed, Mitchell called the very role of government into question: "We don't know how to make even our government agencies efficient instruments of

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<sup>388</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, Foreword to Harry Jerome, *Migration and Business Cycles* (New York: NBER, 1926), 6.

<sup>389</sup> Milton and Rose Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* (New York: Avon Books, 1980), 29.

<sup>390</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, manuscript of the article "Why the Country Needs Women Voters", Talk presented before the Women's Political Union, February 11, 1915, box 25, Section X 1900-23, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 2.

our will.”<sup>391</sup> The problem for him was rather “how to take full advantage of the large opportunities which our increasing control over nature opens to us.”<sup>392</sup> Mitchell deemed public control necessary, albeit only under certain conditions. First, public control had to be overseen by the most qualified persons in the country, by which Mitchell meant the most intelligent and educated persons. Second, women had their role to play in public administration because their experiences differed from men’s. Finally, Mitchell viewed the promotion of collective material and spiritual welfare as a civic function of the state.<sup>393</sup>

The idea of public control was obviously not peculiar to Mitchell. The members of the Progressive Party and of the progressive factions of the Republican and Democratic parties defended public ownership of certain national and state institutions. The originality of Mitchell’s notion of public control lay in his justification of public management. The social sciences afforded public officials greater control over society, Mitchell believed, because of the control that the natural sciences had gained over nature. Recognizing that this control had progressed “in the last 150 years at a rapid rate”, Mitchell wondered how it might be possible to extend such methods to social problems. He saw an eloquent answer in “examples of an encouraging sort, cases in which certain branches of the social sciences have been applied to good effect in the effort to secure social progress.”<sup>394</sup> To a certain extent, the power of the state lay, in Mitchell’s mind, in the capacity and confidence of social scientists. In his interpretation, Milton Friedman neglected the role that the social sciences played for Mitchell.

Mitchell’s stature as a social scientist justified his high profile and active involvement in the implementation of Hoover’s political agenda. The Republican Secretary of Commerce under President Harding and Coolidge enlisted the help of Mitchell because of his social science expertise. Although the first letter the two men exchanged has yet to be found, it was almost certainly sent in 1921 when Mitchell assumed his duties with the Commission on Unemployment and Business Cycles. Working closely with Russell Sage Foundation (RSF) industrial researcher Mary van Kleeck, Mitchell, as director of research at the NBER, attempted to apply his theories of business cycles during a major public inquiry.

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<sup>391</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>394</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, “Social Progress and Social Science”, manuscript of the article, September 6, 1915, box 25, section X, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 3.

Mitchell perceived this public experience as a sort of social laboratory, one where he could put his understanding of economic trends to the test under the scrutiny of a public commission. Mitchell no doubt had convinced Hoover of the necessity of listening to the advice of social scientists. In July 1921, Hoover wrote Mitchell that

I have taken it upon myself to propose profound measures to Congress in the last few days in connection with agricultural questions from an economic point of view and I badly need some sort of mind like yours to give me assurance in such steps.<sup>395</sup>

Hoover wanted to hire Mitchell as his public advisor on social science matters. Mitchell declined Hoover's offer, and Hoover hired the Harvard economist Edwin Gay. Although Mitchell refused to work full-time for Hoover, the Columbia economist did maintain a presence in Washington. During the Washington Naval Conference (1921-1922), Hoover asked Mitchell for information about the state of foreign commerce.<sup>396</sup>

Mitchell's public statements about the Commission on Business Cycles and Unemployment differed considerably from his private evaluations of its impact. Publicly, Mitchell expressed confidence in the ability of the Commission to reduce the repercussions of business cycles. But privately, in a letter to Horace Secrist (1881-1943), secretary general of the Social Science Research Council, Mitchell called into question the actual impact of the inquiry, which was not, he believed, going far enough toward stabilizing economic fluctuations:

Our study on Unemployment and Business Cycles is a rather limited affair. . . . The report will serve, I hope, a useful purpose as an introduction to a very important subject and also as a stimulus to other investigators who may have the funds and time to go into certain topics more thoroughly.<sup>397</sup>

Because economic knowledge alone would never be able to explain fully the complexities of human behaviour, Mitchell sought insights into the entire social structure in order to locate the origin of economic and social disturbances.

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<sup>395</sup> Herbert Hoover to Wesley Clair Mitchell, correspondence, July 29, 1921, box C-32, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>396</sup> Herbert Hoover to Wesley Clair Mitchell, correspondence, box C-32, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>397</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell to Horace Secrist, correspondence, April 25, 1922, C-57-58, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

Similarly, in 1927, Mitchell headed up the research being undertaken for the Commission on Recent Economic Changes. Broader in scope, this body commissioned work by more social scientists than the previous one had done. Throughout the work on Recent Economic Changes (REC), Mitchell worked more and more closely with Hoover. The commissions on Recent Economic Changes and, two years later, on Recent Social Trends (RST) explored the relationship dynamics among private philanthropists, social scientists, and politicians. Set up by Hoover and funded by Rockefeller, these two commissions opened the door to greater collaboration among social scientists charged with research into government affairs. These experiences also made clear the ideological orientation social scientists shared with Hoover about the public role of the social sciences in non-academic milieus.

#### *Mitchell's Social Sciences in the 1930s*

During the early 1930s, Mitchell went through an intellectual crisis. His former student Eli Ginzburg (1911- ) noted the traumatic effects the Depression had had on Mitchell,<sup>398</sup> but there were other manifestations as well. Mitchell revised certain of his most cherished ideas, especially those about the role of social scientists in public affairs. Before the Depression, he had been highly critical of the public position occupied by social scientists. In 1933, Mitchell agreed to co-chair, with Charles Merriam and Frederick Delano (1863-1953), the National Planning Board. Before the Depression, Mitchell did not see planning as the most effective solution to socio-economic problems. After 1933, Mitchell fervently advocated planning as the way out of economic troubles. Governmental planning, Mitchell believed, did not usurp business prerogatives because planning was rarely a priority for businessmen.<sup>399</sup>

Mitchell explained his views on the National Planning Board to Hoover himself in 1934. The defeated president and his former advisor were corresponding concerning Mitchell's new responsibilities under Franklin Roosevelt. Hoover, not surprisingly, rejected Roosevelt's policies, the purpose of which he considered to be the creation of "a Socialist State—or at least a Regimented one".<sup>400</sup> Mitchell, however, saw Roosevelt's National Planning Board not as

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<sup>398</sup> "I was shocked to find that his hair had turned completely gray during his year abroad as visiting scholar in 1931-32 at Oxford." Eli Ginzberg, "Wesley Clair Mitchell", *History of Political Economy*, 29:3 (1997): 372.

<sup>399</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "National Planning", Radio broadcast with Levering Tyson, November 29, 1934, box 15, section N, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York, 11.

<sup>400</sup> Herbert Hoover to Wesley Clair Mitchell, correspondence, December 17, 1934, box C-32, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

socialism but rather the logical extension of Recent Social Trends.<sup>401</sup> National planning only institutionalized the organization of intelligent responses to socio-economic problems. Indeed, because Mitchell found the line between Hoover's policies and Roosevelt's plan to be exceedingly thin, he had little difficulty crossing over from the Hooverian associative state to the Rooseveltian New Deal.

Mitchell envisaged the role of the social sciences differently before and after the Depression. Before the early 1930s, concern for control over social institutions dominated his vision of the social sciences. The shaping of these institutions was essential because it could have an impact on human behaviour. The determination of human behaviour through social institutions was the core of Mitchell's pre-Depression thought. Both psychological and material dimensions figured in Mitchell's understanding of behaviour.

After 1931, however, planning took over as the main duty of social scientists. social scientists, Mitchell believed, could best contribute to public questions through the planning of social policies. In addition, the place of social scientists became less important after the Depression:

The much needed increase in the scope, precision and certainty of economics, political science, and sociology can be gained only by patient and thorough research. . . . But in a democracy the important decisions are not made by a handful of specialists.<sup>402</sup>

Social scientists had always been entitled to recommend policies but not to enact them. Now, however, the enactment of social policies that increased consumption and encouraged material well-being was to become the primary duty of social scientists. Material prosperity replaced the psychological dimension in Mitchell's vision of social planning after the Depression.<sup>403</sup>

To summarize Mitchell's pre-Depression thought, social institutions were the main target of the knowledge and methods that social scientists had developed. Mitchell took no behavioural or fundamental traits for granted. The environment was a dynamic flow of social forces that could be altered. The duty of the social scientist was to understand these forces and influence them in order to change the environment.

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<sup>401</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell to Herbert Hoover, correspondence, December 24, 1934, box C-32, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

<sup>402</sup> WCM, "The Need for Economic Education", Radio broadcast, October 4, 1934, box 26, section X, Mitchell papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York: 3-4.

<sup>403</sup> See his articles published after 1933. Moreover, among his papers may be found drafts and transcripts of radio interviews in which he explained his views on the need to increase economic prosperity.

This reasoning was not unique to Mitchell; it was a trend in the social sciences of the early twentieth century. It was not, however, the dominant paradigm of the 1910s and 1920s. Two other paradigms challenged the social-determinism perspective. The biological school of thought, including eugenics and behaviourism, was important in the early decades of the twentieth century. Freudianism, which challenged this biological school, was also then gaining in popularity.

Social determinists believed that social institutions molded human behaviour and values. For advocates of the biological school, the human body determined social behaviour. For Freudians, the subconscious shaped individual behaviour. These three interpretations clashed in the 1920s in search of the most complete explanation of human social life and solutions to the social problems confronting individuals. The biological school found its solution in the modification of the human body. For Freudians, understanding the individual subconscious was the approach that would transform relations between society and individual. And social determinists like Wesley Mitchell considered the transformation of social institutions to be the key to improving human beings and their lives.

### Conclusion

For many historians, the Lost Generation personified intellectual life in the 1920s. Young intellectuals like Gertrude Stein (1874-1946), Ezra Pound (1885-1972), John Dos Passos (1896-1970), and Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) felt alienated from American values and models. Progressives of the 1900s and 1910s had raised questions without formulating complete answers. The disenchantment about where the United States was going after the First World War and the turbulent prosperity of the 1920s affected large segments of the American population. The search for a unifying national project and disdain for growing individualism characterized the Lost Generation. But the disenchantment reached beyond these young intellectuals to social scientists, who also were looking for answers to the social instability that had arisen with the unequal redistribution of wealth and the vanishing of traditional moral values.

The Lost Generation and the social scientists of the 1920s did not differ significantly in their understanding of social problems affecting the American population. As the case of Wesley Mitchell shows, leading social scientists were conscious of social instability and its roots in social and economic injustice. Any incompatibility between Mitchell and Gertrude Stein, for

example, lay more in the approaches they adopted. The credo of exile, for example, was never a course of action that Mitchell and the other leading social scientists of the period advocated.

In fact, just the opposite was true. Inculcated with the progressive quest for effective solutions and answers, social scientists like Mitchell had worked their way into the political and economic spheres in the hopes of transforming their foundations. Mitchell did not blame the leaders who managed the economy and society for social problems; the dysfunction rested with the institutions, which sanctioned selfishness, profit-seeking, wars, and the unfair redistribution of wealth. Mitchell's main ideas and his general approach to social problems, solutions, and actions betrayed a certain practical idealism. Even though he severely criticized the capitalist system, he did not advocate revolutionary, system-wide changes:

The new system of freedom promptly developed a despotism of its own. Profits obtained from the sheer financial control over markets without the exercise of social leadership, the creation of a laboring proletariat, the reduction of work to a mechanical routine, the physical and moral degradation of the lower classes—these phenomena of capitalism are socially irrational, anti-economic.<sup>404</sup>

His radicalism thus lay in his evaluation of the system and its institutions. Under this rationale, his radicalism was not mere rhetoric; it was actually the beginning of action. It is crucial to bear in mind that, for Mitchell, knowing was acting. It was only through the perfection of learning that the social ethics on which American institutions rested could be reworked.

Mitchell embraced Herbert Hoover's scheme for transforming society through a newly defined ethics. Mitchell, of course, did not propose an ethical system; he was not a philosopher concerned with metaphysical problems. Nevertheless, in his pre-Depression thought, he sought out new rules to explain and govern collective and individual behaviour. These new rules were to be established after a complete survey of social institutions, which mirrored individual and collective behaviour. The commission on Recent Social Trends aimed to create a portrait of American social institutions.

To understand another key dimension of the intellectual quest among progressives to reshape social ethics, it is necessary to delve into the thought of Mitchell's companion, the political scientist Charles Edward Merriam. Mitchell addressed this question from the economic

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<sup>404</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Wieser's Theory of Social Economics", *Political Science Quarterly*, 32 (March 1917) reprinted in *The Backward Art of Spending Money...*, 243.

perspective of the consumer; Merriam approached individual and collective behaviour from the angle of politics and the citizen.

### **Chapter 3: The Chicago Political Evangelist: The Political Science and Career of Charles Edward Merriam**

In the early 1930s, Wesley Mitchell maintained close contact with Charles Edward Merriam, a proponent of the methods and ideas of the Chicago School of sociology and political sciences. Having first met at a conference in Hanover, New Hampshire, in 1927, Merriam and Mitchell began a long professional association as members of Herbert Hoover's Commission on Recent Social Trends and Franklin Roosevelt's National Planning Board. Their experiences and background were similar, coming as they both did from middle-class Midwestern families, and having been educated in late-nineteenth-century preparatory schools.<sup>405</sup> Born in 1874, the same year as Mitchell, Merriam grew up in an upwardly mobile middle-class family in the former pioneer settlement of Hopkinton, Iowa.<sup>406</sup> Merriam's father was deeply involved in local Republican politics during Charles's childhood, which left a profound impression on the boy. From early life on, Merriam viewed the world as a place where political struggles pitted opposing interests against each other. His early acquaintance with politics coincided with an emerging fascination for matters intellectual.

#### Formative Years

After leaving his native Midwest for New York City in 1896, Merriam discovered a different world while attending Columbia University. Merriam's time at Columbia revealed two defining characteristics of his work: intellectual inquiry and political engagement. Professor of Political Economy William Archibald Dunning (1857–1922) introduced Merriam to political philosophy. Merriam finished up his Ph.D. studies with a year in Berlin, Germany, under the supervision of Professor of Political Economy Otto Gierke (1841–1921). After taking seminars with Dunning and Gierke and following their advice, Merriam completed a sophisticated Ph.D. dissertation on the development of the concept of sovereignty after Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

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<sup>405</sup> On the social history of late nineteenth century, see the classic essay by Merle E. Curti, *The Social Ideas of American Educators* (Totowa, N.J.: Little Field Adams and Co., 1966).

<sup>406</sup> For a complete biography of Charles Merriam, see Barry Karl, *Charles E. Merriam and the Study of Politics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974)

### *Merriam's Dissertation on Sovereignty*

Merriam's dissertation was a representative example of a political economy essay on the philosophical evolution of a concept—sovereignty, in this case—as framed by the most famous European thinkers. Focussing on Locke, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel, Merriam dissected ideas about sovereignty, power, and authority during the Enlightenment and nineteenth century, with particular emphasis on the political origins of power. He saw power and sovereignty as originating from the human habit of obedience. Without obedience, there is no power or sovereign authority:

Custom does not make law, but it makes law-makers. The rule of custom ends, however, where sovereignty begins, and, wherever the habit of obedience is so far developed that a state of political society is reached, containing a definite and determinate sovereign, the reign of custom ceases, except insofar as it must always continue to be the basis upon which the society rests.<sup>407</sup>

This idea, in Merriam's opinion, implied a more crucial one. Actually, Merriam did not examine historical sources of power apart from their philosophical nature. For him, power and sovereignty established authority because they constituted an indivisible autonomous entity. Power must remain unified and total. He criticized the United States' political tradition for its failure to delineate American sovereignty.<sup>408</sup> Specifically, Merriam called into question the loose system of checks and balances because sovereignty could not be divided and shared by multiple authorities. He concluded his dissertation by stating that

[t]hus on the basis of the distinction between the State in its ultimate and in its ordinary organization, the recognition of both the unity and the absoluteness of the supreme power is greatly facilitated. This is true of the unity, since the sovereignty rests with the State, while the governmental powers may be divided among the organs of government; and of the absoluteness, since it becomes evident that the State itself, and not the everyday government, is the body to which political omnipotence is attributed.<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *History of the Theory of Sovereignty since Rousseau* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1900),. 149.

<sup>408</sup> "The [US] constitution reflected, therefore, the political facts and the political theory of the time in its peculiar division of powers between local and central governments, and in its failure to define clearly and explicitly the ultimate source of sovereign power." Ibid. , 161.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.,181.

Merriam believed that power rested within the state and administration within the government. Abstractly, the state was one whereas in practice the government was multiple.

Merriam attempted to show that the government was not artificially or accidentally created by ruling elites. On the contrary, he linked the American political tradition with the idea of the naturalness of government. He underscored this idea by citing John C. Calhoun:

Government [in Calhoun's writings] is not artificial but perfectly natural in the sense that it is necessary to the development and perfection of human powers. Government is not a matter of choice, depending for its origin and continuance on the caprice of the individual; on the contrary, it is a primary necessity of man, and, 'like breathing, it is not permitted to depend on our volition'.<sup>410</sup>

Merriam, moreover, had found a defence for governmental action in Thomas Jefferson's essays and correspondence:

By inquiring more closely into Jefferson's theory of inalienable rights, we find him protesting against the idea that we surrender any of our natural rights on entering into society. Jefferson argued that these rights are not given up but, on the contrary, are rendered more secure. . . . Thus it appears that one does not lose his natural rights under government, but obtains a better guarantee of them.<sup>411</sup>

Jefferson, a foe of the pro-government Alexander Hamilton, became, according to Merriam, a believer in governmental structure. Merriam also referred to Thomas Paine's idea that government was at once a "necessary evil" and a "beneficent instrument".<sup>412</sup> Indeed, wherever Merriam looked in the political tradition of the United States, he discovered defences of government as an essential, if often misunderstood, institution.

Merriam's early writings mirrored the early-Progressive-Era challenge to the dominant laissez-faire ideal of the post-Reconstruction period. He tried to relate the concept of the state and government to historical and philosophical traditions. To a certain extent, he did not consider the notions of government and state to be artificial creations because sovereignty and power had

<sup>410</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "The Political Theory of Calhoun", *American Journal of Sociology*, 7 (March 1902): 579.

<sup>411</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "The Political Theory of Jefferson", *Political Science Quarterly*, 17 (March 1902): 26.

<sup>412</sup> "Government, in [Paine's] theory, is at once a necessary evil, with narrowly circumscribed functions, and, on the other hand, a beneficent instrument admirably adapted to collect a confiscatory income tax or a twenty percent inheritance tax, or to administer schemes for state assurance of employment and support." in "Thomas Paine's Political Theories", *Political Science Quarterly*, 14 (1899): 401.

existed since the Middle Ages. Merriam refuted the ideas of William Graham Sumner (1840-1910) and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) for whom states and governments had no natural roots and were only historical accidents that worked to the advantage of despots.<sup>413</sup>

A major feature of Merriam's politics was his tendency to conflate political science and current political events. When Merriam employed the word "politics", he meant both scientific research in political behaviour and daily events in legislatures, the media, and the courts. The term was a very diffuse but rich notion in his eyes: "Seldom worked out by political scientists or philosophers, American political ideas have generally taken shape in connection with some great question of [national politics] which has seemed to require a broad theoretical basis for either condemnation or approval."<sup>414</sup> In 1902, he explained the role of state government by drawing on his earlier thinking on the unity of power, his reading of state and city politics, and his progressive standpoint on social issues.

The emergence of a complex network of agencies, boards, and commissions further justified his position on state centralization and power. First of all, Merriam made a case for

the remarkable increase in the number of new departments, boards, and commissions or commissioners for the inspection, supervision, or regulation of various classes of activity within the state. These new governmental agencies are created for the protection of public health, of personal safety, and in the interest of agriculture or labor.<sup>415</sup>

Second, Merriam noted the logical connection between the multiplication of agencies and the necessity of centralization.<sup>416</sup> Yet he feared that unless the merit system and the professionalization of bureaucracy accompanied this centralization, the power of the governor would be too great.<sup>417</sup> Profoundly theoretical on one side but well documented with data on the other side, Merriam's politics must be understood from both perspectives.

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<sup>413</sup> On William Graham Sumner, I suggest reading Pierre Saint-Arnaud, *William Graham Sumner et les Débuts de la Sociologie américaine* (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1984)

<sup>414</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *A History of American Political Theory* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1928 [1903]): vii-viii.

<sup>415</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "State Government", *Review of Legislation*, 1901, March 1902, 15.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>417</sup> "Almost all of the half a hundred boards or commissions enumerated are appointed by the governor, and all of the consolidated boards of control are his creatures. In the absence of any strong tendency toward the establishment of the merit system, or toward popular election of these officers, it is evident that the power of the governor is being rapidly increased." *Ibid.*, 17.

Early in the development of his political thought, Merriam distanced himself from his Columbia mentor, William Dunning, by insisting on the scientific nature of his discipline. Merriam was not an anti-theoretical or anti-philosophical thinker and gave credence to ideas and political theories. He even gave some attention to utopias and less realistic politics.<sup>418</sup> At the same time, Merriam accepted ideas only if they historically, economically, or culturally affected the society that had produced them. For him, ideas were meaningful only if they affected the course of events or, conversely, if watershed events gave rise to new ideas. He strove to

discuss these theories in their relation to the peculiar conditions under which they were developed, and to keep in sight the intimate connection between the philosophy and the facts that condition it. Like all other political theory, American political ideas are of little importance aside from the great historical movements of which they are an organic part.<sup>419</sup>

Ideas were not relevant only because they were philosophically logical; the historical reality behind them also had to be understood to explain their significance.

### *The Idea of Contract*

Merriam's discussion of the concept of contract illustrated his historical grasp of ideas. The notion of contract was not, for him, solely a product of Enlightenment philosophers from Hobbes to Rousseau, but also an historical heritage dating from the Puritans. The socio-religious history of colonial New England clearly indicated to Merriam that the contract was the basis for all authority:

The idea of contract . . . was common to the New England Puritans. In defense of their form of church organization, government, and discipline, they asserted again and again that the contract is the method by which all associations are formed.<sup>420</sup>

Later, he added,

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<sup>418</sup> "I am particularly interested in seeing to what extent the writers of these utopias are falling back on ethical idealism, humanitarianism, . . . , and on the other hand, how far they are making use of new techniques of science and technology and their effect in elevation of attainable or almost attainable standards of living." CEM, "Memorandum to Miss Ziegler on Utopias", memorandum, undated, box 296, folder 12, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

<sup>419</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *A History of American Political Theory*, viii.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

[i]t seems to have been the prevailing idea that a contract was the necessary basis for both the church and the state. These two classes of covenants were known respectively as the 'church covenant' and the 'plantation covenant'; and there was an intimate relation between the democratic method of forming a church and the democratic method of forming a state.<sup>421</sup>

Merriam's view of political ideas betrayed a diffuse historical determinism in which conditions profoundly swayed the ideas expounded by thinkers. For example, Merriam observed during the Revolutionary Period that "the destructive democratic theory of the day was old, but the constructive democratic theory as worked out in state governments was the product of new conditions."<sup>422</sup> The democratic form of government, in other words, had not originated from philosophical thought but from the decisions of legislators.

#### *Merriam's Sociological Method*

Less historical than his dissertation, Merriam's second essay marked a turning away from the teachings of his mentor, William Dunning. By 1903, Merriam the political scientist was employing sociological methods to explain the origins of political institutions such as governments, courts, and constitutions. By taking a sociological approach, Merriam could concentrate on his interest in the political phenomena of daily life. He used empirical descriptions of social and economic facts as his method. In his essay on American political theory, Merriam criticized Thomas Jefferson's thought for not being systematic or scientific enough:

[Jefferson] did not inquire deeply into the nature of the state, its forms of organization, or any of the numerous problems arising out of the complex relations of political association. He did not write systematically at all, and what he did write was notable rather because of its scientific depth or clearness. Tested by the canons of the schools, Jefferson falls far short of the stature of a great political philosopher.<sup>423</sup>

This critique of Jefferson's thought reveals how far Merriam could take his interpretation. With a distinct disregard for presentism Merriam evaluated Jefferson's ideas from the standpoint of the

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 171.

first decade of the twentieth century. For Merriam, being a great philosopher meant being a great scientist.

The scientific method was useful not only for analyzing past and present political theories; a rational understanding of social structure also influenced actual politics. Merriam believed the principal source of waste in the early 1910s to be essentially the lack of rational control of political agencies. After his election as Chicago alderman in 1909, Merriam took on the chaotic relations between the city council and both municipal boards and the Illinois State Legislature:

The practical question is whether these changes shall be made scientifically, wisely, and with sufficient deliberation to insure the maintenance of the social equilibrium or whether they will be made ignorantly, rashly, and with the blind fury that characterizes revolutionary movements. The mutterings and rumblings of discontent are a warning that changes must come and that the real choice lies, not between change and no change, but between rational and gradual change on the one hand, and sudden and revolutionary change on the other.<sup>424</sup>

The idea that effective social politics resided in scientific management was not peculiar to Merriam. As has been shown in the two previous chapters, Hoover and Mitchell defended it as well; Merriam merely attempted to make scientific management a reality by running for, and winning, elective office.

#### *Merriam's Years as a Chicago Alderman*

The loose and incoherent political structure of Chicago, which included eight distinct political bodies independent from the city council, confirmed Merriam's belief in the need for a centralized authority. The Municipal Corporation, the Cook County Board of Commissioners, the Chicago Board of Education, the Chicago Library Board, three parks boards, and the Metropolitan Sanitary District, along with the Chicago City Council, made up the municipal governing agencies in the city, and each had the power to levy taxes. But political favouritism severely undermined the management of social and political life in the capital of the Midwest. In addition to the problems stemming from incoherent structure and favouritism, relations between

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<sup>424</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Outlook for Social Politics in the United States", *American Journal of Sociology*, 18 (1913): 687.

the Illinois State Legislature the municipal authorities in Chicago had been poor. Although socially and economically a modern city, Chicago was still politically managed as a mid-nineteenth-century frontier town.

These inconsistencies led Merriam to take a vigorous role in the new charter campaign. Historian Maureen A. Flanagan, in her essay on the Charter Movement in Chicago, described it as “conferring some home-rule powers on Chicago by relaxing the legal strictures that bound the city to the mercy of the state legislature. Simultaneously, it could alter the governing and taxing structure of the municipal government.”<sup>425</sup> In 1907, the city held a referendum on a new charter. Merriam strongly favoured and militated for the adoption of the new charter. Nevertheless, a majority of more than sixty thousand votes rejected the proposition, and Chicago kept its traditional structure, which dated from the early nineteenth century.

The encounter with Chicago political life was a pivotal experience for Merriam. It strengthened his convictions about centralized power and unified sovereignty. In the late 1900s and early 1910s, Merriam developed an aversion for county and state politics. Counties and states were but a throwback to the colonial period when cities were tiny, and when rural regions controlled the power structures of counties, states, and federal institutions. A centralization of power and responsibility was desperately needed in order to bring municipal governance into line with the new conditions prevailing in cities of the size of Chicago:

The centralizing tendencies evident in two such states as New York and Massachusetts, where the urban and industrial conditions characteristic of recent times are so highly developed, is very significant. They seem to foreshadow like changes in other states and a general movement toward greater unity in state administration.<sup>426</sup>

Such centralization had to be undertaken while at the same time instituting the merit system in order to reduce the influence of political parties and to recognize the professional expertise of new managers.<sup>427</sup> Merriam linked his project of political centralization to his earlier definition of sovereignty as “indivisible”. He wondered whether

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<sup>425</sup> Maureen A. Flanagan, *Charter Reform in Chicago* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 26.

<sup>426</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, “State government”, *Legislation Bulletin*, May 1903: 716.

<sup>427</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, “State Government, Law Making and Elections”, *Yearbook of Legislation*, October 1904, c-4.

in a federal system . . . the various members of the union [could] be partly sovereign and the central authority partly sovereign? . . . The practical difficulty arises from uncertainty as to the degree of centralization in the given system.<sup>428</sup>

He concluded that a central authority should be mandated to act responsibly in urban politics.

During his tenure as alderman, Merriam promoted an innovative vision of democratic authority. More control in the hands of elected representatives or municipal authorities, he believed, meant more transparent management. He demanded, for example, more “publicity” for tax administration: “the revenue-raising authorities of Chicago constitute one of the most complicated systems of local finance to be found anywhere, certainly the most involved and difficult in the United States.”<sup>429</sup> Merriam pushed for a two-pronged campaign for both more publicity and an integrated system of taxation that reached all levels of Chicago society. This new system of taxation relied on professional experts who would act under close public scrutiny. In Merriam’s vision, more control meant more democracy.

#### *Merriam’s Campaign against Corruption*

Beyond these considerations, the recurring evil of corruption determined much of Merriam’s politics and political science. Corruption was one of the greatest threats facing progressive leaders in general in their battle for political integrity and the extension of democracy.<sup>430</sup> Their fight for democratic primaries and the end of the nomination system led progressive leaders to insist on the necessity of reducing the influence of party bosses. In 1908, Merriam published an essay on primary elections in which he developed this idea:

[Under the nomination system], the primary election, having become one of the most important steps in the process of government, was open to every abuse that unscrupulous men dazzled by prospects of almost incredible wealth and dictatorial power, could devise and execute.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, “Sovereignty”, *New International Encyclopedia*

<sup>429</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Report of an Investigation of the Municipal Revenues of Chicago* (Chicago: City Club of Chicago, 1906), 71.

<sup>430</sup> The literature on this topic is voluminous, but for an outstanding intellectual history of progressivism, see James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986)

<sup>431</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Report of an Investigation of the Municipal Revenues of Chicago*..., 197.

Merriam's inquiry into the primary system revealed that in many places the primary was actually an election, which incensed him. He pointed out the political situation in many Southern states, where nominations led directly to election because of the weakness of the Republican Party. Merriam, however, considered the primary to play a social role in communities. Primaries were more than just a feature of the electoral system; they humanized the electoral procedure by forcing voters and candidates to meet and exchange ideas and preoccupations. During primaries, a dialogue between leaders and voters took place on the most imperative issues of the day. He stressed that

[t]o understand a primary it is not necessary to exert oneself *[sic]* to grasp an artificial and arbitrary system, but on the contrary it is better to relax a little, to think of what commonly goes on in any group, and then allow for the political differentials – after all not so numerous as they might be.<sup>432</sup>

Merriam was not completely naive about the workings of democratic primaries. He saw two major drawbacks to the political nomination system. First of all, relations between leaders, issues, and voters could absolutely not be taken for granted:

What probably disturbs [me] the most in primaries as well as in elections is the frequent failure of candidate and issue to coincide. The right candidate and the right side of the case do not always fit. . . . In this respect the primary is a miniature of human life, which is full of many similar regrets and indecisions, and bitter choices. I know of no panacea for such cases. And if did, I might throw it away.<sup>433</sup>

Leaders did not necessarily play their roles as effective conveyors of collective will. A gap often arose between the preoccupations of leaders and the concerns of most of their constituents. Even though Merriam fully subscribed to the democratic system, he was also able to tackle its inherent malfunctions such as this distance between leaders and voters.

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<sup>432</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid., 205.

### *The Problem of Public Apathy*

The second problem Merriam tracked down was a more pressing one. The indifference of citizens in primaries and elections pervasively impaired the representative character of the democratic system:

The chief difficulty often lies with those who will neither lead nor follow, who will neither accept the judgment of anyone else, nor form a judgment of their own, who murmur and complain, but never develop a drive that leads to any affirmative political action. Of such is not the kingdom of politics, and they do not belong.<sup>434</sup>

Political abstention and indifference do more than just test democratic systems; they can also undermine them. Merriam, who was both fascinated by and afraid of political apathy, sought to understand how citizens could betray their own institutions.

By 1910, Merriam, now a young professor teaching at the young University of Chicago, had already forged the three overarching themes he would refine later in his career: sovereignty and the source of power, leaders and followers, and political indifference and abstention. They would remain major centres of interest for him that he would examine from various methodological angles over the following twenty years. Nominally, he remained a political economist for quite a few years, as his election as chair of the Department of Political Economy of the University of Chicago in 1923 illustrated. Nevertheless, he swiftly distanced himself from nineteenth-century political economy. His political science rapidly became more than just a review of legislation, court decisions, and constitutions, highlighting as it did the social aspects of his discipline:

The underlying spirit of the law was conservative. . . . Conservatism in this case was reinforced by the doctrine of the sanctity of precedent, by the tendency to regard the common law as a closed book, by the unconscious individualism of the common law, and the conscious Manchesterian-Spencerian theory of government non-interference.<sup>435</sup>

Even if the spirit of law was conservative, Merriam recognized the obligation that political scientists had to consider legal history and jurisprudence. Indeed, laws were also social products that exerted their own influence on society. Merriam argued that

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 207-208.

<sup>435</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *American Political Ideas: Studies in the Development of American Political Thought* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1920), 208-9.

[j]ustice . . . is an affair of the heart as well as the head; it is not wholly made up of legal logic and analogy; economic interests and political ideals and standards are not and cannot be ignored; and any system of jurisprudence whether mechanical, historical, evolutionary, sociological, analytical, philosophical, eclectic or otherwise, must be influenced largely in last analysis by sympathies, interests, and ideas represented. The significant feature of the new jurisprudence was the modification of the earlier method through the closer consideration of the living social, economic, and political facts, and the inspiration of the social spirit and the social point of view.<sup>436</sup>

Merriam put particular emphasis on social spirit because the ability of individuals living in democratic systems to grasp social motives hinged on it.

Unfortunately, tradition and custom often trump revised, socially oriented values. Merriam opposed any conservatism that was based on traditional ways of acting and thinking. Merriam antagonized thinkers and politicians who sought to conserve established codes of conduct. On many occasions, Merriam harshly attacked conservatives. For example, he wrote that

[o]utside the hard lines of constitutional and formal government, the political thought and enterprise of the day seized with great avidity the new forces of the new time, sometimes for public and sometimes for private ends, and shaped them into a many-hued variety of forms, unknown to tradition, unforeseen by the Fathers and unwelcome sometimes to their creators.<sup>437</sup>

Indeed, Merriam considered the absence of a long, tradition-bound past in Chicago a distinct asset:

[I]f Chicago's traditions are few, the binding [and] often galling limitations of tradition are also weak, and the obstacles to inventiveness are relatively small. The artificialities of tradition are not in the way of progress, for neither ancient prestige nor ancient evil and sufferings have become habitual.<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>437</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *New Aspects of Politics* (Chicago: Press of the University of Chicago, 1925), 309.

<sup>438</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Chicago: A More Intimate View of Urban Politics* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), 303.

Merriam's resentment of tradition went hand in hand with his liberal faith in the future, which he knew the past did not guarantee.<sup>440</sup> Understanding contemporary human behaviour held the key to instilling new values in a given society.

Merriam was most interested in individual and collective behaviours. Participation and abstention were the two salient political behaviours he analyzed. A political system was not merely the product of legislative institutions or the opinions of leaders and elites; it also subsumed the behaviour of its electorate as motivated by economic needs, family, work, and religion. He even went as far as defining the ideal political and civic behaviour of Americans. Before setting forth a clear program of civic obligations, however, Merriam surveyed the actual behaviour of urban Americans, mostly Chicagoans.

Merriam considered Americans to be essentially urbanites. He even generalized the problems of Chicago to larger and smaller cities. Rural America, he believed, was both backward and backward-facing; few opportunities awaited it in the future. Urban America, by contrast, incarnated the nation's advance toward modern civilization. Merriam's urban-oriented perspective must be understood in the context of the Chicago School of Sociology and Political Science. Merriam was in close contact with Robert Ezra Park (1864-1944), Ernest Burgess (1886-1966), William I. Thomas (1863-1947), and Florian Znaniecki (1882-1958). He heartily supported the Department of Sociology in its inquiries into urban problems. But at the same time Merriam reiterated his belief that the modern city was a place where both the light and darkness of the world were on display.<sup>441</sup> Thus, when Merriam began his research on political behaviour in the 1910s, he was not interested in depicting both rural and urban life. Instead, he confined his research to cities, and to one city in particular: Chicago.

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<sup>440</sup> Merriam illustrated perfectly what D. Joy Humes said about Oswald Garrison Villard: "Because he believed in the mutability of institutions, the American liberal has often been described as being experimentally minded in politics, eager to try new approaches which in turn are subject to review and discard. The liberal has little patience with those who show doubt about the untried. 'The mere fact that it has not been done,' Villard maintained, 'is surely not a ground for saying that it cannot be done.'" D. Joy Humes, *Oswald Garrison Villard: Liberal of the 1920s* (Binghamton, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1966), 105-6.

<sup>441</sup> Pierre Saint-Arnaud has published an original cross-disciplinary survey of the representations of cities by comparing Robert Park's sociology to John dos Passos novels. See Pierre Saint-Arnaud, *Park – Dos Passos Metropolis: Regards croisés sur la modernité urbaine aux Etats-Unis* (Sainte Foy: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1997)

*A Member of the Chicago Progressive Elite*

Charles Merriam viewed life in Chicago from the top. As a member of the Chicago city council, a mayoral candidate at the Republican Convention of 1911, a professor of political economy at the University of Chicago, and a member of certain elite clubs in Chicago, Merriam was a privileged observer of the then second largest city in the United States. Both his membership in the Chicago elite and his many connections, which cut across a variety of social circles, afforded him access to nationally known opinion leaders in the 1910s and 1920s. Merriam maintained friendships with Jane Addams (1860-1935), Clarence Darrow (1857-1938), and Harold L. Ickes (1874-1952) into the post-war era. He was also close to Theodore Roosevelt in the early 1910s when the former president of the United States was busy forming the Progressive Party. Merriam and Gifford Pinchot (1865-1946), the progressive governor of Pennsylvania, maintained a long-term correspondence.

Merriam's social and political life affected his interpretation of political problems. Merriam cannot be classified as a do-gooder progressive intellectual. Of course, Merriam manifested optimism about the future of the United States, but he was also very critical of some of its basic institutions, including the Constitution, the business bourgeoisie, and the power wielded by lawyers. In his handling of political adversity, Merriam did not adopt defeatist positions. For him, all problems, even the most profound ones, had solutions, and he recommended certain approaches to them. In the same spirit as Wesley Mitchell and, as we will see later, Mary van Kleeck, Merriam believed in the possibility of modifying the course of the future. His faith that political conditions could be improved rested on the demonstrated power of science to control human nature and the natural environment.<sup>442</sup> This conviction was common to the great majority of progressive social and natural scientists of Merriam's era. Rather than view laws as immutable, as others tended to do, Merriam endeavoured to discover and then influence the fundamental laws of human nature:

To understand the role of the instinctive, the habitual, the subconscious in political action is not to diminish the role of intelligence in controlling them. Quite the contrary, the more intimate knowledge of the reflex as distinguished from the reflective side of political

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<sup>442</sup> McGill professor Marc Angenot has made a thorough study of the optimism inherent in the idea of progress. See Marc Angenot, *D'Où venons nous ? Où allons-nous ? La décomposition de l'idée de progrès* (Montréal: Trait d'Union, 2001)

nature will increase the degree and extent of the control by intelligence. . . . We understand the springs of human action, and we use the understanding for the purpose of more effective adaptation and control.<sup>443</sup>

With this outcome in mind, Merriam attacked political problems in the city of Chicago.

Institutional and social problems plagued political life in the Midwest's capital. Chicago institutions, Merriam believed, suffered from a chaotic structure, strained relations with the Illinois State Legislature, the absence of a professional municipal bureaucracy, overly conservative attitudes in the local, state, and federal courts, and a decadent electoral system. He pointed problems related to civic engagement such as the exclusion of immigrants, blacks and women from traditional white and male political circles and the weakness of political information conveyed through media and formal schooling. He also insisted on the importance of leadership to raise general interest among citizens toward public issues. These problems led to political apathy. To be sure, Merriam did not consider all these problems to be on an equal footing. Certain questions such as the problem-ridden electoral system and the role of municipal leaders held greater urgency for him.

Throughout his political life, Merriam did not shrink from the institutional problems that arose in a rapidly growing metropolis in the early twentieth century. In the 1910s, Merriam advocated reforming municipal structures. His campaign for the adoption of the new charter illustrated his desire to bring Chicago into line with political practices elsewhere in Illinois and in other states. After the defeat of the new charter, Merriam suggested creating a permanent body of experts with a mandate to assure the stability of a professional administration:

Lack of system fosters political favoritism and graft and at the same time political favoritism stands in the way of proper methods of organization and supervision. We may say that if graft and politics were eliminated, the introduction of business methods would be comparatively easy; and on the other hand we may say that with a proper type of system, both political favoritism and theft would be made more difficult. Eliminate these three great types of waste, establish the principle of absolute integrity and efficiency, drive out politics from the administrative departments, emphasize the importance of

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<sup>443</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *New Aspects of Politics*..., 244.

economy and efficiency, and the taxpayer's dollar would go much farther than it now does.<sup>444</sup>

The complexity of the system was not as problematic as its structural weaknesses were. It was not because the system was malfunctioning that it needed to be dismantled. The trouble was not the system itself but the political bosses who controlled it. A permanent body of experts, Merriam was sure, would carry out the essential function of educating citizens.<sup>445</sup> Municipal investigation committees would pave the way for the growing interest that citizens were beginning to show in public affairs.

The Chicago political scientist devoted considerable thought to the makeup of these investigating committees. Merriam proposed to replace political nomination, which was disallowed from the very outset, with civil service selection. Later, Merriam was to limit his expectations of these experts in charge of public administration: they needed only to be educated persons aware of the needs of their communities. On these grounds, recognizing that the role of experts was to anticipate and respond to the needs of a community, Merriam requested that experts have the same community affiliation as political leaders. To carry out their responsibilities, experts had to be able to understand how the local population lived.

For example, the chronic problem of budget-making in Chicago attracted Merriam's attention. In order to solve it, he suggested creating a financial board whose members were familiar with both urban finances and collective needs. He pointed out that "[i]t would be their duty to make such investigations or inquiries as were necessary for checking expenditures and to make constructive recommendations to the committee for the promotion of economy and efficiency in the use of public funds."<sup>446</sup> In his experience, the problem with budget-making was not so much excessive spending as unwise spending. Wise spending was spending that responded to collective and social needs. To a large extent, the presence of more experts in government implied tighter controls on collective needs: "The larger authority conferred upon officials through the process of consolidation and through the gradually increasing authority exercised by the government over social and industrial affairs will be likely to require a balance

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<sup>444</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Investigation as a Means of Securing Administrative Agency", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 41 (1912): p. 300.

<sup>445</sup> "[These bodies] are educating the taxpayer and citizen to watch where his dollar goes." *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>446</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Budget Making in Chicago", *Annals of the American Academy of Political Science*, 62 (1915): 276.

in more direct control.”<sup>447</sup> Thus, Merriam simultaneously advocated including experts and safeguards in order to extend the managerial role of the city administration to social problems.

#### Public Service: A Democratic Solution to Urban Problems

Merriam acknowledged the danger that bureaucracy could lead to the creation of a mandarin class, but his own notion of bureaucracy was a democratic one. The guarantee that public service would remain democratic was built into the first condition for employment: education. Because the American school system was a public one, government employment remained open to Americans coming from the poorer strata:

The growing burdens of government, and the increasingly specialized technique of administration forced upon the public the recognition of the absolute necessity of trained public servants. At the same time universal public education, and the absence of class distinctions in the governmental service, opened the door to the whole democracy. With more limited facilities for general education, the effect of the merit system might have been to limit public employment, in large measure, to the class in the community whose economic situation was such as to make education possible. The American system of schools, organized upon a democratic basis, insured the democratic character of the public service against the dangers of aristocratic rule and bureaucracy.<sup>448</sup>

Today this opinion sounds anachronistic because it is widely recognized that social classes have always existed in the United States. Public education, too, has lost its aura as social panacea. Yet Merriam’s opinion reflected the values of his era, which favoured a more powerful role for the state. Merriam linked public education and democratic bureaucracy. Experts were not a privileged class that controlled the masses; rather, they themselves had directly issued from the masses. This notion highlights another crucial element of Merriam’s political science: civic education.

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<sup>447</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, “The Direct Primary”, *American Federationist*, 34 (1927): 162-3.

<sup>448</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *American Political Ideas...*, 133.

### *Civic Education*

Merriam's program of civic education must be seen as an integral part of his conception of political science as the study of one facet of human nature. The facet Merriam studied was the political behaviour of individuals and communities:

Human nature is the great factor in city government, but it is still possible to understand human nature better, and intelligence is a part of human nature. . . . It is just as 'human' to have good housing as to have slums; just as 'human' to have a city plan as to follow cow paths made by bovine nature; just as 'human' to organize schools as to allow children to run at large; just as 'human' to organize recreation as to operate commercialized vice and profit by it; just as 'human' to apply science to human affairs as to employ ignorance and prejudice.<sup>449</sup>

Pursuing his inquiry into political behaviour still further, Merriam questioned the origin of certain kinds of behaviour in politics and, more generally, in society. He wanted to understand

why men obey or not; why they incline toward conformity or dissent; why they tend to lead or follow in certain circumstances. . . . There are problems lying at the basis of any system of government, whether aristocratic, democratic, or communistic, and only upon a thorough understanding of the political side of human nature can a science of politics or a prudent art of government and statesmanship be built.<sup>450</sup>

Similarly, Graham Wallas (1858-1932), a political economist from the London School of Economics, had published a survey in 1908 on the problem of human nature in politics, which Merriam often quoted.<sup>451</sup> Thus, inquiry into political behaviour was at the core of Merriam's research in political science.

### *Political Science: A Psychological Discipline*

Merriam undertook to elucidate the origins of political behaviour in order to understand it and, ultimately, to predict and influence it. In the 1910s and 1920s, Merriam faced the paradox that human behaviour might have biological or social roots. The metaphor of organism dominated the

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<sup>449</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Human Nature and Science in City Government", *Journal of Social Forces*, 1 (1923): 462.

<sup>450</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Introduction" of Harold F. Gosnell, *Boss Platt and His New York Machine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), xvi.

<sup>451</sup> See Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (London: Constable and Company, 1914 [1908])

thought of many intellectuals during the first decades of the twentieth century, which marked the apex of the influence of the philosophy of history promoted by Arnold Toynbee and Oswald Spengler. Did society function as a human body? These two leading scholars of Merriam's era believed that civilization followed a developmental course similar to that of human beings: birth, youth, maturity, decadence, and death.

Merriam was not entirely immune to the organicist interpretation. In fact, he gave credence to the physical and biological origins of public figures. For example, in his study of leadership, he emphasized the physical health and strength of major American leaders: "We should find it advantageous to obtain all possible data regarding the physical characteristics of the leader, including the fullest medical history and all possible biological and psychiatric data."<sup>452</sup> Merriam explained Theodore Roosevelt's political abilities as being partly based on his "physical constitution of great vigor and strength".<sup>453</sup> More recent biographers of Theodore Roosevelt have shown exactly the opposite (i.e., Roosevelt was not as physically strong as he strove to appear). The key point here is the way Merriam used biological explanations to support his opinions.

Even though he ascribed a decisive role to physical constitution, Merriam favoured a more social determinist perspective. For him, physical and biological nature only confirmed what already existed in the social environment, as his description of Theodore Roosevelt's leadership bore out:

In addition to his striking physical and intellectual equipment, the qualities that stand out most conspicuously in Roosevelt were his sensitiveness to what was going on around him, his facility in personal and group contacts, and his aptness in democratic expression and action.<sup>454</sup>

Just as Merriam considered Roosevelt's magnetism to be a primary determinant of his success, he thought William Jennings Bryan a better leader than Woodrow Wilson because Bryan knew how to incarnate public feelings.<sup>455</sup> Although he praised Wilson as the archetypal

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<sup>452</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Research Problems in the Field of Parties, Elections, and Leadership", *American Political Science Review*, Suppl. 24 (1930), 37.

<sup>453</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Four American Party Leaders* (New York: Libraries Press, 1924), 28.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>455</sup> Merriam argued that "[i]n personal contact Bryan was exceedingly strong, perhaps unsurpassed except by Lincoln. He met fewer types of persons than did Roosevelt, but he was warmly liked by almost all those he met. The business group is possibly an exception but even there he had many admirers." *Ibid.*, 74.

political expert, Merriam considered the foe of Darwinism and science to be the archetypal demagogue. Bryan was a more persuasive leader than Wilson; the only thing Bryan lacked was political luck.<sup>456</sup>

Social and economic factors were prominent in other aspects of Merriam's political science, particularly in governmental functions. Leadership was relevant, but the economic and social superstructure also had to be considered in any analysis of the role undertaken by the state. In an unpublished article, Merriam stressed that

[f]irst, we cannot ignore the interpenetration of the large social and economic units of social organization with the more specifically political agencies. The whole delicate structure of modern industry is increasingly intertwined with governmental functions, and will continue to be so in the future, not as the result of any theory whatever, but as the inevitable consequence of the closer integration of social and political life. Currency and banking, shipping, international loans, taxation, tariffs, unemployment are only some of the great mass of relations which tend to come within the circle of governmental influence and control; and the inexorable trend continues.<sup>457</sup>

Like Wesley Mitchell and Mary van Kleeck, Merriam applied his discipline to larger social problems. Political science explained only one aspect of the larger set of problems that arose among individuals living together in communities. The focal point of all of these disciplines, however, was human nature. When Merriam tackled the problem of human nature in politics, he envisioned it primarily as having to do with social matters such as economics, gender and race relations, the influence of established and minority religions, and the power of the media. He examined these problems in relation to electoral behaviour, political fraud, and political involvement and apathy. In so doing, Merriam undertook an analysis of the dynamics—including the malfunctioning—of the entire political system.

In order to normalize political behaviour, throughout his articles and essays Merriam proposed a defined program of civic obligations. Merriam did not believe that military service and jury duty should be the only duties required of citizens. In one instance, Merriam even opened the door to requiring a citizenship test to evaluate the degree to which citizens had been

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>457</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Tentative Statement of Conclusions, form Chapter on Changes in government by Merriam", unpublished manuscript, March 2, 1932, box 37, folder 10, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 11.

participating in public affairs.<sup>458</sup> In his campaign for a more engaged electorate to further his political objective of creating national unity, Merriam urged greater participation in public affairs by citizens:

We are involved in an intricate whirl of competing loyalties, alternately attracted and repelled by one and another, in an endless series of forming and dissolving interests, the nature of which is still but dimly comprehended. Political cohesion, although by no means the only one of these central attractions, is one of the most powerful and meaningful for social life.<sup>459</sup>

Here Merriam sought to create confluent national political practices which were then fairly uncommon in the United States. Despite his anti-traditionalist stance, Merriam viewed political habits and customs as social anchors that, in the first decades of the twentieth century, were missing from the national civic landscape. For example, “among the most effective agencies of civic unity and cohesion are language, literature, the press, the radio, moving-pictures – the great vehicles of intercommunication.”<sup>460</sup> American civilization was on the eve of disruption because of the increasing tensions that accompanied modernization. Outdated modes of living were necessarily giving way to new ways of conceiving the future:

With industrialization, urbanization, the decline of agriculture as a dominant mode of production and base social life, with the great mobility of modern populations, with migration a more common phenomenon of social life, the significance of the love of soil is likely to diminish rather than increase.<sup>461</sup>

This change in the relationship between Americans and the land is one example of a traditional belief that was vanishing in the first decades of the twentieth century. Merriam was seldom nostalgic about the waning of traditions, but he was aware of the ineluctability of the need to replace them.

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<sup>458</sup> “The possibility of making citizenship tests of various types was particularly emphasized.” Charles Edward Merriam, Round Table I: Psychology and Political Science”, *American Political Science Review*, 18 (1924): 125.

<sup>459</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *The Making of Citizens: A Comparative Study of Methods of Civic Training* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1931), 2.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

### *Civic Duty*

Merriam's program emphasizing civic duty was geared to this new vision of the future in which a more modern cohesion would extend across the entire country. Merriam's philosophy betrayed an interesting tension between urban consciousness and national pride. On the one hand, Merriam stressed that cities were the future of the United States. It was clear to him that modernization could only take place in the wake of urbanization, which he called for. On the other hand, national identity had to bind the entire country. The future resided in national cohesion and in the gradual evanescence of local pride. Yet, Merriam conceded,

[w]hat must happen in the fixation of the larger country state of modern times is the transfer of attachment from the visually local to a larger picture of the whole state. This larger picture shades into the smaller and back again, in some such a way as to blend them into one – a process we do not understand well if at all. When once this is accomplished, however, the local may be used to reinforce the general with success, and the general becomes a series of cumulative locals plus the larger national effect.<sup>462</sup>

Merriam propounded a systematic program of nationalizing political identity. National identity was the beginning of citizen's civic duty. Membership in the American political community was the primary civic obligation:

On the whole, the American political system has had few competing loyalties to make headway against, and in the field of social control has had the field almost to itself. The struggles with church, region, nationalities, and economic class, so common in many of the European states, have been almost unknown in America, with the tragic exception of the Civil War period when region and economics combined against the central political unity.<sup>463</sup>

So deeply rooted were Merriam's convictions about civic consciousness and the need for a national political culture in the United States that the co-director of Herbert Hoover's Commission on Recent Social Trends even went so far as to suggest examining the civic

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid., 214-5.

program established in the Soviet Union, which he considered “rich in materials for the student of civic processes.”<sup>464</sup>

Merriam gave priority to education as the *avenue royale* that led to the inculcation of civic consciousness. Actually, for him, education virtually guaranteed that a national identity would take shape. Merriam agreed with John Dewey’s opinion that the classroom was the laboratory of democracy. But the University of Chicago political scientist interpreted John Dewey’s program of education in a peculiar way, adapting Dewey’s project to his own scheme of civic obligations:

The fact is that in all cases the school system is the basic factor in the development of civic interest and loyalty, and the chief instrument of that purpose. . . . In modern civilization the school tends to take the place of force and fear in the earlier régime and of religion, the family, the army, in the later, and it succeeds to all the rights and privileges as well as the power and prestige of the ecclesiastical group.<sup>465</sup>

For example, to resolve the problem of political indifference as manifest in low voter turnout, he pushed for the inclusion of political education early in school curricula. Merriam urged that

[g]eneral indifference is made up of many varying factors, arising from the temperament, experience, interests, aptitudes of the voter, and it varies from habitual non-voting to occasional lapses. It may be affected by a broader system of social education, especially in the secondary schools, by more careful political education of newcomers, by dramatizing more effectively the electoral privilege and the electoral process, and by more effective organization of adult political intelligence.<sup>466</sup>

Civic education thus could assure that an intelligent public would be aware of national and local issues in the context of democratic American political culture.

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<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 222.

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>466</sup> Charles Edward Merriam and Harold Foote Gosnell, *Non-Voting: Causes and Methods of Control* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 257.

### *Civic Education*

The introduction of political science into the general curriculum partially realized these aims of intelligent public education. Merriam, however, sought to refine it further. In the 1920s, Merriam gave considerable thought to the role of the Department of Political Economy at the University of Chicago. In an issue paper he submitted to university authorities, Merriam explicated the relationship between civic education, political science, and intelligent public opinion:

[C]ultural education seeks to give the student the information, mental habits and points of view which make for a broader and more useful life irrespective of the particular vocation. Whether this can be done best by shaping education to the individual as in the elective system or by forcing the individual through a standard curriculum as in the classical system need not be here discussed. Among both schools the political system is recognized as an important subject in cultural education. All mature persons in a democracy are expected to contribute toward the formation of an intelligent public opinion, to participate as a voter and juryman in the work of government and to serve in time of emergency for preservation of order and national defense. An intelligent rendering of these services requires some knowledge of the facts and the fundamental conceptions of political life.<sup>467</sup>

By applying his vision of civic education, Merriam longed to democratize the distribution of intelligence and raise the intellectual capabilities of voters. The more aware of the functioning of government the citizens were, the more effective and extensive the role of the state could be. Not only would civic education lead to a greater sense of civic duty, but it was also itself a civic duty.

When Merriam put this project forward, he was keenly aware of the conditions necessary to bring it about. Merriam echoed Mitchell, van Kleeck, and other social scientists active during the first three decades of the twentieth century in attempting to materialize this practical utopia. Although their ambitions may have seemed grand and impractical, American social scientists also made a point of incorporating the means for realizing their programs in their schemes for improving the lives of Americans. For example, civic education represented the means for attaining the goals of Merriam's civic duty program.

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<sup>467</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Suggested Program of Expansion for the Political Economy Department", Draft, undated, box 117, folder 12, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 1.

In addition, the Chicago political scientist acknowledged that civic education required bringing to bear the appropriate expertise. Merriam proposed solutions to resolve the problems posed by crime, which he considered to have its origins in the social environment. In a revealing passage that typified the progressive mind of American intellectuals of the 1920s and afterward, Merriam stressed that

[t]he sources of crime are as important as its manifestations. The world of human beings is full of social deviates and deviations, and the question of how to deal with the more extreme forms of deviation or those which at the moment seem to require curbing is not merely a matter of punishment but a problem of prevention.<sup>468</sup>

Merriam enumerated the specific conditions that fostered criminal activity.<sup>469</sup> Yet he did not call for the severe punishment of criminals; on the contrary, he demanded the betterment of their living conditions and surrounding milieu:

The attack upon the crime problem, the liquor problem, [and] the prostitution problem must go far deeper down than the surface of repressive police activity into the levels of human nature affected by the new environment. Unattractive living conditions, the stress of an intensive mechanical age, the lack of sufficient attention to recreation facilities and the use of leisure time; all these are of prime importance in any study of social maladjustments and of social deviates and deviations. In many ways, the place of the old-time policeman is being taken by the modern technician in various forms of social service.<sup>470</sup>

The last sentence anticipated Michel Foucault and his archeology of the social sciences. Foucault's interpretation, however, was less exhaustive than Merriam's vision, with its social experts and social scientists.

The interweaving of moral objectives with the rational methods of science and technology has often been underestimated in discussions of the social sciences in the Positivist Age and the Progressive Era. Generally, science and technology are reduced to their methods.

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<sup>468</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "The Police, Crime and Politics", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 146 (1929), 117.

<sup>469</sup> "Likewise, we must deal with housing, with recreation and the use of leisure time, with basic economic situations – all of these are closely related to the solution of the problem of politics and police and crime, for it is out of these maladjustments that the criminal cases spring in large number." *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

For example, the French theoretician of technique Jacques Ellul considered technique to be “nothing more than means and the ensemble of means. . . . Our civilization is first and foremost a civilization of means; in the reality of modern life, the means . . . are more important than the ends.”<sup>471</sup> Nevertheless—and this point needs to be underscored here—there was, even at the outset, but especially in the early decades of the twentieth century, a powerful relationship between morals, political economy, and the emerging social disciplines.<sup>472</sup> French philosopher Albert Camus observed in 1942 that “les méthodes impliquent des métaphysiques, elles trahissent à leur insu les conclusions qu’elles prétendent parfois ne pas encore connaître.”<sup>473</sup> When Charles Merriam spoke about the social role of experts based on their scientific training, he was not alluding merely to the human control of nature, but also to the moral purpose of the social sciences.

#### *Mandate of Political Scientists and Social Scientists*

In practical terms, the advisor to Herbert Hoover assigned a double task both to political scientists and to social scientists in general. This dual role included the role of inquirer, commissioner, surveyor, and investigator of social and economic problems. This first role is well-documented and still exists today. But there was also the role of political scientist, which in Merriam’s opinion embraced the mandate of launching new social values. The second task is much trickier to discuss, especially in the context of objectivist social sciences. New values were indispensable because of the crumbling of the older moral system:

Under conditions of the modern city profound changes are taking place in the customs, manners, and life philosophies, and even in human nature itself. The traditional moral code and religious beliefs are breaking down. . . . As yet . . . no thorough-going attempt has been made to describe and to measure the effect upon conduct and human nature of the increasing mechanization and convenience of life, of the multiplicity of sensuous

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<sup>471</sup> Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Knopf, 1964), 19.

<sup>472</sup> “I cannot but think that as years go, more of them [political economists] will call to their aid that study of mankind which is the ancient ally of the moral sciences.” Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics*..., 18.

<sup>473</sup> Albert Camus, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942), 25-26.

stimulations, and of the popularization, often in pseudo-scientific form, of the knowledge of science.<sup>474</sup>

The chaotic social climate had a moral equivalent that also needed to be set right.<sup>475</sup> One of Merriam's objectives was to bring traditional moral values into line with modern conditions. Merriam conceded that accomplishing this task would pose a number of challenges. He admitted that the government could not hire a team of specialists and then expect them to change collective mentality and behaviour in one year. At the same time, political science ultimately sought to modernize the values that permeated American society. Merriam maintained that

[m]odern methods of government would unlock the constructive faculties of human nature and make possible miracles of achievement. In general education and in general organization they have long since had to rely on force, fear, magic or routine, and in proportion as we have been able to replace these factors by scientific analysis and reorganization, progress has been made. Politics is now groping its way in the dark but must learn the use of agencies of modern civilization for its tasks.<sup>476</sup>

Merriam then clarified that what he meant by "miracles of achievement" had to do with the application of political science principles by the government:

It is not to be presumed that in the near future any system of political science can prevent war, revolution and the imperfect adjustments, but the shock of these conflicts may gradually be minimized. Probably war can be prevented, revolution reduced to remote possibilities, and maladjustments vastly reduced in number and intensity. At any rate these are the tasks and these are the tests of scientific politics.<sup>477</sup>

Merriam had great hopes for political science. He yearned to see the moral system rebuilt according to scientific principles. At the same time, he acknowledged that political scientists

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<sup>474</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "A Study of the Census of Crime and Vice", manuscript, undated, box 119, folder 10, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 2-3.

<sup>475</sup> "This trend toward the lessening control of the family as an institution might be paralleled with an analysis of the decline in the influence of the church. The relation of the loss of authority in the home and the church to personal disorganization may best be seen in the changes in leisure time activities once dominated by familial and religious standards." Ibid., 6.

<sup>476</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "The Tasks of Politics", manuscript, undated, box 130, folder 4, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 2.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 2.

could not complete this task alone; they needed the assistance of other disciplines sharing the same ambition of introducing a new social ethics based on science.

### The Social Sciences and Modern Ethics

In the draft version of an article the historian Charles Beard sent to Merriam in 1930, Beard agreed with Merriam on the moral purposes of the social sciences:

Social science cannot ignore ethical considerations; otherwise it would become a branch of inert scholasticism without direction or motive force. At each given moment it is under obligations to select the striking ethical propensities apparent in society, consider their practical upshot, and indicate the various forms which they take. Ethics give to civics a dynamic quality.<sup>478</sup>

Similarly, Merriam wanted social scientists to pool their resources and efforts in the cause of revising ethics, arguing that

[s]cience is a great cooperative enterprise in which many intelligences must labor together. There must always be wide scope for the spontaneous and unregimented activity of the individual, but the success of the expedition is conditioned upon some general plan of organization. Least of all can there be anarchy in social science, or chaos in the theory of political order.<sup>479</sup>

The social sciences enterprise had a definite goal and sought to employ high-tech means to reach it. “[We] must protect the highest standards of the most precise scientific attainment,” Merriam urged, “but science cannot escape social responsibility, by silence or refuge in superiority.”<sup>480</sup> Moreover, he appealed, “the gains of science may be realized for the enrichment of human life, *creating new systems and new values*, more vivid than have yet appeared.”<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> Charles Beard, “Draft of Objectives of the Social Studies”, Draft, 1930, box 125, folder 2, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 49-50.

<sup>479</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, “The Present State of the Study of Politics”, *American Political Science Review*, 15 (1921): 185.

<sup>480</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, “Untitled”, late 1920s, box 136, folder 3, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 6.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 9 (emphasis added).

### *The Political Dimension of Human Nature*

The underlying connection between Merriam's political science and the other social sciences resulted from their mutual object of study: human nature and behaviour. Merriam's political science analyzed the political side of human nature, although he admitted a desire to extend his field of interest to such problems as non-political behaviour in the family, in religious practices, and in the workplace, and gender and race. Merriam asserted that "[i]f biology explains the lower forms of life, psychology the subhuman groupings, and anthropology the primitive human developments, it remains for social groupings on a higher level; and of politics to interpret the special governmental or patriotic cohesions."<sup>482</sup> To analyze these factors, he employed other disciplines.

The concept of social behaviour recurred often in his thinking. In it, Merriam saw a direct manifestation of human nature. Social psychology was one of the complementary disciplines Merriam favoured for advancing political science. In June 1927, he made known his curiosity about social psychology to L. L. Thurstone (1887-1955), his colleague from the Department of Psychology at the University of Chicago. He wrote to Thurstone, "we believe that some of the social implications of psychology are very important and contain wide-ranging possibilities of intellectual inquiry."<sup>483</sup> For him, it was clearly not possible to continue subdividing knowledge about human social activity indefinitely:

The problem of social behavior is essentially one problem, and while the angles of approach may and should be different, the scientific result will be imperfect unless these points of view are at times brought together in some effective way, so that the full benefit of the multiple analysis may be realized. There is grave danger, however, that these precautions may be neglected and the special disciplines in the social fields may be ignorant each of the objectives, methods, and results of the other, and that much overlapping and inadequacy will result.<sup>484</sup>

Merriam's emphasis on social behaviour clearly illustrated his fascination for psychology, and more specifically, for social psychology. As was true for Mitchell, Merriam was fond of the theories and experiments that were emerging from this up-and-coming discipline.

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<sup>482</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *The Making of Citizens*..., 3.

<sup>483</sup> Charles Edward Merriam to L.L. Thurstone, correspondence, June 17, 1927, box 41 folder 11, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

<sup>484</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Progress in Political Research", *American Political Science Review*, 20 (1926), 9.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the study of social behaviour was considered by the majority of social scientists as the most effective way to prove their theories.<sup>485</sup> Wesley Mitchell focused on basic behaviours associated with fundamental human needs like food, clothing, and shelter. Mitchell understood the economic aspects of these fundamentals. Merriam, by contrast, examined those components of social behaviour that were related to politics. He considered the fundamental political behaviours to be voting, leading or obeying, and speaking in public assemblies. Of course, these basic needs had to be understood in a specific context: American democratic political culture. For Merriam, these three behavioural dimensions were as pertinent for citizens as food, clothing, and shelter were for consumers, producers, and workers. Merriam made no attempt to classify these needs hierarchically.

#### *The Social Psychology of Voting Patterns*

Merriam's treatment of voting revealed the way he interpreted the implications of social psychology for political science. An ardent democrat himself, Merriam did not see suffrage as classical political economists, including his own mentor William Dunning, traditionally viewed it: a constitutional right born of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophical discussions held as part of the day-to-day transactions of local democratic assemblies. After mastering eighteenth-century democratic political theories, Merriam shifted his focus from the Constitution and philosophy to the social and economic meaning of suffrage in the lives of Americans, including marginalized groups like blacks, immigrants, and women. "It is in the spirit and temper of the people, rather than in the written word," Merriam stressed, "that confidence must be placed."<sup>486</sup> Merriam treated voting in much the same way that Charles Beard approached the Constitution in his *Economic Interpretation of the American Constitution*.<sup>487</sup> In 1908, Merriam insisted that

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<sup>485</sup> For the London School of Economics professor Graham Wallas, "the science of social psychology aims at discovering and arranging the knowledge which will enable us to forecast, and therefore to influence, the conduct of large numbers of human beings organized in societies." G. Wallas, *The Great Society: A Psychological Analysis* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1920 [1914]), 20.

<sup>486</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *American Political Ideas*..., 227.

<sup>487</sup> Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1913)

[t]o understand a primary it is necessary to exert oneself [*sic*] to grasp an artificial and arbitrary system, but on the contrary it is better to relax a little, to think of what was going on in any group, and then allow for the political differentials.<sup>488</sup>

Although Merriam was well acquainted with American history, he restated his anti-historicism in his survey of voting incentives:

What are the situations under which men vote? A complete study involves an inquiry into the interests or motives both of voters and of non-voters, of the drives that animate them to vote, of the obstacles – physical, legal, social, or otherwise – that inhibit them from voting. This particular part of the investigation is limited to the side of inactivity or non-exercise of the voting rights. But, as often happens in the study of the abnormal or pathological, much light is thrown on the normal. The striking characteristics of the abnormal are often only the exaggeration, sometimes only slight, of the characteristics of the normal individual. So the traits of the non-voter are often the slight enlargement of the traits of the voter.<sup>489</sup>

Merriam's language was that of the psychologist and was replete with terms like "pathology", "traits", and "motives". To a certain extent, Merriam attempted to portray the psychology of voters by examining that of non-voters.

In his study of non-voting, Merriam distanced himself from historical and philosophical explanations. He made reference to its institutional and legal dimensions, but only in order to understand what sorts of conditioning might have been hindering potential voters. For example, he found that black voters in Chicago abstained from voting to a great extent because of psychological traumas they had known under the restrictive political and judicial systems in the Southern states<sup>490</sup>:

The recent arrivals from Tennessee, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina had vivid stories about the devices which had been used to disfranchise them in the South. While some of them were uncertain as to whether they would register as soon as

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<sup>488</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Primary Elections* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1908), 197.

<sup>489</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Non-Voting: Causes and Methods of Control...*, 1.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

they were eligible, most of them seemed to feel that it was a great privilege for Negroes to be able to vote.<sup>491</sup>

As he did for Black voters, Merriam surveyed the effect of women suffrage. Four years after the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment giving women the right to vote, Merriam published the results of his quest to understand how women felt about their new civic duty. He had discovered that among many women voting was far from gaining acceptance as a normal task:

Of the various disbeliefs in voting, disbelief in women's voting was the most frequently encountered. . . . One out of every nine female non-voters interviewed admitted that she had not adjusted herself as yet to the idea of women voting. The strength of this disbelief varied from a mild attitude of indifference toward women's civic responsibilities to a confirmed conviction that women should keep out of politics altogether.<sup>492</sup>

A firm believer in woman suffrage himself, Merriam considered this opinion aberrant in light of the long struggle women had led for the right to participate fully in politics.

The search for effective solutions to non-voting made up the last part of Merriam's inquiry into these problems, for Merriam did not believe that the work of social scientists ended with the publication of their essays or articles. Merriam's exhortations in this last part of the survey were explicit:

It is important to keep our eyes open to the large possibilities in the coordination of medicine, psychiatry, psychology and political science. Out of such a series of converging interests and disciplines there may come types of social diagnosis and prognosis that may have far-reaching consequences in human behavior, and which may vastly increase the possibility of intelligent social control.<sup>493</sup>

Yet Merriam could not find solutions to the problem of non-voting solely in institutional and legislative reforms. Such reforms, he realized, had to be accompanied by campaigns designed to change preconceptions and prejudices. Recognizing that negative voter attitudes towards

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<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>492</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>493</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "The Significance of Psychology for the Study of Politics", *American Political Science Review*, 18 (1924): 479.

government had to be supplanted with positive visions of the state as the sum of the actions of all its members, Merriam argued that

[t]here is reason to believe that many of the attitudes toward government disclosed in this investigation might be changed by a process of popular enlightenments such as might be carried on by the press, by leaders of opinion, by organization and associations persistently inculcating the doctrine of the governmental responsibility of the average man and average voter. . . . The citizen who believes that government is corrupt may be shown that the most effective course of action in such a case is participation in governmental affairs rather than the boycott of government. . . . The citizen who has a grievance against the government . . . may be shown that his abstention from participation in government does not help his situation but is likely to result in still less desirable conditions.<sup>494</sup>

Merriam's civic education program epitomized the solution to political indifference that was due to socio-psychological factors. He had approached the problem of non-voting through social psychology; he resolved it with political science.

#### *The Role of Feelings in Political Behaviour*

Merriam discussed fear, disbelief, impressions, attitudes, and opinions at great length. He regarded these subjective elements as the main determinants of political matters. As early as 1911, Merriam had begun viewing ideals as the moving force behind human actions. In an unpublished critique of an article by French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1857-1917), Merriam defined his vision of ideals:

[The human being] cannot constitute himself without creating an ideal. These ideals are simply the ideas in which social life comes to paint itself, so that they are the culminating points of its developments. . . . These ideals are not abstract cold intellectual representations denuded of all efficiency. They are essentially motors; for behind them

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<sup>494</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Non-Voting* ..., 243.

there are real and influential forces, natural forces, in consequence, whatever all morals and comparable to those ... in the rest of the universe.<sup>495</sup>

Although Merriam put science and the scientific method on a pedestal, he did not deny the operation of “irrational factors” in politics. On the contrary, he recognized irrational dimensions predominated in the political events:

We might have studies in the use of force in political situations, and its opposites passive resistance and noncooperation. . . . We might discuss the use of magic, superstition, and ceremonialism; we might inquire into propaganda; into the actual process involved in conference, so significant a function in modern affairs; or the maintenance of political morale; or leadership, obedience, cooperation; or the causes of war as well as its diplomatic history and law. We might conceivably develop a wide variety of similar types of political situations and processes, quite apart from the established . . . categories, and perhaps corresponding more closely to the facts of political life. The interesting thing about such studies is that while they are primarily political, they have an application to many other forms of social organization; and, if they could be further developed, they would tend to throw light upon many types of social processes.<sup>496</sup>

Here Merriam articulated how his political science dovetailed with the other social sciences, for the study of politics also comprised the perplexing task of accounting for non-quantifiable modes of behaviour.

### *Leadership*

Merriam’s analysis of political phenomena included a discussion of irrational factors, and one topic he particularly valued was leadership and obedience. After having investigated voter behaviour from the bottom up, Merriam tried to shed light on the relation between voters and leaders from the top down. Followers were merely those voters who elected leaders to public offices. The key concept in Merriam’s analysis of the psychology of leaders was the contact they had with their local, regional, and national constituencies. Merriam often saw political leaders

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<sup>495</sup> Charles Edward Merriam “Notes on Émile Durkheim, Jugements de valeur et jugements de Réalité, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*”, manuscript, 1911, box 136, folder 5, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 14.

<sup>496</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, Progress in Political Research, *American Political Science Review*, 20 (1926): 6.

more as social *rassembleurs* than as lawmakers. A leader did not necessarily need to embody popular feeling, but he or she had to be able to unify a population polarized by antagonistic interests. Merriam thus preferred the William Jennings Bryan to the Woodrow Wilson type of leader. He considered the archetypal American leader, however, to be Abraham Lincoln:

In personal contacts which are so large a part of the leader's equipment Lincoln was marvelously strong. The element of human sympathy in his make-up was evident and irresistible. Lincoln was not merely a genial person whose magnetism attracted individuals. . . . Men admired his ability and followed his plans, but more than that they grieved for him personally. They lavished on him sympathy and devotion such as few men receive.<sup>497</sup>

Merriam's glowing account of Lincoln emphasized the talent of the founder of the Republican Party for relating to the American people. His contact with them spoke more eloquently of his leadership than did his own personal qualities. It was evident to Merriam that great democratic leaders were those who rose from the common people, and who could maintain contact with voters. In a letter to fellow political scientist Leonard D. White (1891-1958) at the University of Chicago, Merriam detailed his method for assessing leadership:

For this purpose we have employed three methods; one, analytical study of biographical material . . . ; two, psychological analysis of leadership traits based on a study of leaders and non-leaders . . . ; three, analysis of one of a series of particular leadership situations. In this case the skills of the political leader as seen in his contact with audiences in political meetings.<sup>498</sup>

It was thus through this relationship with voters that leaders continued to carry out the popular mandate that they had obtained on Election Day.

Charles Merriam set down an exhaustive list of the key qualities common to leaders. Leadership was not a trait worthy of veneration only in former leaders. It was also an attribute that had to be cultivated and encouraged in future leaders.<sup>499</sup> "We should," Merriam declared,

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<sup>497</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Four American Party Leaders...*, 13.

<sup>498</sup> Charles Edward Merriam to Leonard D. White, Correspondence, May 26, 1928, box 42, folder 17, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

<sup>499</sup> He maintained that "we cannot hope to manufacture at will our Lincolns, Roosevelts, Wilsons and Bryans, but we may reasonably look forward to a more intelligent view of the whole problem of leadership, to more intelligent training of potential leaders, and to progressively intelligent popular discrimination in the selection and rejection of

“look for self-assertiveness, strength of conviction, tact, geniality, patience, decisiveness, judiciousness, sense of humor, reputation for goodness of heart, and all other pertinent elements in his constitution.”<sup>500</sup> Merriam even went so far as to enumerate the social skills leaders must apply in the public sphere: “skill with crowds, skill in dealing with superiors, inferiors, and equals, skill in bridging over various crises or tense moments in political relations.”<sup>501</sup> Leaders thus had to possess both individual and collective attributes. Individual personal qualities were not what made it possible to lead a community of citizens. Ultimately, Merriam proposed establishing a test of leadership in order to evaluate the fitness of prospective leaders for top positions in public service.<sup>502</sup> This project remained *lettre morte*, but it underscored how important Merriam considered the evaluation of past, present, and future leaders to be for a democratic system.

### *Critical Thought*

The capacity for critical thought among the electorate was, for Charles Merriam, the last fundamental prerequisite for a healthy democratic society. Its presence assured one of the most fundamental rights, if not the most capital: freedom of speech. Merriam was convinced that this crucial democratic right could not survive in an uneducated society whose members were unable to evaluate competing visions of the future advanced by potential leaders:

It is, of course, easier to organize the hates and prejudices and greed of mankind, to scatter the flames, to sow tares among the wheat while others sleep, to appeal to passion and prejudice than to organize human friendliness and the spirit of cooperation. But the history of modern civilization is the history of this slow process, and there is no reason to

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personnel of leadership, and in the circumscription of its metes and bounds.” *Four American Party Leaders...*, 100-1.

<sup>500</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, “Research Problems in the Field of Parties, Elections, and Leadership”, *American Political Science Review*, Suppl. 24 (1930): 37.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>502</sup> Merriam asked Robert M. Yerkes from the National Research Council whether “it [would] be impossible to work out a test of leadership, and more specifically, of political leadership, assuming of course leadership under certain social conditions, or possibly find common elements of leadership running through many or even all types of social organization?”, Charles Edward Merriam to Robert M. Yerkes, correspondence, October 14, 1921, box 43, folder 1 Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

believe that the limit of human intelligence in cooperation has yet been reached, or very nearly approximated.<sup>503</sup>

Intelligence was thus more than an individual gift; it was a social asset dispersed throughout society. The manifestation of intelligence could be discerned in the critical attitude that prevailed among the citizenry. The effect of public education, Merriam insisted, would be to raise the general level of intelligence and intellectual agility of the American people. Merriam agreed with Graham Wallas that education and morality were the safeguards of democracy.<sup>504</sup>

The idea of social intelligence was not peculiar to Charles Merriam. To a certain extent, the synthesis of social intelligence, to borrow Olivier Zunz's expression, was the driving idea behind political economy and the social sciences at the turn of the twentieth century. The study of society had as its object increasing the capacity for critical thought among the people. Merriam founded his anti-historical interpretation on his belief that individuals and communities could master their own futures in the present. The past must never halt the progress of society. In a very revealing passage, Merriam associated the absence of a long past with the freedom to act in the future:

Chicago is in one sense a free city, free in spirit if bound by the rusty chains of ancient law: as compared to European cities, we have no social heritage from which life has passed; no feudal castles fixing their hold upon the lake front; no slums that have lost their power to challenge human sympathy; no class whose forefathers also dwelt here in misery and without hope; no mass of timid souls accustomed to being herded by their betters, deferring instinctively to their masters or seeking others; no bosses we cannot break upon the political wheel whenever we have the will to act. In this sense Chicago is a free city, free to move forward when the word spreads and the way is clear.<sup>505</sup>

The absence of an oppressive past, Merriam believed, implied an unknown yet promising future:

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<sup>503</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *The Written Constitution and the Unwritten Attitude* (New York: Richard R. Smith Inc., 1931), 88-89.

<sup>504</sup> Wallas wrote that "those who would increase the margin of safety in our democracy must estimate, with no desire except to arrive at truth, both the degree to which the political strength of the individual citizen can, in any given time, be actually increased by moral and educational changes, and the possibility of preserving or extending or inventing such elements in the structure of democracy as may prevent the demand upon him being too great for his strength." Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (London: Constable and Co., 1914 [1908]), 240.

<sup>505</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, Spencer D. Parratt, and Albert Lepawsky, *The Government of the Metropolitan Region of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 193.

Social science and political science are urgently needed for the next great stage in the advancement of the human race. As custodians of the political science of our time, the responsibility rests upon us to exhaust every effort to bring the study of government in its various stages to the highest possible degree of perfection, to exhaust every effort to obtain effective knowledge of political forces, to bring to bear every resource of science at our command.<sup>506</sup>

Himself the personification of progressive faith in the future, Merriam envisioned the social sciences as the instrument for materializing these expectations.

#### *The Role of Sociology, Education, and Eugenics in Merriam's Political Science*

Merriam recognized that, even if social psychology held out the promise of thoroughly understanding how Americans thought and acted, he could not avoid bringing into play the oldest social science of his day: sociology. Early on, Merriam had challenged the individualist perspective. Societies could not be understood only by focussing on certain individuals, no matter how influential:

We deal not merely with individuals in studying the whole process, but with groups of individuals or societies of individuals; and we must deal with the relations between individuals and groups, and between groups. We must set relations which are as real and as capable of study as the reactions of the individual alone. We are studying tropisms of various types, or responses of various types, and these are social as well as individual.<sup>507</sup>

Actually, Merriam concentrated on social institutions such as the family and religious organizations. His colleagues at the University of Chicago stimulated his curiosity about sociology. Merriam relied on the methodology crafted by Robert Park, William Thomas, and Florian Zaniecky from their surveys of social problems.

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<sup>506</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Progress Report of Committee on Political Research of the American Political Science Association", *American Political Science Review*, 17 (1923): 295.

<sup>507</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "The Significance of Psychology for the Study of Politics", *American Political Science Review*, 18 (1924): 480.

Some men seem to fear science in politics. Nobody is afraid of science when he has a toothache or stomachache, or headache, or backache, and he is not afraid of science when you can show him how it connects up in his daily life.<sup>508</sup>

He borrowed from them their methods for conducting case studies, field work, and interviews. In his survey of voting patterns, Merriam and his students approached Chicagoans on the street, asking them a series of questions about their political and voting behaviour. Charles Merriam not only justified these methods to business managers, but he also urged them to give serious consideration to the conclusions social scientists had drawn.

Education was one means to alter social behaviour. Another potential approach was eugenics. Merriam's description of the role of eugenics conflicted with his faith in the social sciences to transform society. As discussed earlier, Merriam was closer to social than to biological determinism. Nevertheless, in his most best known essay, *New Aspects of Politics*, he maintained that

[w]e are very rapidly approaching a time when it may be necessary and possible to decide not merely what types of law we wish to enact, but what types of person we wish to develop, either by the process of education or of eugenics.<sup>509</sup>

In the same way that education fostered social intelligence, eugenics, in Merriam's opinion, enhanced collective intelligence. As he saw it, social factors and biological environments were not inimical and in fact offered grounds for optimism about the future:

Control is likely in the future to reach a point where it may be possible to breed whatever type of human being it is desired to have. Then we could breed morons and heavy handed half-wits if we wanted them. . . . The point is that such world is on the way, and that it is part of the duty of serious students of government to look forward and anticipate the situations that will influence mankind when that day of control comes. What manner of race do we want? Democrats, aristocrats, a state based on morons, equality or graded inequality?<sup>510</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "The Need for Business Executives in City Government", *City Manager Magazine*, 8 (1926): 116.

<sup>509</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *New Aspects of Politics*..., 21.

<sup>510</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-7.

In such a world, social intelligence and political values would be controlled by both biologists and educators. Merriam intended to inculcate biologists and educators with values he derived from his political science. They, in turn, would pass these values on to future leaders. Merriam was not out to control society itself, but rather those who would manage it in the future. And although he was also aware of the growing specialization among disciplines, he continued to believe in fundamental values that, to his way of thinking, were common to all scientific disciplines:

The problem presented is a double one, dealing on the one side with the development of the group intelligence, and on the other with the development of special scientific advances; for unless these two are related, little will be gained in the long run.<sup>511</sup>

Social scientists thus had the dual advantage of being professionally immersed in society and at the same time specializing in multiple aspects of human behaviour.

### *Statistics*

Social scientists had to be careful not to be distracted from their joint undertaking to advance group intelligence through specialized disciplines. Merriam, who was less seduced by statistics than were Mitchell and van Kleeck, had foreseen this danger in the works of statisticians. Social statistics could “socialize” or materialize the impressions of political scientists.<sup>512</sup> Accurate data derived by statisticians also substantiated the conclusions reported by social experts. In the struggle to establish a more professional public service in Chicago, Merriam, like Mitchell and van Kleeck, advocated the use of statistics as the most appropriate tool for cleaning up public administration because it brought professional standards to city management:

Operative statistics of cities are still extremely imperfect, and are open to very material improvement (election figures, criminal and judicial). . . . Beyond all this, however, there is need of careful study of the question, to what extent and in what directions quantitative measurement of municipal operations is possible, useful, and feasible. . . . Clearly

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>512</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, “The Present State of the Study of Politics”, *American Political Science Review*, 15 (1921): 179.

municipal statistics is not a fixed quantity, but a developing instrument of observation, growing with the growth of scientific observation and analysis.<sup>513</sup>

Nevertheless, Merriam did not go as far as Mitchell, who maintained that only through the analysis of quantitative data would social conditions change. Merriam was explicit concerning his reservations: "No one expects a magic rule to rise from the maze of figures," he maintained. "The 'mystic numbers' have lost their sway over us."<sup>514</sup> The peril of statistics arose from concentrating too much attention on their preparation, structure, and dissemination, while forgetting their fundamental purpose: statistical analysis was primarily a means for validating broader conclusions. The introduction of new social values thus could not begin by collecting statistics because numbers and figures held no meaning if they did not support arguments.<sup>515</sup> For Merriam, statistics did not express values; social scientists did that. Social scientists could not retreat from the social responsibility they had as compilers of quantitative information. In his writings, for example, Merriam scarcely used statistics, instead relying on field work, interviews, and case studies to support his conclusions.

### *Anthropology*

Merriam was also curious about the research anthropologists were doing. In 1926, Merriam met the British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942). In a letter to Beardsley Ruml (1894-1960), he reported a discussion he had had with Malinowski: "He is the first anthropologist I have met who says he wishes to change anthropology from an antiquarian study to some relation with living social interests, and who wishes to tie up with biology, psychology, and other social studies."<sup>516</sup> Besides anthropology, Merriam also developed and pursued interests in criminology, linguistics, law, economics, and industrial research. The Chicago political scientist did not, however, accord history a central role. He viewed it as a traditional discipline needing to be freed from its conservatism. Nor did Merriam consider history a full-fledged social science; instead, he viewed it as primarily a reactionary, nineteenth-century discipline.

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<sup>513</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "The Next Step in the Organization of Municipal Research", *National Municipal Review*, (1922): 277.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>515</sup> "Statistics, to be sure, like logic can be made to prove anything." Charles Edward Merriam, "The Present State of the Study of Politics", *American Political Science Review*, 15 (1921): 179.

<sup>516</sup> Charles Edward Merriam to Beardsley Ruml, correspondence, April 24, 1926, box 39, folder 9, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

### *Progressive Social Sciences vs. New Deal Social Sciences*

Defining social intelligence and modern values was the prime objective of the social sciences in Merriam's mind. Promulgating a revised system of ethics based on a scientifically oriented intelligence would imbue the American people, in the not-too-distant future, with new values. Although Merriam's methods pretended to neutrality and objectivity, the premises on which he based his conclusions leaned toward the rejuvenation of social cohesion and equity, political participation, free discussion, and, finally, critical thinking. Through his political and social sciences, Merriam "intellectualized" the social reality and the thinking of Americans. To this extent, Merriam's thought exemplified the transition from late-nineteenth-century political economy to post-New Deal social science. Political economy had been, in the late nineteenth century, a moral field anchored in Enlightenment philosophy.

The social sciences in the post-New Deal period, by contrast, were scientific disciplines aimed at establishing social politics. It was the generation of Merriam, Mitchell, van Kleeck, and others that bridged the two periods, marking the decline of classical political economy and the rise of the social sciences. Trained in the United States and Europe when the morals of political economy were dominant during the late 1890s, these same social scientists became the proponents of social politics in government in the 1930s and afterwards. The evolution of Merriam's, Mitchell's, and van Kleeck's thought embodies this shift.

Before discussing Charles Merriam's experience as a politician, I would like to mention an article found in Merriam's papers at the University of Chicago. The article, written by the sociologist Charles A. Ellwood (1873-1946) of Duke University and published in *Social Forces* in 1931, sheds considerable light on Merriam. In it Ellwood pinpointed the fundamental link between the social sciences and ethics:

The social sciences deal with moral values, because moral values are social values, and are as much facts of our social experience as any other facts. The social sciences are therefore in a broader sense ethical – that is to say, they deal with values.<sup>517</sup>

Ellwood then brought to light the direct impact of such a statement on the concrete problems social scientists faced:

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<sup>517</sup> Charles A. Ellwood, "Scientific Method in Sociology", *Social Forces*, October 10 (1931): 20.

It is scarcely possible for the social scientist to avoid making relative judgments of the socially desirable and the socially undesirable. Thus in dealing with such problems as crime, unemployment, and industrial depression, it would be a very inhuman and sterile social science which indicates nothing as to what is socially desirable and what is socially undesirable. It seems to many of us that it would be much better to recognize frankly the ethical implications of the social sciences and to recognize ethics as a social science closely related to all the other social sciences.<sup>518</sup>

Ellwood thus found no distinction between social facts and social morals because a fact could not be separated from the judgement it engendered.

While completing the final report of Recent Social Trends, Merriam expressed convictions similar to those of Ellwood. He affirmed, for example that “like the atmosphere, morals [*sic*] is not noticed until it begins to disappear.”<sup>519</sup> Merriam detected a growing gap between progress and morals in specific contexts:

The spiritual values of life are among the most profound of those affected by technological and organizational developments. They are the slowest to change even to meet altered conditions. Moral guidance is peculiarly difficult when the future is so different from the past, and all the more acute if morals and religion are separated. So we have prohibition and easy divorce side by side; strict censorship and new types of plays and literature; scientific research and laws forbidding the teaching of the doctrine of evolution; contraceptive information outlawed but embraced. All these are illustrations of the varying rates of progress and their effect in raising problems.<sup>520</sup>

Although Merriam was not a strict moralist who venerated past values as they were usually imagined, he was caught between scientific and ethical approaches to understanding society. Unable to define a new code of ethics, Merriam saw the solution to these problems in the discipline he had cherished above all others since his youth: politics.

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<sup>518</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>519</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, “Untitled” circa June 26, 1933, box 270, folder 2, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 10.

<sup>520</sup> CEM, “Notes”, circa 1932, box 270 folder 3, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 10

### Charles Merriam's Politics: Strategic War Waged with Many Weapons

By comparison with van Kleeck and Mitchell, Charles Merriam had by far the greatest familiarity with and command of politics. He was quick to grasp the difference between the sedate ambiance of social science and the clashes that attended actual political manoeuvring. Indeed, he could be described as a politician-political scientist whose acquaintance with politics as a field of scholarly inquiry complemented the practice of politics that assumed a more and more prominent role in his life. Moreover, throughout his political career he strove to implement his intellectual breakthroughs. Whereas populist politics never held much appeal for him, political experts played a central role in his vision. Yet Merriam, like many progressives of the period, was highly critical of partisanship and its links with corruption.

Merriam made his first foray into the political arena in 1897 when, as a student at Columbia, he campaigned for Seth Low (1850-1916) for mayor of New York. With his friend James Harvey Robinson (1863-1936), he participated in political rallies supporting Low's candidacy. A former mayor of Brooklyn, Low was well known at Columbia in the late 1890s. Low, who instigated the move of Columbia from midtown Manhattan to Morningside Heights, vigorously challenged the usurpation of New York City politics by Tammany Hall. Defeated in 1897, he won office four years later running against incumbent Mayor Richard Croker (1841-1922). In that campaign, Low put forward ideas that would later exert a dominant influence on Merriam's political career, such as the promotion of public education, the fight against corruption, and the redress of a judicial system plagued by political favouritism and criminal collusion. Low's campaign also marked Merriam's début in urban politics. Merriam would later, in the 1920s and 1930s, refer to this period as a pivotal one for his career.

In 1902, the year after his graduation from Columbia College in New York City, Charles Edward Merriam returned to Chicago to help cleanse the city's institutions of corruption. In the years that followed, Merriam published many articles in the *Chicago Tribune* about illegal practices by politicians. Merriam's muckraking years, between 1902 and 1904, were another formative period in his growing political involvement. He gained a reputation for being a progressive leader in the Midwest capital. Later, Merriam would argue that political scientists had to become familiar with the methods of journalism if they hoped to predict the outcomes of political contests:

One of the tests of a science is the ability to predict. Political scientists have left the prediction of election results to newspaper men and journalists who have usually no special training in statistics and in the accurate handling of data. The success of the rough and ready methods of the journalists in this field should be encouraging to the political scientists. A definite attempt should be made to systematize the procedure for the taking of straw votes.<sup>521</sup>

Merriam's muckraking period also made him cognizant of the growing power of the media as vehicles for propaganda. Propaganda would become, in the 1910s and 1920s, a key dimension of Merriam's politics. But it was Merriam's experience with journalism that gave him visibility and brought him popularity in this turbulent period in Chicago.

Merriam found the municipal structure in Chicago to be inconceivably chaotic, especially given that cities of similar size (e.g., New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Cleveland, Detroit) had already undertaken restructuring projects. He was well aware of the municipal charter reforms underway in these cities; mayors and aldermen were consolidating the small power of local agencies into the central power of city councils.

Merriam intended to realize the same consolidation in Chicago. For him, an important feature of the charter was "the granting of broad powers of local government to the city of Chicago", the absence of which had plagued the city "[f]or many years" during which it "had suffered from lack of local authority".<sup>522</sup> Two years after having been hired as a professor of political economy at the University of Chicago, Merriam sought to gain greater direct influence. In 1909, he ran for office and was elected a Chicago alderman.

During his aldermanic career, which was to last ten years, Merriam participated on many reform commissions. For example, in 1911 he headed a commission on city expenditures. Its inquiry was undertaken in the aftermath of the post-charter referendum, when questions arose about the fate of the eight local bodies that retained the power to levy taxes, in addition to the taxation authority held by the Chicago City Council and the Illinois State Legislature. In the early twentieth century, taxes were mostly an urban and, to a lesser degree, a state matter. Taxation powers in Chicago were in the hands of city and local administrations. How the

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<sup>521</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Memorandum on Political Research", undated, box 119, folder 2, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 10.

<sup>522</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "The Chicago Charter Convention", *American Political Science Review*, 2 (November 1907): 4-5. On the charter referendum in Chicago, see *infra*. p. 7.

municipal budget was drawn up and managed was the primary interest of the commissioners. Merriam and his colleagues decided it was necessary to push for the permanent establishment of such a commission.<sup>523</sup>

Merriam was shocked by low standards of work among municipal workers:

The city employee is likely to get the idea that his best hope for advancement in the city's service lies in the strength of his political backing, rather than the faithfulness and efficiency of his performance of his official duties.<sup>524</sup>

The absence of systematic procedures for spending taxpayers' money also encouraged corruption:

The three great sources of loss are outright graft or stealing, political favoritism, and lack of proper systematic [sic]. The dividing line between these three is not always clearly marked, and they very often shade into each other. It is an easy step from a lax system to political favoritism, and it is an easy step from political favoritism to plain graft.<sup>525</sup>

The commission's inquiry served to familiarize Merriam with the perils of governing through weak political institutions. His vision of unitary municipal sovereignty and power was closely tied to his political experience with chaotic urban organization.

Even as Merriam was urging urban reform in Chicago, he was active in the Progressive Party, founded by Theodore Roosevelt after his failure to recapture the Republican presidential nomination in 1912. Merriam backed Roosevelt without reservation. In his own campaign to win the Republican mayoral nomination in Chicago, Merriam presented himself as the Republican progressive leader. His candidacy brought him into contact with some of the leading progressive figures of the Republican Party in 1911 and early 1912. In this context, he began corresponding with the Republican governor of Pennsylvania Gifford Pinchot, with whom Merriam and his wife were to develop a friendship that would last many years. In a letter to Pinchot after Roosevelt's 1912 defeat, Merriam proposed to adopt a different strategy to press for progressive measures:

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<sup>523</sup> He maintained that "the investigation of the City Expenditures Commission demonstrated the need of some effective and permanent organization – public or private – which should inquire into the methods of public business in Chicago and offer constructive suggestions with reference thereto." Charles Edward Merriam, "The Work and Accomplishments of the Chicago Commission on City Expenditures", *The City Club Bulletin*, Wednesday August 16, 1911, 195.

<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

I am very strongly of the opinion that we should push forward our program for social and industrial justice by specific bills which will show exactly what we intend to do, by financial statements showing the cost of these measures and how the cost will be met, and by a vigorous propaganda in which the conditions to be relieved are far more vividly described than they have thus far been in our literature or speeches. Both the Republicans and Democrats are likely to adopt platforms which are apparently near progressive, and unless we differentiate ourselves sharply from them we will not be able to preserve our party identity. The spirit and sentiment of our Progressive voters is clearly different from that either of the Republicans or the Democratic group and our platform should clearly represent that difference.<sup>526</sup>

Besides Governor Pinchot of Pennsylvania, Merriam also advised California Governor Hiram Johnson (1866-1945), later a candidate at the Republican Convention of 1920.<sup>528</sup>

In addition, Merriam offered his counsel to Theodore Roosevelt himself during his 1912 campaign. In an eloquent letter to the former President of the United States, Merriam laid out his vision of leadership to Roosevelt. The contact with Roosevelt led Merriam to reflect on leaders and leadership.<sup>529</sup> Interestingly, Merriam did not rely heavily on academic works on leaders, such as the classic study by the German sociologist Max Weber.<sup>530</sup> Instead, the Chicago political scientist observed leaders in action. He explained to Roosevelt the necessity of having a charismatic leader able to communicate ideas and unite people behind him. He argued to Roosevelt that

[w]e cannot hope to gather the Liberals of all parties under our banner unless they are absolutely convinced of the ideals, purposes and methods of our leaders, and I say respectfully and regretfully that I do not think Mr. [George] Perkins commands the public

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<sup>526</sup> CEM to Gifford Pinchot, Correspondence, November 1912, box 21, folder 7, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

<sup>528</sup> CEM to Hiram Johnson, Correspondence, June 27, 1917, box 18 folder 2, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

<sup>529</sup> See the discussion on leadership on pages 30 to 32.

<sup>530</sup> Merriam did not use Max Weber's classic of 1919, Max Weber, *Le Savant et le Politique* (Paris: Plon, 1953 [1919])

confidence to such an extent that he should be made the mouthpiece of the Progressive movement.<sup>531</sup>

Similarly, Merriam's commentary on the future of the Progressive party introduced his notion of leadership. Obviously, his ideas were less refined than in his scholarly studies, but his experiences and ideas were clearly linked.

### *Political Duty of Leaders*

In the early 1910s, Merriam came to view the role of leaders as very close to that of professional experts. Experts and social scientists, Merriam believed, needed to be directly involved in politics as leaders. In a reply to Merriam, his former supervisor William A. Dunning told him how he "appreciates [his] expression of enthusiasm respecting the prospects of the scholars in politics."<sup>532</sup> Merriam epitomized a political archetype prevalent among the Progressive elite of the 1910s that linked the fight against corruption in politics to the disinterested, professional ambition of experts and social scientists who often intervened in the public sphere. The pre-war political tenor did not dispose Merriam to consider experts as being well suited to political advising. Social scientists, by contrast, could become leaders in partisan affairs such as his friend Harold L. Ickes (1874-1952) who, in 1912, became an active member of the Progressive party. This nuance is paramount for understanding the role Merriam ascribed to the political functions of leaders and experts. In the end, it was in part this view of experts that prompted Merriam to pursue the mayoral nomination at the Republican Convention.

Merriam requested that experts learn the techniques that newspapers and advertisements employed to get their messages across to the public. Propaganda and social education went hand in hand in the role he saw experts as filling. They had to shape the thinking of voters in order to convince them to support their progressive programs. Merriam endeavoured to implement this concept during his term as Chicago alderman. But it was in Italy, where Merriam spent the first two years of World War I, that he gained the most useful experience with political

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<sup>531</sup> Charles Edward Merriam to Theodore Roosevelt, correspondence, November 19, 1912, box 22, folder 1, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 2.

<sup>532</sup> William A. Dunning to Charles Edward Merriam, correspondence, March 6, 1908, box 15, folder 18, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

<sup>534</sup> On Merriam's experience in Italy during World War I, see Ido Oren, "Uncritical Portrayals of Fascist Italy and of Iberic-Latin Dictatorships in American Political Science", *Society for Comparative Study of Society and History*, 42:1 (2000): 87-117.

propaganda.<sup>534</sup> In 1915 and 1916, he worked with the U.S. embassy there to bolster the Italian war effort against German armies. He propagandized the reasons for fighting against the Triple Alliance. Surprisingly, Merriam's support for the war left him at odds with many of his Chicago friends, including Jane Addams and Clarence Darrow. Even before the United States officially entered the conflict, Merriam pressed for greater American involvement in Europe. Merriam's papers contain very few documents that deal with his work in Italy during the "Great War". Yet his Italian work merely applied the experience Merriam had gained from the propaganda program he had realized in Chicago. His writings after World War I betrayed a thorough understanding of the role that emotions and impressions played in politics, which he later exploited to full effect in carrying out his political agenda.

In 1914, before leaving for Rome the following year, Merriam had chaired an important investigating body that looked into crime and the judicial system in Chicago, the Council Committee on Crime. Merriam's investigation uncovered the social origins of criminality and brought Merriam face to face with the disruptive effects that low standards of living had on the lives of the poor:

The presence of economic conditions has an enormous influence in producing certain types of crime. Insanitary housing and working conditions, unemployment, wages inadequate to maintain a human standard of living, inevitably produce the crushed or distorted bodies and minds from which the army of crime is recruited. The crime problem is not merely a question of police and court, it leads to the broader problems of public sanitation, education, home care, a living wage and industrial democracy.<sup>535</sup>

The ideas expressed in this passage are entirely consonant with progressive thought. It is, however, essential to remember that Merriam was educated in the intellectual tradition of legal and theoretical interpretation. In the statement above, Merriam employed for the first time certain notions forged by social determinists for whom problems like criminality were due not only to individual misconduct but also to collective social dysfunction. Another first for Merriam was his suggestion that education was one solution to social problems. Still, criminality would continue to fascinate Merriam for the next fifteen years. In the late 1920s, Merriam restated these

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<sup>535</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Findings and Recommendations of the Chicago Council Committee on Crime", *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 6 (1915): 354.

same convictions about the origin of crime in the scholarly circles to which he belonged.<sup>536</sup> Indeed, throughout his political career on the City Council, social problems and their practical solutions preoccupied Merriam.

After World War I, Merriam began to disengage from partisan politics. At first, he collaborated with a past and future political foe, William Hale Thompson (1869-1944), four-term mayor of Chicago. In 1916, Thompson invited Merriam to participate in a committee investigating the fiscal status of the city. Merriam reluctantly agreed to participate but accepted with “the liberty to make certain suggestions which under other circumstances I should not have been at liberty to formulate.”<sup>537</sup> In the late 1910s, although Merriam devoted a lot of his energy to his public position in Chicago, he gradually disengaged from politics. I have not found an explicit reason for his resignation from political office. It was probably due to the combined impact of the political domination of William Hale Thompson and Merriam’s advancement at the University of Chicago and his more extensive participation in the American Political Science Association and the Social Sciences Research Council. As director of the American Political Science Association, Charles Merriam had played an active role in the movement that led to the establishment of the Social Science Research Council in 1922-23. He periodically met Wesley Mitchell and Mary van Kleeck at gatherings organized by the SSRC in the 1920s. Merriam was decidedly more successful in academic politics than in city politics.

#### *The Prolific Years: The 1920s*

Indeed, the 1920s were the most prolific period of Merriam’s intellectual life. Between 1920 and 1929, he published eight essays, including a revision of essays written in the 1900s and 1910s. His production of articles was also impressive. He distanced himself from political life both in Chicago and on the national political scene. He remained keen on politics as an object of research but not as an arena where he played a role himself.

This period was a pivotal one insofar as his conception of experts and social scientists in politics was concerned. Although he did not advocate that social scientists abdicate political

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<sup>536</sup> “We must deal with housing, with recreation and the use of leisure time, with basic economic situations – all of these are closely related to the solution of the problem of politics and police and crime, for it is out of these maladjustments that the criminal cases spring in large number.” Charles Edward Merriam, “The Police, Crime and Politics”, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 146 (1929): 118.

<sup>537</sup> Charles Edward Merriam to William Hale Thompson, correspondence, December 13, 1916, box 23, folder 3, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

involvement, he did explicitly press intellectuals to take active roles in civic matters. In 1931, for example, Merriam affirmed that

[a] discussion of the influence of various groups on the formation of civic cohesion in modern times would be very incomplete without some reference to the class known as the intellectuals; if class they may properly be termed. In contemporary states, both western and oriental alike, these intelligentsia are likely to be found actively engaged in the task of organizing national memories and hopes around a framework of a political structure. History, literature, art, ideology are woven together in an attempt to develop a political interest and loyalty, centering around the national state.<sup>538</sup>

The role of social scientists, then, remained a crucial one. Still, the meaning of this role had changed since Merriam's years at the Chicago City Council.

In the mid-1920s, Merriam acknowledged that leaders could not be "produced" in series. Of course, accomplished leaders, in Merriam's opinion, were those who were the best equipped to deal with the challenges of leadership, which also required extensive educational preparation. But as his comparison between Woodrow Wilson and William Jennings Bryan had revealed, the most educated leader was not necessarily the most qualified to lead. On the one hand, Merriam understood "expert" to mean "a person of ascertained competence having specific training or experience for general or special service in the state, which approaches their employment from the technical or professional point of view".<sup>539</sup> On the other hand,

[t]he leader is . . . the product of his group, having the ability to express more clearly than others the ideals or purposes of his group, and in addition, the ability to present a convincing program that will promise the ultimate success of the plans or aims of the society.<sup>540</sup>

Experts were trained under definite curricula whereas leaders usually emerged from the populace once they had developed the skills necessary to succeed in the public sphere. In the late 1920s, social scientists did not need to be leaders themselves to be politically influential.

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<sup>538</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *The Making of Citizens* . . . , p. 83.

<sup>539</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "The Role of the Expert in Modern Administration", manuscript, undated, box 119, folder 13, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

<sup>540</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Leaders and Personality", manuscript, undated, box 119 folder 14, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

If they did not hold positions of leadership, experts became advisors in social politics. Merriam's own political career revealed such a shift. In the late 1920s, President Herbert Hoover sought Merriam's expertise in government matters. In this capacity, Merriam joined many of his social science colleagues from the Social Science Research Council. He collaborated with Mitchell, a close advisor to Hoover from the early 1920s on; William Ogburn (1886-1959), a colleague at the University of Chicago; Howard Odum (1884-1954), a professor at the University of North Carolina; Robert Lynd (1897-1949), a sociologist just finishing his renowned *Middletown*; and a host of other social scientists from anthropology, psychology, and related disciplines. To a certain extent, the atmosphere of Hoover's commissions mimicked that of the SSRC.

In the spring of 1929, Hoover set up the Commission on Recent Social Trends. The newly elected president asked Mitchell and Merriam to chair this national survey. Merriam enthusiastically accepted Hoover's invitation. Hoover had formed the commission in the hopeful atmosphere that prevailed after the report of the Commission on Recent Economic Change. The Depression, however, was to influence the approach that Merriam and his colleagues took.

#### *The Effects on Merriam of the Depression*

Merriam's reaction to the economic crisis differed from that of Mitchell and van Kleeck. He experienced it in a more moderate way than Mitchell and van Kleeck did. Contrary to Mitchell's morose mood and van Kleeck's radical turn-over, Merriam realized how timid the attempts to prevent the crisis before the 1930s had been. Social scientists in general and political scientists in particular reaffirmed their intent to act responsibly when making political decisions. The economic depression only served to confirm the need politicians had for social science expertise:

The science of human behavior is multiplying the possibilities and the realms of governmental control a thousand times. The physician, the biologist, the educator, social scientists are discovering new characteristics of human behavior hitherto unknown to mankind. New forms of control and new forms of human release are constantly being discovered, and many more are ahead.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Reducing Governmental Costs", *Oklahoma Municipal Review*, June-July 6-7 (1932):153.

More than ever, the future now seemed to lie in the hands of politicians. In fact, Merriam's belief in the necessity of strong government grew even stronger after the economic crisis took hold:

Government is not a pest or a blight or a necessary evil—it has an important and real function to perform in modern life. . . . The continuing denunciation of the uselessness of government and its agents will tend to discredit the public service at the very moment when it might well be built up and made more serviceable to the community.<sup>542</sup>

Here Merriam, although only restating certain ideas he had already expressed in the 1910s and 1920s, showed himself to be perfectly in sync with the liberal spirit that was emerging in the wake of the economic cataclysm of the early 1930s.

The purpose Merriam saw the social sciences as filling, however, betrayed a crucial change in his attitude. In the 1910s and 1920s, social scientists had attempted to introduce new values through social reform in the country. In the 1930s, the role of social scientists as public advisors confined them to amassing the facts required to contextualize and support the adoption of social policies. For example, even though Merriam had great hopes for the Commission on Recent Social Trends, he still clarified at its outset that the conclusions it would draw from its survey could not replace political decisions. In 1932, he argued that “[s]cientifically ascertained knowledge of social trends, such as the committee has aimed to present, is no substitute for social action. But such knowledge is an indispensable basis for intelligent planning.”<sup>543</sup>

This caveat from a former politician made clear the shift in the role he was now assigning to experts. Experts did not enact policies; they merely filled in the background required for political decisions to be contextualized and for social policies to be legislated. At the same time, the former member of public commissions in Chicago demanded the freedom to operate independently of political agendas, including those of the President himself.

Merriam's need for independence came out clearly in a memorandum that he wrote to Herbert Hoover's advisor Edward Eyre Hunt two years after beginning the survey:

My position [is] that if the President asked to see the work in progress, he was entitled to. But that it would be better not to submit piecemeal or unfinished reports to the President

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<sup>542</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, “Boycott of Government Costly”, *Public Management*, 14 (1932): 765.

<sup>543</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, “Draft of Introduction”, draft, 1932, box 271, folder 2, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 4.

for the following reasons: 1) that the President would get a better impression of the comprehensive work of the Committee, if he first saw the Report and the conclusions as a whole; 2) that the President would be in the most favorable situation, if he could say that he had seen none of the Reports until they came to him as the finished product of the technicians selected for the task; 3) that the committee would be saved the embarrassment arising from any suggestions for change, to which it could not agree, or from being charged with having made such changes, even if in fact not true.<sup>544</sup>

Merriam's categorical refusal of any kind of interference from Hoover and his advisors would not be his last. He made a similar move in 1932 when the survey was finished and the Committee was debating the date of publication for the final report. Certain social scientists expected the report to be published before the presidential election in order to make its conclusions a campaign issue. Merriam, however, resisted the ploy made to co-opt *Recent Social Trends* by Republican opportunists, pleading that political partisanship would only lower the likelihood that the report's conclusions would be widely applied. If *Recent Social Trends* were associated with the Republican Party, the work might well later be discredited under a Democratic administration. In the proceedings of the committee chair, Merriam confided, in 1931, that

I am not a public relations counsel at all, but I think you would have to wait until you have a more favorable time, which I think would not come after in November some time [sic], when the political situation has quieted and the economic pangs are not so sharp.<sup>545</sup>

The three years during which *Recent Social Trends* operated altered the path taken by the social sciences in the 1920s. The early years of the 1920s represented the apex of social science, when it sought to found a new ethics of social intelligence. Then the social sciences assumed a moral approach that aimed at bridging the gap between new social conditions and enduring values. Social scientists undertook their work on Hoover's commissions with this very outcome in mind. In the definitive conclusion of *Recent Social Trends*, Merriam maintained that

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<sup>544</sup> Charles Edward Merriam to Edward Eyre Hunt, correspondence, December 10, 1932, box 32, folder 7, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

<sup>545</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Proceedings of the Committee of Recent Social Trends*, minutes recordings, December 31, 1931, box 268, folder 2, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago. 34.

[g]overnmental corruption and incompetence and lack of central direction are not comprehensible away from the social and economic environment of which they are a part. . . . If economic lines of action and economic and other codes of ethics were perfectly clear the task of government would be far simpler. Social planning presupposes a readiness and capacity for the organization of social intelligence outside as well as inside the realm of the political.<sup>546</sup>

Here Merriam reaffirmed the ideal of social studies in the 1920s. In the private proceedings of the committee, however, Merriam showed considerably less confidence in the ultimate achievement of the survey. His disillusionment with the work done in the preceding three years, as expressed in many unpublished meeting minutes was palpable. In one such report in December 1931, Merriam remarked that

[y]ou would have to focus on a more definite committee report. The committee need not necessarily recommend anything but unless you sharpen that up into something less than thirty chapters and fifteen monographs I think . . . it will be nothing more than an interesting enterprise which the professors undertook in a period of tremendous social need.<sup>547</sup>

He then added that

I am not able to explain to my friends highbrow or lowbrow, just what the purpose of the commission is by any preliminary statement. I can explain it to them most elaborately on different levels of wordy discourse, but I don't know whether they are going to know when all these reports are put out . . . . Everybody will say, "of course there has always been change, the world has been changing all the time, but it is changing more rapidly". Yes, but what is the nature of that change or what is the relation of that change to the problems of our social, economic and political life? You really run into a very fundamental difficulty in that.<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Government and Society" in *Recent Social Trends in the United States* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1933): 1537.

<sup>547</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Proceedings of the Committee of Recent Social Trends*, minutes recordings, December 31, 1931, box 268, folder 2, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 34.

<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

In February 1932, during another meeting of the committee, Merriam asserted bluntly that

[w]e are operating a little blindly now because we obviously don't know ourselves just how this is going to shape up. We cannot know. In fact, we should not know until we get a chance to examine all these data. Then I think something is going to come out of it.<sup>549</sup>

Thus, hope remained, but the impact the commission was to have was not as obvious as its members had thought it would be in the 1920s.

In 1932, Merriam still believed in the necessity of adjusting the code of conduct according to new industrial and social standards. Indeed, it remained a fundamental problem for him. But reports and essays by social scientists, he concluded, were not necessarily the most appropriate solutions. Besides, the moral momentum of the social sciences showed signs of faltering in the early 1930s. The Chicago political scientist observed that "the church has lost greatly in education and social work. What has been the effect on religious views of disintegrating and reintegrating ethical standards in other fields?"<sup>550</sup> He further stressed that "[a flexible ethics] comes out in urban sexual and industrial society. There are no satisfactory standards of conduct laid down. There is here a connection with technical and economic changes."<sup>551</sup> The need for a new ethical system remained, but Merriam was now much less certain that the social sciences could provide one.

Paradoxically, the social sciences fairly burst into prominence in government affairs under Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Mitchell, Merriam, and van Kleeck were active in FDR's initiatives to bring the social sciences to bear on government policy. As early as 1929, while governor of New York, Roosevelt had been an admirer of Merriam's work at the University of Chicago, particularly his ideas about creating public data clearing houses. Roosevelt mentioned to his Illinois counterpart, Governor Frank O. Lowden (1861-1943), that he was

interested in the suggestion of President Hall and Dr. Merriam. There is no question in my mind of the need for some kind of central clearing house of information to be used,

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<sup>549</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Proceedings of the Committee of Recent Social Trends*, minutes recordings, February 13, 1932, box 268, folder 4, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 91.

<sup>550</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, *Proceedings of the Committee of Recent Social Trends*, minutes recordings, May 15-16, 1932, box 268, folder 11, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 17.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

first for the guidance of State Executives and Legislators, and, secondly, for the dissemination of data to the public.<sup>552</sup>

Once in the White House, Roosevelt endorsed Hoover's approval of the work Merriam and Mitchell were doing. In 1934, he assigned them to work with his uncle Frederick Delano at the newly created National Planning Board. Merriam viewed this experience as an occasion to reiterate his long-standing aim of eliminating waste and making social and economic management more efficient. In a letter signed by Merriam, Mitchell, and Delano, they recognized that their role now involved fixing social, economic, and industrial problems in order to overhaul a malfunctioning system:

Besides 'A plan for Planning', we had expected to include in our report to you a second section, containing suggestions concerning the most effective way of developing a long-range program for public works, Federal, state and local. In compliance with the president's decision, however, we are turning to the first task assigned to the National Resources Board, that of preparing by December 1 a report upon the most effective utilization of land and water resources in their social, economic, and governmental relations.<sup>553</sup>

A concern for efficiency had thus supplanted earlier preoccupations with ethics and social intelligence as the ultimate role social scientists were to play in the public sector.

### Conclusion

Efficiency and the war on social and economic waste, of course, did not suddenly materialize in 1934 as the creation of Roosevelt and his brain trust. It had also been on the mind of Herbert Hoover, Wesley Mitchell, Charles Merriam, Mary van Kleeck, and many other social scientists throughout the 1920s and even before. Yet during the 1920s, the social sciences had been more than a social engineering tool; they also fostered ferment in prevailing codes of conduct from new ideas about education, social justice, and collective intelligence.

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<sup>552</sup> Franklin Delano Roosevelt to Frank O. Lowden, correspondence, November 20, 1929, box 122 folder 1, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

<sup>553</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, Wesley Clair Mitchell, and Frederick A. Delano to Harold L. Ickes, correspondence, June 27, 1934, box 169, folder 8, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago.

But the cult of efficiency in socio-economic policy gradually replaced the project of modernizing social ethics. By the 1930s, the social sciences had become little more than a tool exploited by politicians and administrative planners for maintaining a certain balance in the redistribution of wealth and in the organization of production. They had ceased to be moral disciplines that superseded the fulfillment of basic human survival needs. Political economy was moribund, if not dead; the social sciences had shed their remaining links with these century-old disciplines.

Robert Lynd chronicled this shift in his 1940 monograph *Knowledge for What: The Place of Social Sciences in American Culture*. The social sciences, he observed, “have tended to emphasize data gathered rather than data needing to be gathered, normative theory rather than the full range of refractory phenomena and to stress knowledge and order rather than the Unknown and Chaotic”.<sup>554</sup> Lynd summarized what he saw as both the task of the social sciences and their significance in the first two decades of the twentieth century:

to discover what kinds of order actually do exist in the whole range of the behavior of human beings, what kinds of functional relationships between different parts of culture exist in space and over time, and what functionally more useful kinds of order can be created in our contemporary culture.<sup>555</sup>

In 1910 Albion Small (1854-1926), the first professor of political economy at the University of Chicago, associated the social sciences with the introduction of social order in the lives of individuals. At the end of that same century, many historians, inspired by postmodernist theoreticians, found in social science a desire to impose the logic of the machine on human society. These historians, including Dorothy Ross, Mark Smith, and John M. Jordan, portrayed the founders of social science as intent on applying an engineering mentality to social structures. Jeremy Bentham’s *Panopticon* and George Orwell’s mechanistic totalitarian society conveyed the essential spirit they believed to be at work in the social sciences from their inception. But this interpretation of social sciences arose exclusively from the study of the rational method crafted by social scientists during the Progressive Era. The rational method, for these observers, led directly to the avoidance of waste and the cult of efficiency.

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<sup>554</sup> Robert Lynd, *Knowledge for What: The Place of Social Sciences in American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940): 118.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-6.

Charles Edward Merriam commands our interest precisely because he called this interpretation into question. Positivist interpretations of Merriam's life and thought miss many important dimensions. Merriam, of course, did use the rational method as developed by sociologists and political economists of the nineteenth century. To be sure, Merriam was fascinated by the development of physics, chemistry, and medicine. In a few instances, he even recognized the need to apply their methods to what was then called social studies.

Yet Merriam also recognized the impossibility of realizing the full promise of the rational method. Many historians of the social sciences have forgotten to mention that, as the modern social sciences were taking shape, their founders had emphasized the inherent difference between the objects of their study and those of their colleagues in the natural sciences. Indeed, political economists and social scientists had initially acknowledged the impossibility of thoroughly applying laboratory methods to human and social problems. Merriam had even gone as far as differentiating what he called the "solid positivistic social sciences" of the late nineteenth century from less positivistic social studies, such as political science and history.

Surprisingly, for Merriam, the most empirical social disciplines were not necessarily the most scientific.<sup>556</sup> His colleague Wesley Mitchell joined him in this orientation:

One of the most important problems [concerning scientific method] is methods of getting inspired questions. How to do that of course I don't know, but in this problem of method, as in all similar problems, I think we must work on the hypothesis that there are numerous ways of trying to achieve more illuminating formulations than we have achieved in the past.<sup>557</sup>

Merriam and Mitchell thus believed that the social sciences had to employ rational measurement if they were to describe social conditions scientifically. The precise description of social conditions was not the ultimate goal of social science in Merriam's, Mitchell's, and van Kleeck's day. Instead, solving social problems was the first outcome that social scientists were seeking. New values and a modernized code of conduct made up the second outcome on their scientific agenda. Efficiency was part of this scientific agenda, but it was not the most sublime

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<sup>556</sup> Charles Edward Merriam, "Positivism and Political Science in the US: A Study of the Development of [the?] Scientific Approach in Politics", manuscript, undated, Box 117, folder 5, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 2.

<sup>557</sup> Wesley Clair Mitchell, "Scientific Methods", Hanover Conference speech, 1926, box 163 folder 2, Merriam Papers, Joseph Regenstein Library, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 475.

offering of the social sciences. As we will see next, Mary van Kleeck would forcefully restate the moral purpose lying at the heart of the social sciences.

## Chapter 4: Mary van Kleeck: The Spiritual Reformer of the Industrial Order

From the time of her birth in 1883, Mary van Kleeck was steeped in the social inequality that already pervaded American society. She grew up in an upper-middle-class family in upstate New York descended from prominent members of the Dutch trading aristocracy in the colony of New Holland. In the early nineteenth century, the van Kleeck family had owned a small but lucrative fur and hat company.<sup>558</sup> In the early years of the twentieth century, van Kleeck received a classical education at Smith College with other young middle-class girls. Her years at Smith were to have profound effects on the way she viewed the world. After receiving training in a joint program that emphasized both social work and industrial research, van Kleeck began doctoral studies in sociology at Columbia University in 1905, although she did not complete the degree requirements.

In this respect, Mary van Kleeck differed from Wesley Mitchell and Charles Merriam, two leading scholars in economics and political science respectively. Van Kleeck did not earn a doctorate and was not to become a well-known university professor. Yet she nevertheless earned a reputation as a prominent intellectual of her time. Van Kleeck's thought, despite being less academic than Mitchell's or Merriam's and vigorously anti-theoretical, was representative of the non-academic social sciences of the Progressive Era and the 1920s. She forged an original definition of social sciences and its practical applications. She thought it should promote an idealism based on a solid knowledge of social conditions. It was imperative, she believed, that social science have practical applications. Of the three, van Kleeck probably made the greatest effort to realize and live in accordance with her intellectual and spiritual ideals.

### Social Work and Industrial Research: Engineering a Better Future

#### *The Years at Smith College*

Founded in 1879, by the late nineteenth century, Smith College was one of the most challenging and rigorous schools for young middle-class women. Laureus Clark Seelye (1837-1924), president of Smith College when Mary van Kleeck was studying there, explained the general mission of the institution:

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<sup>558</sup> Frank van Kleeck, *The Van Kleeck Family: An Account of its origin and Record of that Branch of it Represented by the Descendants of Tunis van Kleeck* (by the author, 1900), Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

The chief aim of Smith College will be, by a well-chosen course of liberal studies, to furnish young women with that general yet appropriate discipline of all their powers and faculties which will qualify them, in a fully-developed womanhood, with a sound mind and a pure heart in a healthy body, to do the work of life for which God has made them, in any place to which in His providence they may be called.<sup>559</sup>

Smith College was one of the first institutions to give the same classical education to both boys and girls. To be sure, girls' colleges had existed before Smith, but mostly they prepared students for domestic duties. Smith offered classes in Latin, Greek, mathematics, grammar, history, and botany, to name but a few.

Religion also figured prominently in students' education. An integral part of the dominant Victorian and New England culture, Protestantism made its presence felt at Smith both in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities. President Seelye explicitly supported it:

I believe, in order to secure the best intellectual work the college should seek directly the highest morality of its students. I believe that Christ and his words are the highest sources of virtue and spiritual life. For the sake, therefore, of the spiritual health of its students, to promote their virtues, to add to their amiability and teachableness, we should make the College distinctively and unequivocally Christian in its character.<sup>560</sup>

This mix of religious and scientific instruction would act to galvanize van Kleeck's thought and action.

During her days as a Smith student, van Kleeck participated in religious missions organized by the school, and she served as president of the Smith College Association for Christian Work (SCACW) in 1904. She characterized the mission of the SCACW as

helping to send out from college graduates whose Christian life and ideals will be factors in the growth of that spirituality which the world needs. Toward this ideal each year must add its history, and the end of each year must be the beginning of larger effort and stronger faith, that ever more and more the Christian life may be deepened within ourselves and within the college.<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>559</sup> L. Clarke Seelye, *The Early History of Smith College, 1879-1910* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1923), p. 13.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>561</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "SCACW", *Smith College Monthly* 11 (June 1904): 537-538.

Here van Kleeck formulated an ideal that was to dominate her thinking for the following thirty years: the need for spirituality in modern life. She was acutely attuned to the lack of values in people's outer and inner lives, a view that constantly preoccupied her and came through in her intellectual work.

Moreover, van Kleeck was not merely preaching traditional religious faith and values. She had also observed the cataclysmic shocks that the industrial revolution had sent through the daily lives of workers. In 1904, she composed a poem in which she brought the Protestant value of her youth into accord with her insights into life in urban society:

In the quiet haze of a summer day  
The Green and gray earth and sky  
A forest of trees stretching far away  
God's sunlight in the sky above  
And in our hearts a dream of love  
Over the City a low-lying cloud  
Blackened by smoke of factory fires;  
Beneath are the homes of the toiling crowd,  
And in their midst the strong church spires.  
God's peace within a world of strife,  
And in our hearts Belief in Life.  
To love, to dream the semblance of what seamy  
Yet not to live  
Until from out of our strength of dreams  
We learn to give  
Ourselves – the life akin to that above –  
In service. So through life, through love,  
To find Strong Faith in God.<sup>562</sup>

In this Emersonian verse, written at the close of her education at Smith, van Kleeck set down her ideal of connecting social interests with spiritual values and thereby transforming the lives of the toiling masses. Becoming an industrial researcher and a social worker was a means of promoting social welfare. While van Kleeck was discovering the promise of the newly founded social

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<sup>562</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Untitled", *Smith College Class Book* (1904): 134.

sciences, she was also developing a fascination for the traditional Protestant faith of New England. Thus, early in her life, religious belief moved van Kleeck to become a social scientist.

### *The Years at Columbia University*

After graduating from Smith in 1904, van Kleeck opted to pursue a Ph.D. in sociology at Columbia University. That year she moved from the quiet middle-class atmosphere of Northampton, Massachusetts, to the turmoil of New York City. The squalor and drudgery that permeated the lives of the urban masses in 1905 shocked the young Mary van Kleeck:

New York city would house the entire population of Northampton, which according to the census of 1900, numbers 18,643, in five city blocks. This fact presents the problem of NYC life – not the only problem, but one which is interwoven with many others – a problem municipal, political, sociological, and, indeed, universal in its bearing. Too small a quantity of light and air, many odds against cleanliness, ample chamber for disease, much downward pulling in the scale of morality, and a vast deal of human misery and degradation – these are some of the results when too many people are herded together in too small a space.<sup>563</sup>

In addition, she clearly had difficulties adjusting to the secular instruction in religion and sociology that she received at Columbia. In the notes from her first year of study, she questioned Professor Franklin Henry Giddings's (1855-1931) views on religion:

It seems hardly worth while to write a criticism of Professor Giddings' position [on religion] – it is so superficial. . . . First, we must show how the hope of a messianic Kingdom changed with the hope of a messianic King; next, we must show what variations come into this idea before 'it could be claimed that Jesus of Nazareth was the King and we must show this historically and not speculatively'.<sup>564</sup>

She also rejected Giddings's description of Saint Paul as a "social propagandist and economically interested".<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "See breeze – A Fresh Air Home", *Smith College Monthly* 12 (May 1905): 515.

<sup>564</sup> Mary van Kleeck, Columbia University Class Notes, 1905, box 3, folder 6, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>565</sup> Mary van Kleeck, Columbia University Class Notes, 1905, box 3, folder 11, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

But at Columbia she also discovered the work of Adolphe Quételet (1796-1874), the renowned Belgian astronomer who founded social statistics in the mid-nineteenth century. She also took Henry Roger Seager's (1870-1930) course on labour and trust.<sup>566</sup> Thus, in the utterly different atmosphere at Columbia, van Kleeck fleshed out the knowledge of the social sciences she had started to acquire at Smith.

Van Kleeck did not complete her Ph.D., despite two later attempts to do so in 1916 and 1927. Unfortunately, her papers give no clear reasons for her unfinished studies. One plausible explanation may be the attention she gave to more practical matters. On many occasions, van Kleeck criticized the academic and theoretical rationales for attacking social problems. She argued in 1911, for example, that

[t]he privilege of a college education for women in this country was not won by argument nor by theory, but by experiment controlled alike by the scientific attitude and a large faith in the future triumph of an ideal. The ideal was to give to women as fully as to men the opportunities which a college affords for the development of power. The same spirit, the same method of experiment, and the same ideal are needed now in solving the problems of women's work.<sup>567</sup>

Van Kleeck emphasized the need for a practical social vision. She probably perceived the academic world as too remote from the real social world in which she wanted to get involved. Even though she was very critical of the abstract world of theory, she ardently defended social idealism and common purpose.

### *New York City's Social Movements*

The dynamism of the social movements in New York soon attracted her interest. The settlement movement, initiated by the Chicago reformer Jane Addams, was rooted in convictions that were similar to van Kleeck's. Her first experience with the settlement movement in New York brought her face to face with the degrading conditions in which individuals and families had to live. She grappled with the social effects of widespread impoverishment. Poverty and bad

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<sup>566</sup> Mary van Kleeck, Columbia University Class Notes, 1905, box 3 folders 7-8, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>567</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "What Alumnae are doing: Some facts and some theories about women's work", *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 2 (January 1911): 81.

living conditions, she believed, affected not only individuals and their immediate families, but also the whole community:

A generation of toilers, shut up in factories ten hours every day, dwarfed in body, stunted in mind, without leisure for recreation in its true meaning of re-creation, would perforce leave untouched and unknown the social treasures of their predecessors, and the generation to come would be impoverished by the loss.<sup>568</sup>

Her experiences with a New York settlement house made her realize how essential education and training were for the improvement of workers' lives.<sup>569</sup> Their lack became, for van Kleeck, the principal source of social misery.

Training and education were to become prominent features of van Kleeck's thought. Her convictions led her to undertake work with a new kind of agency: the vocation bureau, where she was to develop her social ideals further. The Vocation Bureau for Women in New York, founded in 1911-1912, was a place where employees gathered information on the job market, particularly on those sectors where employees were in the highest demand. The bureau also offered training in order to build women's skills and thereby increase their chances of getting hired. Van Kleeck believed that such a clearing house was needed

because of the economic complexity which characterizes business and professional life to-day. For an individual to attempt to find his proper niche, or for the niche to seek its rightful occupant, without any systematic guide, is wasteful and ineffective.<sup>570</sup>

This experiment was initially directed at college alumnae. However, the bureau broadened its mandate to include the unskilled workers who made up the great majority of the female labour force. Financial pressures ultimately forced the bureau to close its doors in 1926.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, American intellectuals and social leaders promoted education and skill development as the main avenue for advancement and progress.<sup>571</sup> The proliferation of public and graduate educational institutions characterized this period,

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<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>569</sup> "Diffusion of enlightenment made possible by inspired and inspiring teachers in the colleges will be the surest means of preventing social wreckage in the future." MVK, "The Campaign for \$300,000 in New York", *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 4 (November 1912): 9.

<sup>570</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "A Vocation Bureau for Women", *Association Monthly* 6 (April 1912): 85.

<sup>571</sup> See Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Knopf, 1961); Joel Spring, "Education and Progressivism", *History of Education Quarterly* 53 (Spring 1970): 53-71.

including vocational schools both at the technical and graduate levels. Van Kleeck saw education and skill training as straddling colleges and universities and technical schools. Indeed, van Kleeck believed these two kinds of schools should share pedagogical objectives:

Education, special training and experience are at a premium, and consequently the women who seek a large opportunity must have a purposeful plan of life, and must bend all their energies to gaining a mastery of the technical requirements of their chosen vocation.<sup>572</sup>

On the one hand, college alumnae should seek to develop skills and expertise in one specific field. On the other hand, workers need to have access to education that was broader than the skills their jobs required. In a revealing passage from her study on women in the bookbinding trade, van Kleeck expressed her faith in workers' intelligence:

Conditions in the [bookbinding] trade complicate the learner's problem. Irregular employment, specialization, rush work, the piece-work system, changing methods, and the increasing complexity of machines, all tend to discourage the inexperienced worker, and to make the expert less inclined to take time to teach. As a result of these influences, two important problems of training are characteristic of the bindery trade; the problem of the specialist in a task which makes small demands on the workers' intelligence, and the problem of the untrained, unskilled casual worker.<sup>573</sup>

Here van Kleeck acknowledged the complex relationships among education, work, and workers' lives. Education, she believed, humanized the work done by workers in a given industry, particularly that done by unskilled women workers. Education and skill training were both ways of increasing economic opportunity and improving human relationships.

### *Education and Skill Training*

This twofold concept of education and skill training was a recurring idea in van Kleeck's thought. Education brought both an intellectual stimulus and an economic boost to the public and private lives of workers. Throughout the 1910s, 1920s, and early 1930s, she was constantly to

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<sup>572</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "A Vocation Bureau for Women" *Association Monthly* 6 (April 1912): 86.

<sup>573</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Women in the Bookbinding Trade* (New York: Survey Association, 1913), 207.

return to this notion as launching opportunity and a means for humanizing the lives of workers. In 1914, she contended that

[t]he schools have a larger problem than that of giving technical efficiency to their pupils. In some way they must supply what the industry does not demand, such an all-round development as shall keep alive the general intelligence of the worker.<sup>574</sup>

Moreover, the prospect of “deskillizing” certain jobs through the introduction of unskilled women workers was seen as a threat by a segment of American industry. In 1918, just before the armistice, van Kleeck observed that

[t]he training of women workers to take men’s places is causing concern among some of the local unions. Yet women introduced without training will surely be a greater menace to established standards since in that way the job itself is likely to become unskilled.<sup>575</sup>

In the early 1920s, van Kleeck had already tied the search for equal opportunity to equal access to education.<sup>576</sup> Later she included the question of standards of living in her definition of education:

To leave school to go to work at an early age is one of the signs of an inadequate standard of living in the community—interpreting standard of living to mean not only food, clothing, and housing, but educational ideals—and is due to as great a variety of causes as determine standards of living.<sup>577</sup>

Women gained more than job opportunities by getting an education; they also won equality with men, which was another crucial facet of van Kleeck’s thought. She first made contact with the women’s movement through the Women’s Trade Union League in New York City.<sup>578</sup> There this former Columbia sociology student encountered a dilemma that was to trouble

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<sup>574</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Working Girls in Evening Schools: A Statistical Study* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1914), 58.

<sup>575</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “The Government and Women in Industry”, *American Federationist* 25 (September 1918): 789.

<sup>576</sup> “By equal opportunity we mean the chance to be trained for that occupation by the very best recognized means of training. . . . Yet to be trained for a vocation is vital to the economic position of women.” Mary van Kleeck, “Labor Laws and Opportunity for Women: An Address Delivered in July, 1921, before the National Convention of Business and Professional Women”, *Association Monthly* (January 1922): 2.

<sup>577</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Working Girls in evening Schools: A Statistical Study* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1914), 174-175.

<sup>578</sup> See Richard A. Greenwald, “‘The Burning Building at 23 Washington Place’: The Triangle Fire, Workers, and Reformers in Progressive Era New York”, *New York History* 83:1 (2002): 55-91; Nancy Schrom Dye, *As Equals as*

her profoundly for the next twenty years. In the late 1900s and early 1910s, gender and labour issues complicated van Kleeck's understanding of social problems. She examined the manifold obstacles faced by unskilled women workers in New York factories and, in 1906, wrote a dark but vivid description of the working conditions of the young girls who worked in them:

The evil of long hours is physical; it is also moral; and in every aspect it is social, concerning others besides the individual. An overworked factory girl is a vantage point for disease which finds already an all too easy access to the tenement population and through them to all other classes. A worn out factory worker exhausted by standing throughout long days – or by operating swift machines, is unfit to be a wife and a mother. If we believe in laws to protect children who toil, we must believe in laws to protect them in their birthright of health and strength, not handicapping the children of one generation by failing to care for the health and strength of the generation before them.<sup>579</sup>

Van Kleeck dramatized the terrible consequences of unskilled work to prompt the enactment of local labour laws. In addition, it was clear to her that the effects of work extended beyond the factory. They encompassed the home, family life, and, more profoundly, the intimate lives of the workers. Van Kleeck also underscored the relation between work and womanhood:

For boys the task is to develop efficiency in economic and social relationships, which changes, it is true, with economic and social evolution, but which nevertheless is accepted as part of the 'boys world'. For girls the task is not only to develop efficiency in economic and social relationships but to develop also the opportunity to use it, and the desire and ambition of the girls themselves to win a recognition which is not accorded to them as a matter of natural right.<sup>580</sup>

Even if working conditions held the promise of uniting women and men, prevailing gender roles created different expectations about what men and women could do with their lives.

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*Sisters: Feminism, the Labor Movement, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); Allen F. Davis, "The Women's Trade Union League: Origins and Organization", *Labor History* 5:1 (1964): 3-17.

<sup>579</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Working Hours of Women in Factories", *Charities and the Commons* 17 (October 1906): 20-21.

<sup>580</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Changing Educational Needs of Women", *Association Monthly* 9 (September 1915): 324.

### *Equal Opportunity for Male and Female Workers*

Although very concerned about this problem, van Kleeck did not openly contest the pro-male labour movement out of respect for the common interests of all workers. In the 1920s and early 1930s, she had still not completely resolved this dilemma. In certain contexts, she advocated the complete segregation of women and men in trade unions and the workplace. For example, in 1918, she defended the idea that

[t]he labor problem now confronting the United States cannot be solved by the Government alone. Because of the important part which women must play in them, they are a challenge to the organized women of the country to be leaders in their solution.<sup>581</sup>

Van Kleeck thus believed that women leaders must speak for themselves. On other occasions, however, she called for joint action among men and women in a united front against industrial interests. For example, she maintained that “while women’s work has its special aspects, nevertheless its problems are so intertwined with those of men in the same trade that they cannot be considered as a group apart.”<sup>582</sup> The problem of the place of women in relation to male-dominated trade unions was a divisive one. In van Kleeck’s thought, work ought to furnish a guaranteed means for workers to earn their living, to pursue their personal development, and, more significantly, to find their place in society. The problem van Kleeck encountered here was reconciling socio-economic position and gender roles.

### *The Russell Sage Foundation*

Van Kleeck’s experience as an industrial researcher at the Russell Sage Foundation turned out to be one of the pivotal events of her career. On leaving the Vocational Bureau of Information of New York, she joined the Russell Sage Foundation in 1912, four years after its establishment by Margaret Olivia Sage, the widow of Russell Sage, a powerful coal magnate.<sup>583</sup> The original mission of the Russell Sage Foundation had been to improve workers’ living conditions through social research. To carry out this mission, the Foundation hired social scientists to investigate the social circumstances of American workers.

<sup>581</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Women in the Munitions Industries”, *Life and Labor* (June 1918): 122.

<sup>582</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Women’s Work for the War”, *Evening Post*, 6 March 1918, 11.

<sup>583</sup> See Ruth Crocker, “From Widow’s Mite to Widow’s Might: The Philanthropy of Margaret Olivia Sage”, *American Presbyterians* 74, no. 4 (1996): 253-264; William J. Breen, “Foundations, Statistics, and State Building: Leonard P. Ayres, the Russell Sage Foundation, and U.S. Government Statistics in the First World War”, *Business History Review* 68, no. 4 (1994): 451-482.

Van Kleeck stayed at the Russell Sage Foundation for forty years. Her long tenure at the Foundation afforded her the necessary time, focus, and resources to realize her goal of understanding the living conditions of working men and women. During her years at the Foundation, she conducted well-received surveys on the complex character of modern industrial life. In one of the first surveys she did for the Foundation, van Kleeck defined her object of study—industry—as being part of a world that reached far beyond its most visible manifestations:

We cannot take the trade apart like a house of cards and rebuild it in an hour. An industry is an organism whose development is vital and not mechanical. But much depends on nurture and environment, and the American people are just beginning to recognize the possibility of legislative action which shall strengthen the growth of a trade under conditions favorable to the best interests of all who are engaged in it. . . . The growth of legislation, however, should be as vital and organic as the growth of a trade. It must be based on knowledge of conditions, it must controlled by special interests, and it must be vigorously and fearlessly enforced.<sup>584</sup>

This need to have “knowledge of conditions” dovetailed with the mission of the Russell Sage Foundation.

The status of the modern worker was a question of pre-eminent interest to social scientists in the early 1910s. The first two studies that van Kleeck conducted were on emerging industries that she unequivocally associated with twentieth-century modes of production and publicity: bookbinding and the manufacture of artificial flowers. Her study of the bookbinding trade gathered facts about a very old industry that was nevertheless undergoing mechanization. Bookbinding had traditionally been a highly skilled craft that very few had the specialized knowledge to carry out. As public education made learning more accessible and as more and more people gained the leisure and means for reading, however, the increased demand for books obliged factories to adopt faster and cheaper methods for producing them. One such method was mechanization; another was the use of cheap and unskilled labour. Van Kleeck noticed a direct correlation between mechanization and worsening working conditions: “In machine binderies, it would seem to be largely the lack of opportunity to acquire mechanical skill which prevents women from adjusting themselves to new inventions and retaining their former place in the

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<sup>584</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Artificial Flower Makers* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1913), 221-222.

trade.”<sup>585</sup> Work in the mechanized branches of the bookbinding industry, she discovered, was being dehumanized:

While the craftsman still holds his own [work], arranges his hours of labor, and bargains approximately as an equal with the customer who pays him for his services, the bindery girl in the ordinary workroom represents a changed industrial order. Her position is a reminder that since the days of Grolier, or Roger Payne, the forces of industrial revolution have been at work relentlessly and inevitably, changing methods in the workroom, enlarging the number of employees, splitting up their tasks into minute processes, introducing mechanical contrivances and making each worker merely a humble part of a large system.<sup>586</sup>

Van Kleeck conceded that these vicissitudes did not permeate all operations in bookbinding factories. She observed traditional crafts juxtaposed with modern industrial methods.<sup>587</sup> Moreover, the process of mechanization proceeded gradually in bookbinding: “the changes are much less rapid or revolutionary than some of the remarks of workers and employers would indicate, and the hardships of the workers could be avoided if more attention were paid to their problems.”<sup>588</sup> Van Kleeck was thus not indiscriminately critical of mechanization. Its consequences, she believed, were neither uniformly appalling nor inevitable.

The transition to mechanization, van Kleeck recognized, was not peculiar to the bookbinding industry:

It is not in binderies alone that conditions change rapidly; that machines cause a reorganization of work and then give place to new inventions involving further reorganization; that speed is an essential requirement; that specialization is the custom, weakening by continual repetition of one process that power of adjustment so vital to success in a changing industrial environment; that women work exhaustingly long hours in the busy season; that irregularity of employment during the dull season compels the

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<sup>585</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Women in the Bookbinding Trade*, 70-71.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>587</sup> In fact, she showed that “variety in products [fine books, paper covers pamphlets] and in methods of work [hand-made, machine-made, or both] has divided the bookbinding trade into branches, with diverse processes, different machines, and distinct labor conditions.” *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>588</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71.

worker to forego all or part of her wages, when even in the busy season the income of the majority of women employees is insufficient for self-support.<sup>589</sup>

The second study van Kleeck undertook for the Russell Sage Foundation examined a trade with a much shorter history than bookbinding, one in which women were over-represented in the labour force: the fabrication of artificial flowers. Such a seemingly straightforward business had grown to the point that

[e]ven without machines, which are commonly considered the prime factors in producing industrial revolution, the artificial flower trade in New York has not escaped industrial changes. It is today not a handicraft but a factory industry in which many evils of the factory system have robbed the occupation of its artistic possibilities.<sup>590</sup>

The production of artificial flowers, van Kleeck had learned, required workers to deal with the additional uncertainties of fashion.<sup>591</sup> The emerging fields of advertising and media communications brought fashion and industry together, particularly where clothing and accessories were concerned. Van Kleeck quickly grasped the precarious commercial implications: "All the work involved in this construction of a bunch of artificial flowers may be wasted if they are not of the form, color, and size to be popular in the market."<sup>593</sup> She lamented that "[o]n such uncertain conditions depends in large measure the welfare of workers in the trade."<sup>594</sup> The international ramifications were obvious to her as well: fashion in Paris and London now influenced the job market in New York.<sup>595</sup>

To help American manufacturers adapt to this new international competition, van Kleeck advocated that they produce superior products by employing more highly qualified workers. Product quality, she insisted, was dependent on the skills and living conditions of the workers:

So long as more than half the work is done in tenement homes, so long as the standards of industry with reference to hours of labor overtime, seasons, and wages are too low to permit an adequate standard of living and efficiency for the workers; so long must

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<sup>589</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>590</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Artificial Flower Makers*, 1.

<sup>591</sup> The best analysis of fashion and advertising in the 1920s is Roland Marchand's *Advertising the American dream: Making way for modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985)

<sup>593</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>594</sup> Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid., 189-190.

American manufacturers be content with inferior work. No protective tariff will suffice to enable them to rival the French product.<sup>596</sup>

In the course of her early research, van Kleeck had come to realize to what extent modern conditions of production, such as machines, media, and competition from abroad, were directly affecting the lives of the very workers on whom the industrial system relied so heavily. The Russell Sage Foundation was to prove an ideal setting for her to explore similar themes in the years to come.

In choosing the work environments for her studies, van Kleeck had followed the lead of the social scientists with whom she worked at the Foundation. They concentrated their attention on a unique urban environment that, because it offered almost limitless research potential, had become their laboratory: New York City. This focus on a single urban setting, however broad its spectrum of opportunities, occasioned self-conscious assertions by the Foundation that its work had a relevance extending well beyond the metropolis. In the preface to her study on the artificial flower trade, for example, van Kleeck maintained that

[w]hile the inquiry was local in scope the facts discovered are national in their significance. . . . The development of the industry in any other section of the country will depend on the labor standards maintained in the city where it is now so largely concentrated. Furthermore, the trade is a concrete illustration of large industrial problems—seasonal work, child labor, lack of skill, the home-work system—which are common to many occupations in many communities. Intensive studies of the conditions in one trade in one city will throw light on conditions in other trades in other cities. Efforts to solve the problem in one locality will stimulate action in other sections of the country.<sup>597</sup>

Van Kleeck made no reference to farmers or rural America; her work centred on urban social conditions, especially those in New York. For instance, she studied the impact that state labour laws had had there, paying little heed to small urban areas like Muncie, Indiana, which Robert and Helen Lynd had studied in the mid-1920s. Indeed, van Kleeck's exclusive concern with large urban centres drew implicit criticism from Robert Lynd. Two years before beginning the Muncie research, he had explained his rationale to van Kleeck:

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<sup>596</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>597</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Artificial Flower Makers...*, v.

What we are really after is the factors in a changing, small American city that lie back to the philosophy of its citizens—a local application of the sort of thing John Dewey has done in the field of philosophy and that economists like Wesley Mitchell are increasingly doing in other fields.<sup>598</sup>

The transformations that accompanied large-scale urbanization were undeniably exerting a profound influence on the emerging disciplines of industrial research and social work.

*The Importance of the Community and Family in the Lives of Workers*

Although central to the lives of workers, industries were not the sole object of concern in van Kleeck's work. When she examined the social conditions of workers, and particularly of women workers, van Kleeck often emphasized how their lives were not confined to their jobs. It was vital, she asserted, for women "to relate their work to the life of the community and to make their power felt as workers and citizens".<sup>599</sup> In fact, van Kleeck considered the family to be the most significant dimension in the personal and social spheres for any individual. Before being hired to work for companies, after all, individuals had developed roles and relationships as family members.

The demands industries made on individuals profoundly altered their family lives. Perhaps the most immediate and visible effects stemmed from the ten hours they claimed daily from their workers. Van Kleeck was categorical in her disapproval of this state of affairs. In her industrial research, she continually pointed out the negative effects that long workdays were having on workers. She decried the ineffective enforcement of labour laws. Her activism as a member of the Women's Trade Union League led her to accuse employers of disparaging employee Union Leagues. Finally, she focused on the problem of personal fatigue from overwork; she supported male trade unions in their campaign to make the eight-hour workday standard.

Although long days spent working in factories often shattered family life, home-work operated even more pernicious disruptions on it. Van Kleeck's inquiries required that she visit the homes of working families. There she saw children helping their mothers increase productivity by taking on small piece work. Although child labour had been prohibited by law in

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<sup>598</sup> Robert Lynd to Mary van Kleeck, February 7, 1924, box 10, folder 304, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>599</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "The Women in Industry", *Vassar Quarterly* (November 1919): 43.

1912, children still participated in this home-work system in tenement houses. Van Kleeck cited the case of a family where the children routinely worked with their mothers in the kitchen after returning home from school. Child labour was not the only danger to arise in the home-work system. Van Kleeck also suggested to her readers that buying clothes produced in crowded and poorly ventilated homes posed potential risks to their health:

This form of manufacture has become a most threatening aspect of the sweating system. In it the labor of young children is utilized, and advantage is taken of the urgent need of their mothers to earn money without leaving their homes and their children. . . . To the buyer and the general public[,] goods manufactured in these crowded tenement homes may carry disease not recognized as the result of the home-work system. But even more threatening is the effect on the standards of industry, the lowering of the prevailing rates of wages paid in the shop.<sup>600</sup>

The consequences of working conditions within and without the factory went beyond personal fatigue and erosion of the family unit. Industrial employment undermined the private lives of workers by calling into question established value systems. Because morality was a guiding principle for van Kleeck, throughout her life she attempted to adjust and redefine individual and collective ethics. She found in the declining standard of living that accompanied the shift to employment in industries and factories an unmistakable urgency to modernize social ethics. "In modern industry," she observed, "the man out of work is also out of wages. The effect of unemployment on individual income is clear."<sup>601</sup> She added that "distress is produced by the combination of unemployment and low wage rates, and this does not seem to be a combination to which economic laws are opposing effective obstacles."<sup>602</sup>

Chronic uncertainty sapped more than just the morale of individual workers. It was "a social problem, obviously because in affecting income, it affects at once the standards of living of the community."<sup>603</sup> Community was a dominant concept in van Kleeck's thought, an eloquent reference to a cherished American concept.<sup>604</sup> Even though van Kleeck frequently recurred to the

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<sup>600</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Artificial Flower Makers*, 93-4.

<sup>601</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "The Effect of Unemployment on the Wage Scale", *American Academy of Political and Social Science* 61 (September 1915): 90.

<sup>602</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-95.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>604</sup> Morton and Lucia White have analyzed the historical significance of the idea of community life in their discussion of Jane Addams' experience: "Instead of participating in the building of community from scratch, [Jane Addams] felt that she was trying to rebuild a community, to re-create the scattered, chaotic thing that city life had

explanatory power of social class in her work, she also made constant allusions to community. Workers, family, industries, employers, and politicians, among others, were all community members. Indeed, crumbling community morals were what frightened van Kleeck the most in the mid-1910s and -1920s: "It seems probable . . . that the nature of the work creates a state of mind which results in the aggravation of grievances."<sup>605</sup> She was deeply concerned that, as the modern community emerged, human relationships would lose their meaning.

The idea of community stood between two clashing visions: individualism and collectivism. This dualism, which set powerful interest groups against each other, left its mark on van Kleeck's thought, which bore traces of collectivism:

. . . in the experience of great many individuals are certain common elements, and [ . . . ] as industrial and social life has grown more and more complicated in this country, and in other industrial nations, the individual must draw on the experience of other individuals. *We do not 'get ahead' alone.* We act in groups, and there is an interplay between the life of the individual and the environment. . . . The more we realize this relation of the individual and the group to impersonal forces, the more fundamental will be our thinking about women in industry.<sup>606</sup>

By attributing a potent role to social environment, van Kleeck urged social leaders to transcend individuals:

Can a local community do more than give relief? My answer is, Yes – that in the local community live leaders and workers in industry and commerce. There a new consciousness of common interests can be applied; conflicts can be discussed as public affairs; and principles and practices established in local industry which can be more widely applied. We need to experiment now in new forms of industrial control and they can be made and appreciated locally.<sup>607</sup>

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become in the 1880s. It was this that linked her with more theoretically sophisticated philosophers and sociologists who spoke throughout the nineteenth century of alienation and estrangement, of the breakdown of some original and happier community." Morton and Lucia White, *The Intellectual versus the City* (New York: Mentor Books, 1964), 155.

<sup>605</sup> Mary van Kleeck and Ben M. Selekman, *Employees' Representation in Coal Mines: A Study of the Industrial Representation Plan of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1924), 53-54.

<sup>606</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *What Industry Means to Women Workers* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), 2.

<sup>607</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Community Planning to End Unemployment", address at the City Club, Denver, 23 February 1932, box 16, folder 2, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., 4-5.

Thus, by featuring the social context, van Kleeck compelled politicians, businessmen, and trade unionists to confront social ills and also to recognize that individual workers were not entirely responsible for their “standard of life”, to borrow an expression that van Kleeck used often.

Nevertheless, the individual, to van Kleeck’s way of thinking, was under obligation to assume responsibility for searching for opportunities. Indeed, an elusive individualism permeated van Kleeck’s notions of education, work, and science. Her insistence on education as a means to expand opportunity betrayed a belief that individuals were responsible for securing stability in their lives. For her, individual workers could partially control their professional and industrial lives by acquiring skills and education:

The individual must be brave enough to find his own truth and to put forth efforts to change social customs or institutions when these are out of line with truth. He will be guided in his effort to effect changes not by erratic self-seeking, but by the scientific method which is the heritage of this generation. Through science applied to social conditions he will be freed to see facts as they are, [and] to learn how to change them.<sup>608</sup>

Although van Kleeck considered professional training an individual responsibility, she still did not abandon the individual to the struggle to earn a living. The modern social and economic system, she held, obliged the community and the individual to enter into a mutual and constructive dialogue, given that “neither the individual nor the community is wholly sufficient without the other.”<sup>609</sup> The intercourse between the individual and the community had one key objective: stabilizing and raising living conditions, which van Kleeck referred to as the “standard of life”.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Justice and the Individual”, *Workers’ Education* 4 (August 1926): 15.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>610</sup> Clinton Rossiter explains the importance of this notion in the traditional American ethos. For Rossiter, “society is a unity. In the healthy community all these groups and institutions and classes fit together into a harmonious whole, and attempts to reshape one part of society must inevitably disturb other parts. The Conservative, though something of a pluralist, never loses sight of the ultimate unity into which all the parts of society must finally merge.” I do not consider Mary van Kleeck a conservative, but she shared with conservative, as defined by Rossiter, the same notion of a “healthy community.” Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America: The Thankless Persuasion* New York: Vintage Books, 1955 [1966], p. 28.

### *The Notion of Standard of Life*

The concept of standard of life could be considered one of the most original creations of the early-twentieth-century social sciences.<sup>611</sup> Wesley Mitchell and, to a lesser degree, Charles Merriam had given prominence to the idea of a standard of life in their social theories. This idea took a peculiar conceptual form with van Kleeck, who straightforwardly defined standard of life as the capacity

to purchase the housing they need, to buy clothing [and food], and to secure education – for schooling, too, must be purchased, despite the fact that it is public and free; it takes money to enable children to stay out of work long enough to be educated.<sup>612</sup>

To van Kleeck, then, a standard of life meant meeting basic needs, such as food, clothing, shelter, and education.

The singularity of van Kleeck's standard of life idea lay in the way she employed it to understand society. In her mind, a standard of living could not be permanently or definitively established. It needed first to be stabilized and then adjusted to the economic level of production. Overall, an individual's standard of living matched the degree of his or her integration into the community. "In standards of living," van Kleeck explained, "we find the social results of modern industry. The standard of living concerns us all. It is the measure of the effectiveness of industry in serving society."<sup>613</sup> In the final analysis, the effectiveness of industry was to be measured not in wages or production, but in its consequences for human beings:

[The standard of life] gives us a clue to judging modern industry, by putting first the welfare of human beings who are affected by it. The ultimate test of our industrial methods must be their effect upon the standards of living.<sup>614</sup>

At the time, most of the commentaries about the standard-of-living concept concerned primarily its economic aspects. Van Kleeck, however, went further in her interpretation by giving it political resonance as well:

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<sup>611</sup> See Ruth Crocker, "'I only ask you to divide some of your fortune with me': Begging Letters and the Transformation of Charity in Late-Nineteenth-Century America", *Social Politics* 6:2 (1999): 131-161.

<sup>612</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Modern Industry and Society", *American Federationist* 33 (June 1926): 701.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, 699.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, 703.

By the standard of life we mean not only food and housing and clothing although these are included, nor do we mean food and housing and clothing with the addition of education and recreation . . . . But the standard of life means that added to these necessities are the opportunity, the power and the capacity to share in all the affairs of the community, including industry.<sup>615</sup>

Van Kleeck's vision of the standard of life encompassed the power that workers should have in the management of their own workplaces. Industrial democracy was, for van Kleeck, political democracy within the walls of factories.

### Industrial Democracy: A Practical Ideal of Social Justice

Industrial democracy was a typical early-twentieth-century idea formulated as an antidote to industrial strife.<sup>616</sup> The first two decades of the twentieth century were a period in industrial relations characterized by violent conflicts between powerful but controversial employers and young and dynamic trade unions.<sup>617</sup> The Progressive Era and the 1920s saw these two forces clash on countless battlefields. Van Kleeck, who lived through this era, advocated compromise between the two extremes. Although pro-labour herself, van Kleeck disliked playing one interest off another. In 1924, she asked "how an industrial enterprise can be conducted so that the relations between employers and employees shall square with American ideals of democracy and brotherhood."<sup>618</sup> She believed, as did many intellectuals of her day, that society formed a complex but organic whole to whose members industry, government, and trade unions had social obligations. A majority of those members were workers, whose right it was to live with dignity<sup>619</sup>:

Democracy is not an object that you can select and secure as you might buy a yard of cloth, nor is it a fixed institution already developed to which you can point and say 'there

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<sup>615</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Women's Responsibility in Industry", *YWCA Association Monthly* 14 (January 1920): 10.

<sup>616</sup> See the dated but still valid articles by Milton Derber, "The Idea of Industrial Democracy in America, 1898-1915" *Labor History* 7:3 (1966): 259-286; Milton Derber, "The Idea of Industrial Democracy in America, 1915-1935" *Labor History* 8:1 (1967): 3-29.

<sup>617</sup> On the history of workers and trade unions in the early twentieth century, see Melvyn Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1996)

<sup>618</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Foreword" in Ben M. Selekmán, *Sharing Management with the Workers* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1924), iv.

<sup>619</sup> Axel Rolf Schaefer, "Neither Liberalism nor Socialism: American Progressives, German Social Reform and the Organicist Model of Welfare State" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Washington, 1994).

is Democracy! See how it works.' It is not a system. Democracy is a spirit which enters into a community and transforms its institutions, and it can accomplish this in only one way, that is, through the lives of the members of that community, through their vision, intelligence, and united action.<sup>620</sup>

It followed, she believed, that social and economic institutions were obliged to secure a basic quality of life for the members of the society in which they operated.

### *Shared Management*

One way of realizing this goal was for industrial employers to share management responsibility with their workers. Shared management was the key to van Kleeck's industrial democracy. "The idea," van Kleeck summarized, "was to apply in industry the mechanism of republican government in political life."<sup>621</sup> Her advocacy of this ideal was to be one of the most decisive battles she fought for improving standards of life. She played a role in at least three important attempts to share management among workers, employers, and stockholders: the Dutchess Blanchery in northern New York State, the Niagara chemical industries, and, most important, the Rockefeller coal mines in Colorado, especially around the town of Ludlow.

After the Ludlow massacre (1914), van Kleeck carried out a detailed survey of the conditions in which workers and their families lived.<sup>622</sup> What she learned led her to recognize the need for compromise among workers, employers, and stockholders. In Colorado, she even went into the mines to see working conditions for herself. She also visited the camps around the mines, where she examined the housing, education, recreation, and access to food and medical treatment that affected the living conditions of workers' families. For example, in Ludlow, Colorado, and the surrounding area, she interviewed a number of workers' wives concerning their access to these fundamental necessities. She uncovered many unfair practices, such as the exclusion of union members from activities organized by the local YMCA.<sup>623</sup>

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<sup>620</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Women's Responsibility in Industry," 9-10.

<sup>621</sup> Mary van Kleeck and Selekman, *Employees' Representation*, xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>622</sup> On the Ludlow massacre, see Mark Walker, "Labor History at the Ground Level: Colorado Coalfield War Archeology Project", *Labor's Heritage* 11, no. 1 (2000): 58-75; Priscilla Long, "The Voice of the Gun: Colorado's Great Coalfield War of 1913-1914", *Labor's Heritage* 1, no. 4 (1989): 4-23; Howard M. Gitelman, *Legacy of the Ludlow Massacre: A Chapter in American Industrial Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

<sup>623</sup> Howard M. Gitelman, *Legacy of the Ludlow Massacre: A Chapter in American Industrial Relations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 371.

To resolve these intense labour disputes, van Kleeck and others, such as William Lyon Mackenzie King (1874-1950), the future prime minister of Canada, recommended a plan in which representatives of the constituent groups working at the mine would together manage the enterprise and its surroundings. For example, van Kleeck pressed this group to invest part of the business profits into both an unemployment insurance plan and a reserve fund for stockholders. She structured the plan in order to assure both revenue for employers and investors and income for employees during a depression. She also stressed the necessity of involving workers and their families in the administration of a housing plan. It was not uncommon in the first three decades of the twentieth century for companies to own housing and rent it to workers and their families. A representative board shared the local administration of housing facilities, recreation, education, and medical treatment in the area owned by the company. The improvements in social life that resulted from the shared management of housing and social services was one of the prime achievements of these boards.

In the mine itself, however, the situation was very different. In fact, there the representative committee was able to solve very few problems. For many employers, representative boards were seen as an alternative to trade unions over which they had no control. At that time, it was not uncommon to find unionized and non-unionized workers in the same company. For unionized workers, these boards were obstacles because they called into the question the existence of the trade unions for which these workers and their forebears had fought for many years. Non-unionized workers found the boards to have some value. But the separation of unionized and non-unionized workers on the representative boards only served to amplify internal divisions.<sup>624</sup> Van Kleeck acknowledged the tensions that representative boards aroused. She was eager to increase the power of representative boards, but she soon came to recognize the threat the boards posed to trade unions. Some employers used these boards as a means to eliminate trade unions from employee ranks. Van Kleeck, needless to say, disapproved of the decisions these boards took against unions.

At an intellectual level, these representative plans symbolized industrial democracy. Van Kleeck conceived democracy in socio-economic terms. The “present task [of democracy] we

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<sup>624</sup> See the essay on the company town of Ilasco, Missouri, by Gregg Andrews, *Insane Sisters: or the Price Paid for Challenging a Company Town* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1999)

would all agree,” she wrote, “is to transform the economic organization . . . .”<sup>625</sup> For her, political rights were meaningful only when they improved living conditions:

The extension of the voting power to women has been rapid during the war, and the biggest single gain of women in the post-war period in this country has been the passage of the federal amendment by Congress. . . . The exercise of political power will mean new growth for women and a changed attitude of the community toward them, and both these results may be expected to register their influence at no distant date in economic conditions.<sup>626</sup>

Yet van Kleeck’s belief in political rights was not legalistic. She ultimately gauged democracy not upon trial verdicts or the enactment of new laws, but rather upon the quality of life of the American people. The achievement of respectful industrial relations was thus the first step toward industrial democracy. In the early 1920s, this concern prompted her to object to the Equal Rights Amendment being championed by her former suffragist allies:

The danger is now that the women who have struggled for political suffrage may not clearly see where their own temperaments, their own ideals, their own philosophy of industry, are going to lead them in their attitude toward labor problems. Thus we may have a cleavage across the ranks of the political suffragists which will deny to industrial progress the enormous force that might come out of their limited support.<sup>627</sup>

### *Representative Plan*

Van Kleeck presented humane relations in industry as her objective in order to justify the representative plan: “Blindness to the human needs of a different economic class is the risk encountered by centralized financial control – blindness rather than unscrupulousness.”<sup>628</sup> The aim of the industrial representative plan was to profile employee needs and avoid socio-economic struggle. It was, after all, the responsibility of industry to assure and secure basic welfare for their workers. Van Kleeck argued for social responsibility shrewdly. By appealing to

<sup>625</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Women’s Responsibility in Industry,” 10.

<sup>626</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Women in Industry”, *Vassar Quarterly*, (November 1919): 42

<sup>627</sup> Mary van Kleeck, address to the Jubilee Convention of the National American Women Suffrage Association, St. Louis, Missouri, 1919 in *Suffragists and Industrial Democracy* (New York: National Women Suffrage Publishing, 1919), 4.

<sup>628</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1924), 372-373.

employers' religious values, van Kleeck sought to persuade business owners to act responsibly toward their employees. "[I]ndustry in its effect upon human beings," she reminded them, "is a matter of religious importance."<sup>629</sup> Competition should not be the primary motivation of captains of industry. "[T]he Christianizing of industry," she insisted, "consists in the purification of competition as an instrument of selection and adaptation in fulfilling the needs of mankind."<sup>630</sup> She held that social responsibility was only an extension of the religious duty of employers. They had to act from a sense of responsibility or out of religious inspiration in their relations with their employees:

Competition is not the life of trade. It may give zest to the individual trader or trading group, and it still has a value for the control of prices, but as it works out in industry it is the enemy of efficient productive organization.<sup>631</sup>

Here van Kleeck intertwined her first reason, the religious ethics of employers, with her second argument, rational and effective scientific management.

#### *The Moral Dimension of Mary van Kleeck's Thought*

Parallel to the economic and political dimensions of the standard of life was its moral aspect. In one of the first commentaries she wrote on the standard of life, in 1911, she claimed that

[a]ll legislation which tends to make bad conditions unprofitable, and good conditions increasingly rich in returns is a valuable factor in raising the social level, not of the industrial classes only, but of the whole community; for there is no hope of making moral conduct general until such legal and social conditions are created that he who follows a high ideal of justice in business dealings can hope for a fair degree of business success.<sup>632</sup>

She also argued that a fairer redistribution of wealth was the basis of an equal and secure standard of life, rephrasing a traditional leftist tenet into a religious and moral discourse:

Many Christians are disturbed by the great gulf that has come to exist between the rich and the poor, not only because of the sufferings and privations of those at the bottom of the

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<sup>629</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *What Industry Means to Women Workers* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), 9.

<sup>630</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "The Church and Economic and Industrial Problems," address to the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, Speeches, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., 9.

<sup>631</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>632</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Improvement by Community Action", lecture 6, box 19, folder 1, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., 140.

economic scale but because of the spiritual isolation which the possession of wealth in the face of others' poverty brings to those at the top. It is not too much to say that if the existence of large fortunes is held to be essential to the conservation of the social surplus, then it becomes the spiritual responsibility of those to whom this stewardship falls to use their wealth as a tool rather than to wear it as argument and to recognize stewardship to society as well as to God.<sup>633</sup>

Indeed, the notion of a standard of life also encompassed spiritual values held by the workers. The economic and social difficulties they faced affected their morals and values. Around the idea of a standard of life, van Kleeck forged her vision of social justice based on education, access to regular work, fair wages, democratic industrial management, accommodation to family and social life, and the expression of personal values.

In the industrial research she pursued professionally, van Kleeck frequently drew on the standard-of-living notion. But beyond her formal role as industrial researcher, she was also gaining prominence as a social worker. In 1925, the economist E. R. A. Seligman (1861-1939) asked van Kleeck to write the entry on social work for the *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*.<sup>634</sup> Her training as a social worker illustrated another important angle of her vision of the standard of life. Whereas the traditional mandate of social workers in industrial relations was to "socialize" the consequences of the unequal redistribution of wealth, her definition of the standard of life insisted on equal shares of wealth. The industrial representative plan was one attempt to make it a reality; social work was another:

After all, social work has grown up on the base of a society in which wealth is not evenly distributed, in which wealth is concentrated in the hands of a comparatively small group, and social work represents at best the effort of a group to fulfill what might be called stewardship, to make a wise use of the money that had come into the hands of the small group.<sup>635</sup>

### *Her Vision of Social Work*

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<sup>633</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "The Church and Economic and Industrial Problems", speeches, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., 8.

<sup>634</sup> Mary van Kleeck to E.R.A. Seligman, 3 October, 1925, correspondence, box 3, folder 377, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>635</sup> Mary van Kleeck, address to the Conference on National Economic Objectives for Social Work, New York City, April 22, 1933, box 16, folders 3, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., 6.

Her understanding of social work rested on the broad professional charge that she believed it placed on its members. Van Kleeck defined the task of “industrial social work” as

includ[ing] all the subdivisions usually listed under employment management, public service in public employment bureaus, workmen’s compensation, factory inspection, child labor administration, etc.; industrial research with organizations of widely differing types and points of view; activity of miscellaneous sorts, such as vocational guidance, industrial journalism, administration of trade agreements, industrial psychology . . . .<sup>636</sup>

Clearly social workers had an indispensable role to play in industrial matters. In van Kleeck’s thought, it was to embody the conciliatory spirit between workers and their bosses.

The most potent threat social workers faced was falling prey to the temptation to restrict their work to administrative tasks as a result of the increasingly complex economic organization of business and labour. Wesley Mitchell had noticed the same trend from the perspective of an economist. Social workers, however, needed not only to understand the social system, but workers’ lives as well. The danger inherent in “the growing complexity and specialization of social organizations,” van Kleeck argued, was that “social workers, whose time is fully occupied with executive work, will lose the contacts which have given their predecessors insight into the life and labor of their wage-earning neighbors.”<sup>637</sup>

Social workers would thus have to take labour-related issues into account, van Kleeck realized, if they were to bring about positive changes in workers’ lives:

The social worker is concerned with public health, with education, with various community gains which cannot be purchased individually, even if we have high wages. The social worker who is concerned with community development discovers sooner or later that not only can these things not be purchased individually but they cannot be purchased collectively unless there be an adequate foundation in just conditions of labor. Therefore the citizen interested in community development must encounter labor problems sooner or later if he is really carrying on a fundamental work.<sup>639</sup>

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<sup>636</sup> Unsigned, untitled document, undated, box 41, folder 2, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>637</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work,” 372.

<sup>639</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Trade Unions and the Social Workers”, *Seventeenth New York State Conference of Charities*, (1916): 181.

If social workers ever hoped to improve community life, they would have to become aware of such issues and “mold the public opinion which labour surely needs.”<sup>640</sup> Van Kleeck considered social workers, to rephrase her ideas according to Marxist orthodoxy, to be the “avant-garde du prolétariat”.<sup>641</sup>

### *Van Kleeck's Method*

As a social worker and industrial researcher, van Kleeck adopted the empirical methods developed both by the first generation of professional social scientists and by political economists. As Wesley Mitchell had done, van Kleeck also employed social statistics, a discipline in its own right, to depict actual living conditions. Most of her generalizations about standards of life were based on social statistics, which became one of her preferred sources of information: “Statistics of employment and earnings which give . . . information are as vitally important to wage-earners and to the labour movement as the security of employment which they aim to increase.”<sup>642</sup> Van Kleeck's emphasis on statistics as a means of controlling economic forces and business fluctuations paralleled Mitchell's:

Economists and statisticians are beginning to be more hopeful [about solving the problem of unemployment]. They say that if we first use a measuring rod to find out how much unemployment we have, and what conditions in business preceded it, business men and bankers may be able to change conditions and thus prevent some of the fluctuations. . . . [I]t is not unreasonable to believe that we shall be able, more or less, to control unemployment.<sup>643</sup>

Nevertheless, statistics were not as predominant in van Kleeck's thought as they were in Mitchell's writings. Van Kleeck conceded that certain social problems were simply not quantifiable by statistics that outlined the contours of social life without actually portraying the daily lives of workers:

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<sup>640</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>641</sup> “It lies with the working class, with which social workers have the bond of common goals, to transform the principle of government and industry alike, from possession to creative work, which has been America's primary source of power in the building of this nation.” MVK, “The Common Goals of Labor and Social Work” in the *Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), 303.

<sup>642</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Employment Statistics and Trade Unions”, *American Federationist* 34 (April 1927): 423.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid., 419.

To go to work too young; to be used up in hard work which stunts development; to toil long hours and to walk home late at night unprotected on deserted streets (while your employer fights every attempt to strengthen the laws protecting women and girl workers); to be young, furthermore, and eager for recreation yet unable to have any but the cheap and dangerous kind – this to be handicapped in a way which statistics can never measure.<sup>644</sup>

The surest route to genuinely understanding the daily lives of workers was through personal interviews. Developed by intellectual forebears of social work like E. R. A. Seligman and Edward T. Devine (1867-1948), the personal interview focused mainly on individual experiences in a predetermined context.<sup>645</sup> The individual interview was a method common to both social work and industrial research. To a certain extent, it even formed the nexus between these two disciplines, especially in van Kleeck's career. In 1917, she proposed

to make an intensive study of a few typical shops rather than a cursory inquiry into a larger number. . . . As the chemist can determine the composition of the whole body of water in a reservoir by analyzing a small sample, so the investigator of industry may legitimately portray all the essential facts in a trade by intensive study of a small group, provided the group be wisely selected.<sup>646</sup>

Van Kleeck viewed the personal interview as the equivalent of laboratory work in the natural sciences:

If the method of experiment has its limitation for the social scientist he may find some compensation in the fact that he has a method of procedure exclusively his own, as compared with the laboratory scientist, namely the interview. The interview may be merely for the purpose of securing information from someone who possesses it, as the historian might find in the oldest inhabitant a source of facts in the history of a town.

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<sup>644</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Working Conditions in New York Department Stores", *Survey*, 11 October 1913, 51.

<sup>645</sup> On the history of social work, see the essay by John H. Ehrenreich, *The Altruistic Imagination: A History of Social Work and Social Policy in the United States* (Ithaca, NY.: Cornell University Press, 1985); on the life and career of Edward T. Devine, see Peter Seixas, "Unemployment as a 'Problem of Industry' in Early-Twentieth-Century New York", *Social Research* 54, no. 2 (1987): 403-430; on E. R. A. Seligman, see Lendol G. Calder, "From 'Consumptive Credit' to 'Consumer' Credit: E. R. A. Seligman and the Moral Justification of Consumer Debt", *Essays in Economic and Business History* 14 (1996): 185-206.

<sup>646</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *A Seasonal Industry: A Study of the Millinery Trade in New York* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1917), 5-6.

Generally, however, the individual has a larger interest than this for the social scientist, for he finds in him not only a source of information, but a subject for study whose attitude of mind, experiences and emotions are all part of the material of social discovery.<sup>647</sup>

The relationship between the object of study and the purpose of the inquiry was a central aspect of van Kleeck's social surveys. Although she employed the scientific method, she was not an extremist in her objectivism. Van Kleeck did not pretend to neutrality, either in the information she gathered or in her role as industrial researcher. It was clear to her that social surveys were the first step toward transforming the social conditions that fostered unequal opportunities. The personal interview not only offered a way to change these conditions, but it also let her adjust the way she viewed her object of study in ways that corresponded better to actual circumstances.

Van Kleeck put the personal interview to frequent use in her work. In her survey of industrial flower makers in 1913 and in her survey of Colorado miners and their families in 1921, she met individuals and families and discussed their general conditions of life and work with them. Interviewing them in their homes, she familiarized herself with their personal experiences. She also walked in the neighbourhoods around factories in New York City, and she talked to unemployed workers searching for jobs. Her field experience informed her industrial research and social work in ways that set her work apart from that of many of her contemporaries.

In the interdisciplinary atmosphere of the early twentieth century, industrial research and social work complemented each other. Industrial research was the empirical foundation on which social workers relied to devise solutions for social ills:

To the social reformer today – and by social reformer we mean every man and woman who has a vision of what the social order ought to be and who believes that it can be made like the vision – to recognize an evil is to set about changing it. Nothing socially disastrous is inevitable. Such faith, however, if it is to be fulfilled, must be particularized. It must apply wherever the conditions of modern industry press heavily upon the workers

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<sup>647</sup> Mary van Kleeck and Graham Romegn Taylor, "The Professional Organization of Social Work", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 101 (May 1922): 167.

– in an artificial flower factory and in the mammoth steel works, in subway construction, and in the making of a woman’s hat.<sup>648</sup>

This idea was not peculiar to van Kleeck; in fact, Mitchell, Merriam, and Hoover had all expressed similar beliefs. The same vision could also be found in pragmatic philosophy, political progressivism, and the Social Gospel movement. It could be traced back to the writings of John Dewey, Walter Lippman, and Walter Rauschenbush, to name but a few of the leaders who were van Kleeck’s contemporaries.

The emphasis on personal interviews partially contradicted the uses of statistics. In 1930, van Kleeck lamented the non-specificity of statistics:

The need for the detailed reports on states, which only the state bureau can issue, is emphasized rather than lessened by our present experience in viewing our employment situation as a national problem. The importance of details rather than mass statistics is again emphasized.<sup>649</sup>

Although the context of 1930 markedly differed from that of 1920, social scientists advocating the use of general statistics remained at odds with those preferring to work with samples or case studies.

Between 1911 and the early 1930s, van Kleeck virtually abstained from the conflict over methodology raging between advocates of the statistical and case-study approaches. She did not feel concerned about the methodological debates dividing social scientists. Her understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each method allowed her to make use of both. She made no pretence of being a methodological theoretician; methods were only the means for making inquiries. Her most pressing concern was to conduct her surveys with the most effective methods.

### *Taylorism*

Van Kleeck had read and assimilated Frederick Winslow Taylor’s (1856-1915) basic ideas about surveys and research. A member of the Taylor Society in the 1920s, van Kleeck actively promoted Taylor’s ideas on research and organization. Yet Van Kleeck’s Taylorism was

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<sup>648</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *A Seasonal Industry: A Study of the Millinery Trade in New York*, 26.

<sup>649</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Employment or Unemployment? That is the Question”, *American Labor Legislation Review* 20 (March 1930): 19.

a very controversial component of her thought, in part because of the way historians such as David Noble and, more recently, John M. Jordan have characterized the intellectual Taylorism of the Progressive Era and the 1920s. Their work has tended to over-emphasize the absence of values and the materialism thought to underlie the rational and scientific organization generally associated with Taylorism.<sup>650</sup>

Yet organization and effective management were particularly important to van Kleeck because they allowed the full expression of human values. In the *Bulletin of the Taylor Society*, she affirmed that

[m]y interest in the contribution of scientific management to the social problems in the lives of wage earners was not solely in its emphasis upon personnel relations, but in the technical organization of industry as it affects wage earners. The constructive imagination which can spend seventeen years studying the art of cutting metals is the imagination which can make industry and all its results in human lives harmonize with our ideals for the community.<sup>651</sup>

Constructive imagination was a potent tool that van Kleeck the Taylorite recommended for bringing industry and community life into harmony. She considered technique to be secondary to the study of “the disastrous results of industrial organization” as revealed by industrial research. Van Kleeck believed that engineers were key figures in this process of harmonization. Again, the idea was widespread among intellectuals and politicians in the 1920s that engineers were often the best qualified to introduce efficient management into industry and, by extension, into society at large. But van Kleeck conceived of an even more unusual role for engineers: their mandate was to use their skills to promote social harmony in the community:

My interest in the Taylor Society is not directed toward challenging the technical engineer to give attention to problems of human relations. I am not worried about that, because if he is a good engineer he cannot fail to contribute to human relations. I am concerned rather with the other end of the story. I am eager to have those people who see in the community the present disastrous results of industrial organization realize how the

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<sup>650</sup> See David Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Howard P. Segal, *Technological Utopianism in American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); John M. Jordan, *Machine-Age Ideology: Social Engineering and American Liberalism, 1911-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994)

<sup>651</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “The Social Meaning of Good Management”, *Bulletin of the Taylor Society* 9 (December 1924): 242.

art of management in the shop can fundamentally change those social conditions in the community. The Taylor Society can thus interpret management to the group who are seeking to construct a better community.<sup>652</sup>

This passage from van Kleeck's article shows how far van Kleeck's Taylorism was from a valueless, science-based Orwellian society. In fact, van Kleeck linked the search for efficient scientific management to her quest for a more moral society. In one of her most interesting pronouncements, although made in a different context, van Kleeck asserted that "in industry science needs religion to get itself applied."<sup>653</sup> The revolution underway in technology and economic structure called for a new spirituality, yet it would be impossible, she thought, to impose the old moral system on new economic conditions:

This social order . . . [that] developed on so tremendous a scale, with all the complexities of economic life today, is not without its own social message. As a marvelous demonstration of mechanical interdependence and co-operation, does it not suggest a new interpretation of spiritual interdependence and co-operation? With each process of production and distribution so vitally related to every other, it would seem that the mechanical organization itself should be ready for the parallel: development of co-operation in human relationships.<sup>654</sup>

Here van Kleeck's thinking took an interesting turn, as she mixed elements of the Social Gospel discourse with Taylorism and described the critical rationale that ought to have been motivating business leaders in the 1920s. Hence, van Kleeck was not seeking to impose mechanistic solutions through the scientific method; instead, she clearly pointed out the need for new social values to be propounded by social scientists, engineers, and religious leaders.

For van Kleeck, Taylorism went hand in hand with the quest for a new ethics. Social scientific methods could ensure the improvement of individual and collective circumstances:

We need here a combination of what might be called social common sense and scientific procedure . . . . Upon the basis of a growing social standard, we must build, using as our method the scientific and technical facts which show us how to arrive at the goal which is

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid., 242.

<sup>653</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "When and How Should this be Done", *Proceedings of the First National Conference on Christian Social Service*, held at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 20-22, 1921 (New York: Department of Christian Social Service), 179.

<sup>654</sup> Ibid., 179.

set by our social vision. Our social vision grows out of our experience as to what is good for our communities.<sup>655</sup>

Moreover, van Kleeck linked expert professionalism with the general search for the social common good:

A profession, on the ethical plane [as] tend[ing] to become the use of knowledge and skill for the common good [as not being] the function of any single group [explaining why] both the knowledge and the skill of a profession may be increasingly shared with others who are working in the common interest.<sup>656</sup>

Professional expertise thus signified more than merely the accumulation of minutiae, and more than the repeated application of the scientific method. The social sciences as professions existed to apply knowledge and method to improve collective and individual living standards.

Van Kleeck drew the inspiration for her idea of “a kind heart with intelligence” from her experience as social worker and industrial researcher, which embodied her desire to put her intellectual understanding of science and society into practice.<sup>657</sup> Her emphasis on “science devoted to social ends” only restated what she had achieved as a social worker and industrial researcher.<sup>658</sup> Compared with Mitchell and Merriam, two scholars who were relatively removed from the social realities of their objects of study, van Kleeck was certainly the most socially involved in her work, which took her beyond the intellectual construction of the social sciences. Although her definition of social science was less refined than those of Mitchell and Merriam, she was the only one of the three who attempted to experience firsthand the personal lives of the people she was studying. She visited the homes and work places of the workers she surveyed, and so was able to benefit from direct contact with them. When she spoke of grounding her notion of the common good in scientific experience, she was thinking of the acquaintances she had made among workers and their families.

This direct involvement and her anti-theoretical vision of the social sciences did not meant that she was the most practical of the three. In fact, although van Kleeck was without a

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<sup>655</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “What Industry Means to Women in Industry”, address to the Women’s Industrial Conference, Washington, D.C., 11 January, 1923., Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., 13.

<sup>656</sup> Mary van Kleeck and Graham Romegn Taylor, “The Professional Organization of Social Work”, 158.

<sup>657</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>658</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Foreword: Method of the Conference” in C.S. Johnson, *The Negro in American Civilization* (New York: Henry Holt, 1930), 381-382.

doubt the social scientist with the most immediate understanding of living conditions, she was also the most idealistic. For example, she maintained that

[i]f we can realize a more worthy ideal for business, if we can see its relationship to the community, if its management can feel itself a part of something bigger and finer than the mere success of the individual business, then there will develop a motive power for perfecting management which will make industry a fascinating adventure for the individual as well as a real service to the community.<sup>659</sup>

Any thorough understanding of van Kleeck's work requires delving more deeply into her unique vision of and approach to the social sciences.

### Mary van Kleeck's Social Science

The search for effective solutions underpinned van Kleeck's social science and her research methods. She fell out with contemplative scholars committed to doing research for the sake of pure knowledge. Although she recognized and supported the spiritual dimensions of social work and industrial research, she repeatedly insisted on the ineluctability of practical solutions. Motivated by her pragmatic faith in action and decisiveness, she did not advocate arbitrary solutions. Her conception of practical decision-making rested on the imperative of amassing sufficient data first in order to act intelligently: "Force always is a lazy, stupid way of accomplishing an end which is, itself, too limited."<sup>660</sup> She added that "with knowledge as the master, the word control assumes an entirely different meaning. It becomes not the force of authority but precise guidance by knowledge which is formulated through a study of experience."<sup>661</sup> Van Kleeck's notion that knowledge rather than the resort to force should inform action was directed not only toward military dictatorships but also, and more specifically, toward the arbitrary decisions made by industry. Paradoxically, the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union was closer, in van Kleeck's view, to knowledge-based action than was American industry:

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<sup>659</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "What Industry can do to raise standards of work for women", *Conference on Women in Industry* (Pennsylvania: Department of Labor and Industry, Special Bulletin 10): 47.

<sup>660</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Concluding Summary" in M. L. Fledderus (ed.), *Rational Organization and Industrial Relations: A Symposium of Views from Management, Labor, and the Social Sciences* (Hague: International Industrial Relations Association, 1929), p. 127.

<sup>661</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

Force has no place in the new era. The moving power of scientific management is co-operation in procedures and practices, conforming to standards developed by research. The question which challenges scientific management in the United States is whether American industry can accept knowledge, and not force, as its control.<sup>662</sup>

Indeed, the social sciences were no less than the repository of social experience. Social scientists had to conduct research and then diffuse their findings throughout managerial, business, and political milieus. Having knowledge implied also applying it to ensure that people could enjoy a reasonable standard of living. The social sciences of the 1920s and 1930s thus had to be understood in direct relation to political and industrial institutions.

### *The Purpose of Social Sciences*

In the 1920s and early 1930s, the social sciences were a field whose methods, object of study, and, more important, ultimate purpose were still being defined. What was the purpose of social science? Why should we scientifically study society? These two questions were of enormous interest to the small community of social scientists in the Progressive Era and the 1920s. In 1922, van Kleeck observed that “little thought was given to defining the real substance of [social] intelligence”.<sup>663</sup> She made this observation in the context of her reflection about the relation between science and the common good.<sup>664</sup> Through her definition of social science, van Kleeck clarified what she meant by social intelligence: “The possibility of using science to study social life – human relations and institutions – and by understanding to change them and to bring them into closer harmony with the common welfare is just beginning to be appreciated.”<sup>665</sup> The social sciences were, to van Kleeck’s way of thinking, more than research and surveys; they were a spur to action.<sup>666</sup> Their interventions targeted human relations in industry and the community. Social science was the instrument that promised to humanize relationships in the new, complex industrial and social system. “The science here put forward,” she maintained, “is not the science of the technician alone, but science in the service of workers and producers, whose collective

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<sup>662</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Discussion”, *Bulletin of the Taylor Society* 16 (April 1931): 74.

<sup>663</sup> Mary van Kleeck and Graham Romegn Taylor, “The Professional Organization of Social Work”, 160.

<sup>664</sup> See the section on this topic earlier in the text.

<sup>665</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Labor and Institutions for Social Research”, *Journal of Electrical Workers and Operators* 26 (September 1928): 452.

<sup>666</sup> “The social sciences are developing to a point where they offer data sufficient to be a guide for action . . .” Mary van Kleeck, “World Economic Unity Cited as Basis for Consideration at Amsterdam Trade Parley,” *Christian Science Monitor*, December 1930: 6.

action can build not only an economic system but a human society.”<sup>667</sup> The essential purpose of the social sciences was to ease relations between labour and capital. Their imperative was to harmonize human values with private interests.

During the industrial revolution, tremendous technological refinements expanded economic and employment opportunities.<sup>668</sup> Technology and mechanization had progressed even more swiftly since the late nineteenth century. Van Kleeck acknowledged the import of this attainment, but she also understood that the development of social values in the industrial system was lagging. In 1930, five years before John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946) published his famous essay, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, van Kleeck had observed the paradox of technological success in production accompanied by growing levels of poverty:

The paradox is that this economic distress occurs at the close of a decade in which technological development has greatly enhanced the world's productive capacity. At a moment when the machine seems capable of supplying more needs for more people than ever before, many people cannot buy. What if the machine, which at the beginning of the industrial revolution was accused of exploiting the poor, should now meet defeat through poverty [?] Apparently, technological invention has increased production faster than social engineering has increased and distributed buying power.<sup>669</sup>

Clearly, technological progress did not assure a better quality of life. Van Kleeck was aware that the energy devoted to machines and mechanical engineering outstripped the desire to adjust social attitudes. This was a salient idea in her writings. Like novelists Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951) and John Dos Passos (1896-1970), van Kleeck wrote about how large the chasm was that separated interpersonal relations based on nineteenth-century values and the social proprieties of the 1920s. Financial and technological advances obviously did not necessarily confer social and individual amenities.

Even if, before the Depression, van Kleeck was closer ideologically to Lewis and Dos Passos than to Ford or Carnegie, she was not pessimistic about the possibility for social values to “catch up” with and even get ahead of technological and financial progress. The vision she

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<sup>667</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Miners and Management: A Study of the Collective Agreement between the United Miner Workers of America and the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company and an Analysis of the Problem of Coal in the United States* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1934), 223.

<sup>668</sup> There is a vast body of literature on this topic. For an excellent general survey, see Carroll Pursell, *The Machine in America: A Social History of Technology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

<sup>669</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “World Economic Unity Cited as Basis for Consideration at Amsterdam Trade Parley”, 6.

shared with the 1920s novelists was buoyed with the same optimism shown by the great captains of industry and finance. She ardently believed that social science would afford an opportunity for upgrading the conditions of industrial life:

We, in the United States, then, have developed industry to a point of technical efficiency where it should be possible to insure the good life for all the people. One factor in this success has been industry's interest in the technical applications of the discoveries of the physical sciences. Is it not time to apply as effective brain power to the human relations in industry? Discoveries are being made in the social sciences today. Economists working with the spirit and method of science, seeking to substitute facts for guesses, are giving us a safe basis for action.<sup>670</sup>

Van Kleeck believed that defining a new ethics and new values was the primary task of social scientists. She did not see technology and ethics as mutually exclusive but rather as complementary. Progress in one was conditional on advancement in the other. In an unpublished paper given at a conference held in 1925 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, she elaborated on this point of view:

I am not willing to leave the impression that I think that a highly technical scientific approach is all that we need in industry. We must also have a social ideal as our objective. I have said that the true scientist cares not for superficial results measured in temporary profits, but finds his satisfaction in producing something that is worth while for the community. The objective of a business must not be primarily its output, but the service which its output constitutes, and it must not be forgotten that in the procedure of production human relationships must not be subordinated to the thing produced. In other words, industry must not use human beings as means to ends, but must remember that human beings are ends in themselves. '*Ethics and technics are sisters*. Ethics rules the natural forces within us. Technics rules the natural forces without us. Both seek to subjugate nature by spirit'.<sup>671</sup>

The politics of the social sciences was oriented more toward ethical considerations than the industrial system. The industrial revolution had not, in fact, transformed all aspects of

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<sup>670</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Unemployment in Passaic", *American Federationist* 35 (May 1928): 602.

<sup>671</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "What Industry Can Do to Raise Standards of Work for Women", *Proceedings of the Conference on Women in Industry* (Harrisburg, PA, 1925): box 15, folder 11, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., 47 (emphasis added).

society. Now, values and ethics had to be reshaped by the same force that had restructured industry and society: science.

### *The Politics of Social Sciences*

This mission seemed thoroughly idealistic and utopian. Van Kleeck acknowledged how dreamy the social sciences could be. Having ideals and dreams was not itself problematic in her vision of these disciplines. In fact, the role of social science was to concretize and materialize these utopias. "Men must be set to thinking concretely," she prescribed. "Most utopias are unreal and unconvincing, but a scientific approach which describes human relationships in industry as they are should be the basis for discovering what they should be."<sup>672</sup> The search for what "should be" done in human relations was the motive force in van Kleeck's social science. In her thought, constructing new morals was central because of the fragmentary nature of industrial society. In fact, the same year that she was attempting to find practical solutions to industrial management in Colorado and to gain control over unemployment through Herbert Hoover's 1921 Commission on Business Cycles, she argued that

[t]he whole task of human civilization is to build this world after the pattern of the next. There are two worlds, but only one kingdom of God. The work here is to [unclear] Kingdom of Heaven in time and space. It can never be perfected except in eternity and in the spiritual world, but it is impossible to be indifferent to it in this world. The happiness of the saints in heaven is affected by our success in building the Kingdom of God on earth.<sup>673</sup>

Her faith in a perfect spiritual order, coupled with the stress she placed on practical solutions, revealed the limits to her belief in rational science and technical solutions to social problems. Of course, science predominated in her vision, but an ardent religiosity concerning the realization of the self on earth intensified the purpose she ascribed to social science.

Society included antagonistic and complementary groups. In her writings, van Kleeck dwelled on this idea, which Mitchell, Merriam, and Hoover shared. They all agreed on the fragmented character of American society. They and other intellectuals and politicians of that

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<sup>672</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "What contribution has our Church to make to the improvement of human relations in industry", address, September 1922, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., 4.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid., 4.

day believed that society was similar in function to an organism.<sup>674</sup> In their minds, the different pieces worked together to form a whole similar to the human body. Although this system might have seemed uncomplicated in abstract terms, van Kleeck, Mitchell, Merriam, and Hoover all acknowledged its practical intricacies. Van Kleeck emphasized its interdependence:

We have been taught that success depends almost wholly upon the individual. In actual experience this teaching has led us to disappointment. The very development of industrial, economic, and professional life has created a complexity whereby the injury of one becomes the concern of all, and the concern of all becomes the injury of one.<sup>675</sup>

The multidisciplinary social sciences were founded on such functional visions of society. It is very important not to confuse a functioning system and a working system. Just because van Kleeck, Merriam, and Mitchell viewed society through a functionalist lens did not mean that they believed society to be working perfectly. Conversely, they were indeed seeking to develop a working system that could take multiple systemic factors into account.

### *Multidisciplinary Social Sciences*

As Secretary of the Social Science Research Council from its founding in 1922 into the early 1930s, Mary van Kleeck actively participated in the debates about the multidisciplinary character of the social sciences. Her writings borrowed concepts from political science, psychology, economics, sociology, statistics, and anthropology. Yet this multidisciplinary perspective was not peculiar to her. In fact, in this regard she resembled Mitchell, Merriam, and other social scientists in the 1920s.

The debate on multidisciplinary issues in the 1920s was not without its irony. These disciplines, although relatively new, were already in the process of being granted professional status; departments of economics, political science, and anthropology were being established. Yet at the same time, leading scholars in these disciplines, working through multidisciplinary bodies such as the SSRC, were also attempting to close ranks. The crumbling of political

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<sup>674</sup> On the impact of early-twentieth-century biological breakthrough upon social thought, see Hamilton Cravens, *The Triumph of Evolution: American Scientists and the Heredity-Environment Controversy, 1900-1941* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968).

<sup>675</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Labor Laws and Opportunities for Women: An Address Delivered in July 1921, before the National Confession of Business and Professional Women", *Association Monthly* (January 1922): 4.

economy in the late nineteenth century did not only open the way for separate and distinct disciplines, but it also created a need among social scientists to make common cause.

Van Kleeck's multidisciplinary bent can be seen in the frequent references she made to other disciplines and the novel way in which she viewed them. For example, van Kleeck rephrased traditional American republican thought in such a way to support her advocacy for social justice. She compared industries to republics: industrial management resembled the administration of a state. Democratic principles should thus inform industrial decisions and management. Leadership was an important function of management, she conceded, but managers must consider their employees in the same way that democratic governments recognize the rights of their citizens. Citizenship, a concept that Merriam analyzed in some depth, corresponded to something more important than voting and holding a passport. For van Kleeck, to be an American citizen meant being actively involved in economic relations. Work was both a right and a social responsibility for Americans. The political right to work was a restatement of the traditional Protestant work ethic, which sanctified work as one of the most fundamental determinants of the self. This political right obliged business leaders to standardize working conditions. Work, as a collective right, thus could not be temporary and unfair because it constituted a basic aspect of living. This view of work required politicians to respect, and see that others respected, workers and working conditions. To exploit a worker would thus be tantamount to discriminating against a citizen.

Although workers were often depicted as a group with common interests, van Kleeck studied them as individuals with their own unique problems and situations. Workers were citizens who had not only rights, but also feelings and needs. In various surveys of employee conditions that she conducted, she probed beyond their material lives into their emotional lives. She held that

[i]t seems probable . . . that the nature of the work creates a state of mind which results in the aggravation of grievances. We do not wish to overdraw the picture, but coal mining is essentially a dirty, unpleasant, and extremely hazardous occupation.<sup>676</sup>

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<sup>676</sup> Mary van Kleeck and B. S. Selekmán, *Employes' Representation in Coal Mines*, 53-54.

Here van Kleeck, taking the approach developed by social psychologists in the 1910s and 1920s, associated the state of mind of workers with the social dimension of their workplaces.<sup>677</sup> Van Kleeck considered mental attitude to affect industrial management and labour relations:

For control in world economy [sic] as in the individual enterprise, the basis would be created in free world economic co-operation, made possible by a new mental attitude in which there is no longer room for exclusive self-sufficiency. The motive, enlarged to make the good of the whole the aim of the individual, is primary.<sup>678</sup>

Van Kleeck's reference to social psychology was representative of the vogue this field had in the 1920s and early 1930s. She linked mental state with socio-economic factors. Each was influenced by the other. In her mind, employees and employers were both economic agents of production and human beings with emotions, desires, and interests. Humanity was the dimension all workers shared regardless of their occupation. "Behind all economic questions is human nature," van Kleeck asserted, "and especially the instinct of self-preservation, which shows itself in self-interest."<sup>679</sup> Nevertheless, her view of human nature was grounded neither in metaphysics nor in abstract moralism. The bedrock of human nature remained, for van Kleeck, economic relations.<sup>680</sup>

Economics and sociology were the two disciplines van Kleeck employed most frequently in her writings and speeches between 1900 and the early 1930s. Trained in sociology in 1904-05, she had also acquainted herself with the work of the economists of the first decade of the twentieth century. She was, moreover, on intimate terms with economists like Wesley Mitchell and Henry Seager in the 1910s and 1920s. Beyond the exposure to economics that her friendship with economists occasioned, she came to use economic concepts forged in the Progressive Era.

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<sup>677</sup> On the intellectual history of social psychology, see Kurt Danziger, "Making Social Psychology Experimental: A Conceptual History, 1920-1970", *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 36, no. 4 (2000): 329-347; James M. M. Good, "Disciplining Social Psychology: A Case Study of Boundary Relations in the History of the Human Sciences", *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 36, no. 4 (2000): 383-404; Ian Lubek, "Understanding and Using the History of Social Psychology", *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 36, no. 4 (2000): 319-328.

<sup>678</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Analysis and Review of Congress" in IRI, *World Social Economic Planning: The Necessity for Planned Adjustment of Productive Capacity and Standards of Living* (Hague: IRI, 1931), 29.

<sup>679</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>680</sup> "Human relations in industry are carried on within a framework of economic activities, and it is fruitless to consider human relations without understanding that bed-rock of the economic structure. The world is fed, clothed and housed and services are given to society through definite tangible activities directed toward manipulations of materials, machines, equipment and a network of communication, all of which are technical." Mary van Kleeck, "Concluding Summary" in *Rational Organization and Industrial Relations*, 121.

For example, van Kleeck employed the idea of the business cycle and unemployment propounded by Mitchell in 1913:

[The] study of business cycle and unemployment is directed toward the possibility of action to prevent the extreme fluctuations which are described as the business cycle. . . . The trend of unemployment is one of the indexes of business which managers are finding reliable as a guide in determining policies. . . . A feasible substitute for this kind of information is to be found in the statistics showing the trend of unemployment. The extension of these statistics of employment is urged, because they are needed in approaching constructively the problem of preventing unemployment.<sup>681</sup>

This Mitchellian passage was congruent with van Kleeck's understanding of economics. Van Kleeck, however, was not an orthodox disciple of Mitchell's; she kept her distance from him by adopting positions different from his, especially on women and labour. As shown in the chapter on him, Mitchell, who had a fairly traditional view of women, considered women's work in the home to be the limit of their economic power. The story was just the opposite for van Kleeck. In a paper on the meaning of industry for women, van Kleeck claimed that

[industry] means three things . . . . First, it represents a chance to earn a living . . . . Second, industry has constituted for women what one might call an endurance test. Third, it is an opportunity for women to join in the constructive up-building of a better order.<sup>682</sup>

Van Kleeck also believed that industrial employment emancipated women from the home and its traditional tasks.

Finally, work implied a power struggle between employees and employers:

The basic purpose . . . we must have in mind is that every worker – and that means every human being, because every human being needs work for the full expression of personal power – that every individual in society must have a chance to use his or her own characteristic powers.<sup>683</sup>

Here van Kleeck presents multidisciplinary social science in an enlightening way. Political science, social psychology, and economics appear under the rubrics power, human nature, and

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<sup>681</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Charting the Course of Employment" in *Business Cycles and Unemployment* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1923), 360.

<sup>682</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *What Industry Means to Women Workers* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), 4.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

work, respectively. In short, van Kleeck's economics must be understood in relation to her liberal vision of women and workers living in a fragmented industrial structure that affected them both within and without the walls of factories and mines.

Sociology was probably the discipline that most influenced van Kleeck's thought. While a student of sociologist Frank Giddings's, she assimilated crucial notions of early-twentieth-century sociology. Her frequent use of statistics and individual interviews attested to his influence on her methodology. Her ideas about the standards of living were also borrowed from sociology. On many occasions, she discussed intellectual issues relating to social institutions like the family and religion, working out an innovative framework for family social structure. She viewed the family as a productive agent, a refuge, and an emotional unit that influenced the lives of all of its members. She analyzed the impact of work, particularly tenement work, on family life. She also studied the effect that male and female wages had not only on individual wage earners but also on the family unit as a whole. Van Kleeck believed that employers ought to take the number of dependents in a family into account when they set wages.<sup>684</sup> She did not consider children and women to be the only members of the family; men played a leading role in her definition of family life. When she examined the effects of wages on the family, she considered the shared wages of men and women. She also raised the issue of recreation and leisure and their impact of on the family.

Van Kleeck took an entirely different approach, however, in her analysis of religion. First, van Kleeck was known to be a fervent member of the Episcopal Church, as well as a member of many religious boards and organizations dealing with social problems. She kept her professional work distinct from her personal work and did not act as a representative of the Russell Sage Foundation in her private capacities. In her work as an industrial researcher, she also propounded the need to rejuvenate Christian morality. For example, she linked the Rockefeller industrial representative plan with Christian ethics. She also studied the relationship between church and labour, later asking that both employers and employees make society more religious by applying the Christian credo in their daily lives. Van Kleeck's religion is particularly complex to grasp because she also pressed for a new, secular ethics based on Christian morality. Nevertheless, although she was careful to define the method for achieving this new ethics, she

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<sup>684</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Protective Standards for Women Must be built up and Maintained" *U.S. Employment Service Bulletin* 1 (October 1922): 11.

did not go into details. Her elusiveness, however, should not eclipse the emphasis she placed on the inherent need for a new ethics.

One means she recommended to bring about this ethics was the scientific method of social statistics. In the 1920s, social statistics represented more than a method; it was a distinct social science unto itself, complete with professional organization (the American Statistical Association) and publication (*The ASA Review*).<sup>685</sup> Presided over by Wesley Mitchell in the late 1910s and early 1920s, the ASA promoted statistics as a way to gain precise knowledge of social conditions. Van Kleeck employed statistics to encourage the creation of new social values, directly associating a moral purpose with the discipline. To know how much weight to assign a given event was necessary for understanding it completely and maximizing its ultimate impact:

The results are not theories but evidence gathered slowly from those who know the facts through actual experience – the workers and the employers. The inquiries are carried on in the faith that a well-informed community will develop, step-by-step, a new order, the outgrowth of a new philosophy pressing toward the control of the industrial causes of poverty and misery as a task well within the bounds of possibilities in practical social politics. What the community thinks will depend upon *how much* the community thinks.

How clearly the community thinks will depend upon *how much* the community knows.<sup>686</sup> Statistical information thus established a foundation for sound social policies, well-informed public opinion, and, ultimately, community values. This idea was not peculiar to Van Kleeck. On the contrary, Merriam's and Mitchell's writings also relied on statistical inquiry as the first step toward a comprehensive solution to social problems.

Van Kleeck also employed anthropology in a unique and meaningful way. It figured in her account of the condition of blacks in the United States. Although the situation of blacks was only of secondary interest to her, she did examine the condition of African-American women in industry. Her analysis of industrial conditions in the Midwest acquainted her with a another obstacle that black women faced: equal economic rights. She found racism, sexism, and limited access to education to be undermining black women's opportunities. She participated in a survey

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<sup>685</sup> On the history of the American Statistical Association, see Robert C. David, "Social Research in America before the Civil War", *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 8, no. 1 (1972): 69-85.

<sup>686</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Industrial Investigations of the Russell Sage Foundation* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1915), box 85, folder 6, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., 4. (emphasis added)

on blacks in industry done in 1929<sup>687</sup>, maintaining that no social hierarchy could be founded on culture since there was no such thing as an inferior or superior culture:

The idea of inferiority of the Negro race in physique, in mentality and in ability to conform to law is a case not proved; that, on the other hand, the Negro in the period since Emancipation has profited to an amazing degree by opportunities for education and by improvement in the standard of living and hence in conditions of health. He has also proved himself to be skilled in meeting the difficulties of adjustment to a new community, though he labors under the disadvantage of liability to unjust arrest and to more severe sentences than the whites when convicted.<sup>688</sup>

### *The Anti-Lynching Campaign*

Van Kleeck was also an activist in the 1920s anti-lynching movement. She protested a lynching trial in Scottsborough, Alabama, attending as a representative of a New York City anti-lynching committee. Her anthropological interest was not confined to studying and militating for blacks' rights. In fact, van Kleeck believed that openness toward diverse cultures could ease relations among Americans. Van Kleeck considered making "efforts at understanding with the Orient, and with the Orientals in America" to be one of the main tasks that social workers needed to undertake in the course of serving their communities.<sup>689</sup>

Although van Kleeck considered neither American black nor white cultures to have inherent superiority, she did defend the assimilationist aims of immigrant education in the United States. Her image of U.S. culture did not square with her view that all cultures were equal. For example, in her mind, the United States could pretend to represent the entire world because of its multiethnic nature. American immigrants, van Kleeck declared before the first international Congress of Working Women, were in actual fact representatives of their native countries:

For we are all very much concerned in each other's affairs and that is the practical reason for this gathering. If America, or if any other land, fails to awaken to this opportunity, we

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<sup>687</sup> See Mary van Kleeck, "Foreword: Method of the Conference" in C.S. Johnson, *The Negro in American Civilization*.

<sup>688</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "The Negro as a Municipal Problem: What a Local Chairman of the National Interracial Conference Might Accomplish", *The American City* 40, no.2 (February 1929): 112.

<sup>689</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "From the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work", manuscript, 1922, box 87, folders 11-12, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., 2.

are going to set back progress by just that much; but if, on the other hand, America and all the races represented in America and the lands which they represent can feel a true unity in solving these problems, the resulting strength will be tremendous.<sup>690</sup>

*The United States: An International Empire*

The United States, which van Kleeck considered an international empire, could thus speak for the whole world because of its own cosmopolitanism. Paradoxically, in 1919 she urged American teachers to improve their methods so as to accelerate the Americanization of immigrants:

The appropriation [of \$100,000] will probably go for the necessary expense of organizing and supervising instruction and also for coordinating Americanization methods; appropriations by local boards of education will pay the teachers and provide the school materials. . . . Since 1910 there has been a net increase of both illiterates and those unable to speak English. [With this money] the work of teaching will not be left to inexperienced hands . . . .<sup>691</sup>

Although no culture could claim superiority, American culture, because of its multicultural character, was nevertheless preferable to other cultures in van Kleeck's eyes.

Unlike the way most scholars viewed them, van Kleeck saw anthropology and, more generally, social research as a means for improving the lives of blacks in American society by advancing the causes of integration and cooperation.<sup>692</sup> Van Kleeck had never considered social science to be a neutral, descriptive discipline. On the contrary, social researchers were under obligation to promote social justice at both the community and national levels:

If research can thus change the minds of judges, and advance the cause of betterment of labor conditions, it cannot be regarded as academic or remote from practical affairs. It must be given an honorable place among the methods of improving social conditions. It is essentially democratic. It implies that the solution of social problems rests not with any

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<sup>690</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "The Working Women and the New Social Vision", *Life and Labor* (December 1919): 320.

<sup>691</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Americanization in New York State", *School and Society*, 11 October, 1919: 423-424.

<sup>692</sup> "Instead of waiting for a race riot to start action, the author urges the immediate appointment of a local commission composed of wise men and women of both races who will study the conditions and make plans for meeting needs with even-handed justice and with a keen sense of the great social opportunity offered to a city made up of several races and able to demonstrate the varied and interesting possibilities of composite life." Mary van Kleeck, "The Negro as a Municipal Problem", 111.

restricted group but with the whole community; that the light of well-informed public opinion is more to be desired than the fire of conflict between opposing interests, which destroys more rapidly than it illuminates.<sup>693</sup>

### *The Campaign for Social Justice*

As she first expressed it in 1910, van Kleeck's linking of utilitarian social research and enlightened public decision-making prefigured the classic description by Walter Lippmann (1889-1974) in his 1922 essay, *Public Opinion*. An understanding of social issues, once it reached an enlightened public, justified the existence of the social sciences in the 1910s and 1920s—a premise many of van Kleeck's contemporaries shared.

Social scientists, in their quest for utility, sought to mimic the natural sciences. Alfred D. Chandler was the first of many historians to show how managers and social scientists aspired to control nature and, ultimately, society, much as the natural sciences aimed to do. Van Kleeck, too, hoped to cure social ills through social science. She even advocated a closer working relationship between the natural and the social sciences. In a letter to Marie Obenauer of the American Association of University Women, van Kleeck affirmed that “[t]he working of a closer relationship between the social sciences and the natural sciences becomes, therefore, another of those problems which make the future interesting.”<sup>694</sup> Indeed, the natural and the social sciences were fundamentally alike because they were based on the same scientific method:

[Science is important because of the] power of facts to set new forces in motion for remedying wrongs and teaching men a new understanding of how to get the business of producing goods done with advantage instead of disadvantage for human good. If facts have this power, then science and the discipline of science, with its final result in freeing minds from the chief obstacle to progress, prejudice, is a [supreme] contribution [to society].<sup>695</sup>

The war against prejudice waged by both social and natural scientists was unequivocally a legacy of the Enlightenment approach to science. For example, the eighteenth-century French

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<sup>693</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Suggestions for Investigations of Women’s Work in New York”, manuscript, 3 May, 1910, box 85, folder 5, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass., 2.

<sup>694</sup> Mary van Kleeck to Marie Obenauer, correspondence, 25 March, 1924, box 10 folder 333, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>695</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “Thinking Together for Smith College”, *Smith Alumnae Quarterly*, 13 July, 1922: 359.

philosopher Condorcet (1743-1794), elected secretary of the Académie des Sciences in 1777, campaigned to rid science of prejudice.<sup>696</sup>

Van Kleeck, however, avoided pitting religion and science against each other, as became common after the Enlightenment. She maintained faith in both science and religion, which she conceived of as two complementary means for advancing social welfare. For example, she looked at the problem of industrial fatigue with

a combination of . . . social common sense and scientific procedure. We have had scientific procedure in determining that fatigue is psychological, and that from fatigue one must rest if it is not to become exhausting. That is the scientific basis for setting some limit to the machine which otherwise would run all day long, and all through the night, because the machine does not know fatigue. . . . Upon the basis of a growing social standard we must build, using as our method the scientific and technical facts which show us how to arrive at the goal which is set by our social vision. Our social vision grows out of our experience as to what is good for our communities.<sup>697</sup>

Social science shared a method and a goal—improving social conditions—with the natural sciences, but its primary mission was to find and promote what was good for the community. As a consequence, in van Kleeck's mind the social sciences incorporated elements of both the natural sciences and religion.

The social sciences had an active role to play in fostering equitable social conditions. To achieve this end, van Kleeck did not allow herself to fall prey to an intellectualism presuming that the production of knowledge in and of itself would have the desired effect on the public. Instead, van Kleeck was closer to the idea of empowered social studies that John Dewey had defined in his classic essay on social reconstruction.<sup>698</sup> Indeed, the very process of making social

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<sup>696</sup> "Le mépris des sciences humaines était un des premiers caractères du christianisme. Il avait à se venger des outrages de la philosophie ; il craignait cet esprit d'examen et de doute, cette confiance en sa propre raison, fléau de toutes les croyances religieuses. La lumière des sciences naturelles lui était même odieuse et suspecte ; car elles sont très dangereuses pour les succès des miracles ; et il n'y a point de religion qui ne force ses sectateurs à dévorer quelques absurdités physiques. Ainsi le triomphe du christianisme fut le signal de l'entière décadence et des sciences et de la philosophie." *Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain* (Paris: Librairie Philosophie J. Vrin, 1970 [1793]): 84.

<sup>697</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *What Industry Means to Women Workers*, 8.

<sup>698</sup> In the same vein as van Kleeck, Dewey argued that "when the practice of knowledge ceased to be dialectical and became experimental, knowing became preoccupied with changes and the test of knowledge became the ability to bring about certain changes. Knowing, for the experimental sciences, means a certain kind of intelligently conducted doing; it ceases to be contemplative and becomes in a true sense practical." John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920): 121.

inquiries marked the beginning of social reconstruction for van Kleeck. In a more practical way than Dewey had done, van Kleeck stressed the paramount role of surveyor over that of the survey itself. Social scientists undeniably became political actors while carrying out their inquiries, van Kleeck acknowledged. Their feelings about social issues influenced how they gathered facts. Social scientists, far from being remote from the environments they were studying, immersed themselves intellectually in the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of these milieus. Surveyors derived their authority for making these investigations from their professional training, not their psychological distance.

### *On Leadership*

Van Kleeck advocated the training of a leadership elite made up of both women and men to guide community decision-making. She pointed out what she saw as an imperative for “a genuine and characteristic by university women to the improvement of the social and economic status of women.”<sup>699</sup> Moreover, she underscored the shortage of effective leadership among black women. The basis of leadership, van Kleeck maintained (echoing Charles Merriam), was education and professional training.

Van Kleeck’s promotion of professional leadership training revealed another paradox in her thought. On the one hand, she vigorously denounced leadership by owners and managers, citing its undemocratic origins; on the other hand, she wanted to create new leaders by relying on another undemocratic structure: education. Her vision of leadership did not call for a democratic diffusion of authority, but rather for the sharing of power among political, business, and professional elites.

Yet to conclude that van Kleeck was hypocritical in her conception of democracy would be an error. It is no less true, however, that her vision of democracy could hardly be termed anti-authoritarian. Indeed, van Kleeck sought to introduce a new source of authority into American politics and business: the authority of experts and social scientists.

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<sup>699</sup> Mary van Kleeck, “The Association Relation to the Social and Economic Position of Women: Preliminary Statement for the Committee on the Study of the Relation of the Constitution to Equal Rights for Women”, *Journal of the American Association of University Women* 18 (1923): 19.

### Mary van Kleeck's Politics: Social Scientists as Coaches for Progressive Action

The theoretical orientation of Mary van Kleeck was incontrovertibly political. Her hard-won understanding of industrial research and social work, together with her idiosyncratic approach to social science, led her to one conclusion: social scientists, social workers, and industrial researchers needed to play an active role in politics. She even criticized the American Federation of Labor for not being politically oriented. Labour relations, van Kleeck believed, were a political problem that legislation could resolve by altering working conditions.<sup>700</sup>

Her career took a sharp turn toward politics when she began working with the Department of Labor during World War I. As was the case for Mitchell and Merriam, the first war to have a global reach in the twentieth century marked a pivotal time in the life of Mary van Kleeck. Whereas before 1917 van Kleeck had sought to influence policy primarily at the local and state levels, during the war she gained national prominence as the first director of the Division of Women of the U.S. Labor Department.<sup>701</sup> This office was charged with facilitating and accelerating the entry of non-working women into industry. Van Kleeck's experience in industrial research at the Russell Sage Foundation stood her in good stead when she and her staff began overseeing the writing and adoption of regulations that affected women in the manufacturing sector. For example, she took into consideration the suitability of women for certain kinds of work, as well as their ability to do the work. She was well aware of the disadvantages, risks, and dangers that would likely prove greater for women than for men and that to a large extent would determine the activities of the Division of Women:

[It] is a separate branch because many of the problems affecting women are different from the problems affecting men. The standards of their wages are lower. They are not so strongly organized in trade unions. They are physically less capable of heavy work, and the dangers of overstrain are more serious. And they represent a reserve force of labor capable of expansion if the withdrawal of men into military service makes necessary the more extensive employment of women. The danger is that they may be put into men's places before an actual shortage of labor makes it necessary, and that their ill-considered introduction into new occupations may be the occasion for lowering wages, for checking

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<sup>700</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Women unite to protect women", *Survey* 41 (December 1928): 406.

<sup>701</sup> On the experience of the Division of Women, see Marsha Gordon, "Onward Kitchen Soldiers: Mobilizing the Domestic during World War I", *Canadian Review of American Studies* 29, no. 2 (1999): 61-87.

the proper development of collective bargaining, and for adding a new and powerful factor to conditions causing unrest in industry.<sup>702</sup>

She went into industries where women made up the bulk of the work force and surveyed their jobs, their training, and their schedules. For example, in 1918 she visited plants producing chemical weapons for the U.S. Army. She discovered that some chemicals posed dangers to female fertility. She also identified jobs that required a level of physical strength that very few women possessed. Factories might be able to compensate for differences in physical strength, she reported, by installing machines that would enable women to perform tasks formerly carried out only by men. It was by conducting such industrial research that van Kleeck and her staff gained firsthand knowledge of methods for adapting men's work to women.

Van Kleeck's choice of project in this instance was surely related to her commitment to gaining equal access for women to male jobs. But it also showed her how indispensable mechanical training was for women in situations where male workers had been called away. For these reasons, van Kleeck considered that developing her industrial research skills was a legitimate substitute for military service during the war. Her time as head of the Division of Women managing social scientists had also swayed her later thinking about the politics of social science.

#### *Mary Van Kleeck's Participation on Hoover's Commission*

Van Kleeck resigned from the Division of Women in 1921. A year later she served with Wesley Mitchell on the Presidential Commission on Unemployment headed by then-Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover. While working for the Commission, van Kleeck conducted another investigation into the status of the employed and unemployed. Unemployment, she maintained, was a problem of access to work. It was impossible to understand the problem of unemployment without considering issues related to employment. This survey led Van Kleeck to realize how limited knowledge of labour and working conditions was:

A state and its citizens need enough facts to show them the condition of employment within their own borders, but they also need to know the condition of business throughout the country. Thus, not only is a national index important for use as a barometer, but the

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<sup>702</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Woman's Work for the War" *Evening Post*, 6 March, 1918, 11.

detailed facts about a section of the country or an industry are also necessary as a basis for action.<sup>703</sup>

Statistics could, van Kleeck discovered, modify the conditions of unemployment, a realization that disposed her to acquiesce to the general conclusion of Hoover's Commission.

The 1920s were rich with events that influenced van Kleeck's life and thought. Hoover's evaluation of van Kleeck's work for the Commission on Unemployment confirmed Joan Hoff's thesis about Hoover's progressivism: Hoover did not, in fact, listen only to businessmen and pro-capital social scientists.<sup>704</sup> The contributions that Van Kleeck had been hired to make to the Commission exemplified Hoover's interest in workers and in the stance women took on social and economic problems. Van Kleeck agreed with Hoover that job opportunities for workers were a cornerstone of the American republic:

With the leadership of Herbert Hoover, the individual responsibility of every man and every industry was emphasized not as a selfish effort to provide for one group at the expense of others, but as a social obligation of each group to others in the nation.

Moreover, governmental action was urged.<sup>705</sup>

In February 1922, Hoover recommended van Kleeck to receive an honorary degree at Smith College.<sup>706</sup>

Another pivotal moment in van Kleeck's life, especially in her relationship with Charles Merriam, turned out to be participation in a Commission on Migration and Industries from 1923 to 1926. The commission, which came into being under the auspices of the National Research Council (NRC), was set up in the context of the debate over the second immigration law, passed in 1924. Van Kleeck and Merriam collaborated on the commission's work. Van Kleeck, who was interested in the relations between industry and immigrants, charged the commissioners to be prompt and timely in their deliberations in order to maximize the influence of the commission's findings in the political debate about immigration. But the topics under consideration dealt mainly with administrative matters, such as which organizations would carry out what work. After long months of discussions, some commissioners, including Merriam but

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<sup>703</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Charting the Course of Employment", 352.

<sup>704</sup> See Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975).

<sup>705</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Unemployment Ended", *The Survey*, 15 June, 1922, 388.

<sup>706</sup> Herbert Hoover to Mary van Kleeck VK, correspondence, 10 February, 1922, box 9, folder 260, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

not van Kleeck, decided to switch from the NRC to the newly constituted SSRC. Merriam led these debates between the NRC and the SSRC. Bored by all of these technical matters, in 1923 van Kleeck decided to pressure Merriam into speeding up the pace by threatening to abandon the survey. When Merriam did nothing to satisfy van Kleeck's demands, she directly confronted Merriam about his attitude toward the social sciences in a revealing letter in February 1923, asking Merriam

[whether] the national research committee in social science [was] yet organized? If so, who are its members and what are their addresses? Would that committee be in a position to make a somewhat extensive inquiry as to research now in progress which has a relation to the social aspects of human migration, using social sciences[,] to include political [science] and economics?<sup>707</sup>

Merriam took nearly a year to reply to van Kleeck, writing, somewhat elusively, in January 1924 that "we were not fully organized at that time. I am not sure that we could do better this time."<sup>708</sup> After receiving only one other letter from Merriam (in March 1924), van Kleeck notified Merriam a year later that she was resigning from the commission, severely criticizing his lethargic approach:

May [I] in resigning express the hope that a plan of relationships may be developed so that the various scientific groups can make their contribution to problems of migration through a unified committee representing them all? The need for this seems to be amply demonstrated in the experience of both these committees on human migration.<sup>709</sup>

This experience was a turning point in van Kleeck's life because of the effect it had on her thinking about the politics of the social sciences. She had tired of endless committee discussions that led nowhere; she now craved more radical action. She took her distance from Mitchell, Merriam, and Hoover in order to focus on ways to pursue more coordinated action that would be more likely to transform the foundations of the social structure.

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<sup>707</sup> Mary van Kleeck to Charles Edward Merriam, correspondence, 13 February, 1923, box 62, folders 6, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>708</sup> Charles Edward Merriam to Mary van Kleeck, correspondence, 19 January, 1924, box 62, folder 6, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

<sup>709</sup> Mary van Kleeck to Charles Edward Merriam, correspondence, 27 June, 1925, box 62, folder 6, Mary van Kleeck papers, Smith College Archives, Smith College, Northampton, Mass.

### *Mary Van Kleeck's Notion of the State*

Before analyzing how van Kleeck was radicalized after 1925, I would like to discuss her conception of the state. Social scientists had for some time been actively involved in political decision-making, although more often than not as political advisors. Part of their task was to devise innovative definitions of the state and its role, and the definition that van Kleeck proposed had a certain eloquence. Her familiarity with local and municipal problems prompted her to focus on the city as the main polity affected by social ills. In van Kleeck's early writings, she understood municipal responsibility in much the same way as did Chicago political scientist Charles Merriam. Ethnic tensions characterized the urban context for her as well. She perceived black integration as initially an urban problem. Immigration, too, concerned primarily municipal authorities and institutions such as schools located in cities. Thus, like Merriam and the Chicago school of sociology and political science, van Kleeck believed that the origins of social ills and of the political solutions to them could be found in the cities.

Soon, however, she realized that municipal leaders held only limited political power. She also reacted against the widespread corruption among aldermen and mayors. Van Kleeck attempted to transcend these two obstacles by involving the state legislature: "With so much of the trade centered in New York[,] it is within the power of the state legislature to take action which should determine the future of the whole industry in this country."<sup>710</sup> In 1913 and 1914, she campaigned for state labour legislation that would regulate women's and children's working conditions, make the eight-hour day standard, and prohibit tenement work. She also called for the strict enforcement of these laws through daily inspections by industrial researchers commissioned by the state government. Van Kleeck's campaign to make industrial research an investigative arm of the state legislature was, in fact, partially successful. But in a very New York City way, she criticized Albany for being too removed from the daily life of the mass of workers. Although she had flirted with state power, she now joined Merriam in his critique of state legislation as an outdated and anachronistic tool for improving working conditions.

In her early industrial studies, van Kleeck had pointed out how the conditions of workers and their families were not peculiar to one city or one state. She had noted the problems that arose when factories controlled both the means of production and the lives of their employees. While with the Federal government in World War I, she had witnessed social ills firsthand that

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<sup>710</sup> Mary van Kleeck, *Artificial Flower Makers*, 224.

were common to several states. She now realized that these problems were national in scope and so required comprehensive solutions. This realization turned van Kleeck, in the Harding-Coolidge Era, into an ardent believer in the power of the Federal government to correct social problems:

Through coordination in the Department of Labor it is hoped that the service of the U.S. Government in labor problems during the war may be characterized by a combination of unity in plan and policy and careful attention to the details which make up the sum total of industrial conditions. If this can be achieved[,] out of the new conditions created by the war will come a new understanding of industrial relations.<sup>711</sup>

For example, van Kleeck demanded equal access to work for women. She also insisted on continued increases in the standard of living of workers and farmers around the country. Her main argument in support of these demands was that they would make it possible for workers and farmers to consume more goods, which in turn would assure economic and social prosperity. Henry Ford wanted to increase consumption as well in the name of economic prosperity. Unlike Ford, however, van Kleeck believed that the responsibility for carrying out these policies should be shared by business, city administrations, and the Federal government:

Between the opposing interests of employers and workers, the Government, representing the whole people, must serve not only as mediator, or as an agency to enforce laws, but as a vital force to make industry serve the national good with the spirit of a truly and thoroughly democratic nation.<sup>712</sup>

These actors had to guarantee a minimum income for all Americans in order to ensure adequate consumption of manufactured products. Consumption was the key to higher standards of living, peace between labour and management, and fair conditions for all concerned. Here van Kleeck, in the early 1920s, anticipated the economic theory that John Maynard Keynes was to promote in the mid-1930s, based on the belief that expenditures by municipal, state, and federal governments would stimulate consumption. Van Kleeck was, in effect, instructing politicians and bureaucrats to guarantee a basic standard of living.

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<sup>711</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Woman's Work for the War", 11.

<sup>712</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Women in the Munitions Industries", *Life and Labor*, (June 1918): 115.

Once immersed in the game of politics, van Kleeck had to deal with the thorny issue of putting her ideas into effect. Van Kleeck, after a decade of working with prominent Washington politicians, could no longer accept the frustration that accompanied inefficient commission procedures, interminable administrative debates, and the process-oriented mind-set of social scientists like Charles Merriam. Although Merriam and Mitchell considered asking van Kleeck to sit on the Commission on Recent Social Trends in 1929, they finally settled on the medical practitioner Alice Hamilton (1869-1970) to represent women in that inquiry.

Van Kleeck, moreover, had by then also distanced herself from the nationalist self-sufficiency of the 1920s that was fueling the shift toward economic isolationism. She questioned the relation between the state as a political unit and the state as an economic unit which is a party in competition. . . . A modern nation is not an economic unit, though national pride in international gathering may make it appear so. An industry, however, may be regarded as an economic unit though it may be carried on in many different nations. It is practicable to plan a study, for example, of the textile industry and of the varying factors affecting it throughout the world. It is easy to see that such a study would illuminate many of our ideas of international competition.<sup>713</sup>

Nor were poor working conditions peculiar to any one country.<sup>714</sup> The problem concerned every industrialized nation in the world. After 1926, van Kleeck became much more interested in international solutions to economic and social ills. She endorsed, for example, the Canadian plan for mediating labour disputes like the postal service strike of 1923. More important, she was a leading member of the International Industrial Research Institute (IRI), an organization based in Amsterdam. Through the IRI she met representatives from the Soviet Union and became familiar with Soviet attempts at social planning on a national scale. She was also fascinated by the internationalist message of Soviet leaders. With the help of her contacts in Amsterdam, she visited the Soviet Union in 1932.<sup>715</sup> She was attracted by the equality among sexes there, and intrigued by the respect and dignity granted workers in a socialist country.

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<sup>713</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "How the United States Can Aid the International Labor Organization through Research", *American Labor Legislation Review* 17 (June 1927): 169-170.

<sup>714</sup> Van Kleeck believed it important to do "research not confined to a single nation but free to envisage all the factors regardless of national boundaries." *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>715</sup> On travelling in the Soviet Union, see the old but still valid article by Lewis S. Feuer, "American Travelers in the Soviet Union 1917-1932: The Formation of a Component of New Deal Ideology", *American Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (1962): 119-149.

Although she may have found the communist model appealing, van Kleeck did not become rigidly doctrinaire. It was clear to her, for example, that the United States could not adopt the Soviet model in its entirety because U.S. industrial and cultural development was so different from the Soviets'.

*Mary van Kleeck's Admiration of the Soviet Union*

Still, van Kleeck believed that the Soviet Union should become a source of inspiration for Americans. U.S. officials would do well to refer to it as a functioning model for the efficient planning of social, economic, and natural resources. The idea of operational planning was not new in her thought; in fact, as a member of the Taylor society, van Kleeck had propounded the notion of efficiency in organizing labour and capital. Social planning was merely a different way of putting the same idea. Van Kleeck, moreover, had never subscribed to any hypothetical natural balance or realignment of economic and social inequalities:

Social economic planning, directed toward raising standards of living, means not controlling consumer demand but setting it free so that there is no obstacle between the freed requirements of the consumer and the utilization of productive capacity, including not only natural resources but their fabrication and transportation and all the operations of production culminating in goods and services. . . .<sup>716</sup>

Indeed, van Kleeck's communism was far from orthodox. First, she never openly supported the idea of violent revolution by the proletariat. Even in her Stalinist years, van Kleeck still held that the democratic system should remain the foundation of the American republic. Second, at the same time that she was holding discussions with Comintern representatives, she was also active in the Evangelical Church of the United States and had never even contemplated atheistic political and economic theories, so central was religion to her vision of society. Finally, van Kleeck had some trouble with the authoritarianism of the Stalinist regime in Moscow. For her, neither proletariat nor bourgeois dictatorship was the solution. Class cooperation in industries and government continued to be a prevailing feature of her thought. Thus, even though she defended socialist planning in general, she kept her distance from the Stalinist and Marxist

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<sup>716</sup> Mary van Kleeck, "Social Planning and Social Work", *National Conference of Social Work* 2 (1931-1932): 296-297.

variants of socialism, seeking instead to adapt socialist tenets to American political and economic culture.

### *The Early New Deal Years*

In the early 1930s, van Kleeck started to view her past collaboration with the Federal government in a harsh light. She regretted her work with the Division of Women and with the Commission on Unemployment, which she considered largely a waste of time and energy. In her more radical years, she considered her former experience as only having abetted the perpetuation of the traditional power structures that denied the fundamental rights of workers to fair working conditions. Although van Kleeck had been considered for membership in the Recent Social Trends Commission in 1929, by that time she already had developed conflicting views on the means for effecting social planning. In essence, her social justice goals had not changed since 1926, but she came to realize the limitations and the weaknesses of public commissions.

After Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidential election victory in 1932, van Kleeck was also approached to be on the board of the National Recovery Administration. As were Merriam and Mitchell, she, too, was curious about Roosevelt's program. Nevertheless, only two days after having been nominated in 1933, she abruptly resigned in protest over Roosevelt's decision to question the right to strike, making it known that she refused to be a member of an organization that undermined the rights of workers. After this, van Kleeck joined the ranks of those on the left who criticized the New Deal for catering to capitalist interests. She reckoned Roosevelt among the leaders of the bourgeois dictatorship at the top of the United States. In the same spirit as Charles A. Beard (1874-1948), she continued to plead for socialist planning based on scientific evidence.<sup>717</sup> Fascism, she believed, was only the dictatorship of capitalism, and its seeds in the United States appeared to her to be identical to the ones that had given rise to it in Italy and Germany.

### Conclusion

A former associate of Hoover, a leader in the Taylor Society, and a prominent member of the Evangelical Church of the United States, van Kleeck was misunderstood as much by post-war

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<sup>717</sup> On Charles A. Beard's challenge concerning the New Deal, see Clyde W. Barrow, "Building a Workers' Republic: Charles A. Beard's Critique of Liberalism in the 1930s", *Polity* 30, no 1 (1997): 29-56.

politicians as by historians after her death. In the early 1950s, just as did the famous performer, stage producer and leftist activist Paul Robeson (1898-1976), Mary van Kleeck had trouble getting a passport to leave the U.S. for a conference of the IRI in Amsterdam. Despite being an eighth-generation American, she was suspected of involvement in un-American activities because of her association with communists in the early 1930s. Her eclectic vision of American society alarmed Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957) and his followers, who viewed it as a threat to American ideals and the American way of life.

Van Kleeck fit into no categories. A labour leader who worked with Rockefeller, a Stalinist who led church meetings, a social scientist who opposed objectivist opinions—these contradictions and others characterized the life of van Kleeck before the New Deal Era. Van Kleeck's thinking reflected, and helped shape, some of the great trends in American intellectual life in the Progressive Era and the 1920s.

The political philosophy of progressivism as elaborated by Herbert Croly and Walter Lippman profoundly influenced van Kleeck. She believed that the state needed to have the power to intervene in social and economic affairs. Progressive anti-laissez-faire notions permeated van Kleeck's writings from her early essays for the Russell Sage Foundation to her socialist articles on social planning in the mid-1930s. Obviously not everyone shared her ideas in those days, but van Kleeck promoted them nonetheless on behalf of workers, women, immigrants, and blacks. Employers and politicians, van Kleeck contended, had to understand that these marginal groups had the right to equal opportunity.

The business and political communities also had the responsibility for not making arbitrary or unilateral determinations. Van Kleeck brought an understanding of pragmatic inquiry from her political progressivism, and inspired by the writings of John Dewey, she based her methods on social research into living conditions. The first step in political decision-making was gathering information, an idea also advanced by the Taylorites. Van Kleeck herself stressed the notion of social studies as the beginning of social reconstruction. Her understanding of social studies antagonized some social scientists like Merriam, who defended the gradualist approach of committees. But formulating advice was not enough for van Kleeck; it should also lead to concrete action based not on theories but on practical information about living and working conditions.

Yet van Kleeck's faith in science and rational control should not be overemphasized, as has often been done by Guy Alchon and John M. Jordan.<sup>718</sup> "Science," she was known to quip, "needs religion to get applied." Her fundamental aim was not to establish an Edward Bellamy society organized around a valueless and rational system. On the contrary, van Kleeck was seeking to create a new ethics rooted both in scientific evidence about human behaviour and in a redefined morality. The Social Gospel swayed van Kleeck because of the way it linked science with religion. As the lives of Walter Rauschenbush and Jane Addams showed, it was indeed possible to take an interest in both science and morality at the same time.

Van Kleeck's training in industrial research and social work had brought her into close contact with the pioneers of the modern social sciences. Influenced by Thorstein Veblen, Robert and Helen Lynd, and the leaders of the Chicago School of sociology and political science, van Kleeck analyzed society through these novel lenses. Her use of personal interviews and statistics, her interest in cities, and her Veblenian vision of communities of interest informed the bulk of her work as a social scientist. Her frequent contact with Wesley Mitchell and Charles Merriam influenced her writings. The business cycle and citizenship were two important ideas to which she referred repeatedly and that she redefined throughout her work. She adapted their meanings, however, by associating business cycles with employees' dignity and citizenship with the right to work, two dimensions absent in Mitchell's and Merriam's work.

Finally, her work also bore traces of the naturalist cynicism that was characteristic of the leading novelists of her time. Like Sinclair Lewis, van Kleeck portrayed American society as promoting a false impression of fairness so as to mask unfair living conditions among women, workers, and blacks. Some of her work was very critical of the fundamental principles of American life. On occasion, she interpreted the development of American society over the years as having been co-opted by selfish entrepreneurs working only to advance their personal interests. Yet even during her socialist years, van Kleeck did not lose her faith in the capacity of the United States and the industrial world to transform themselves in favour of social justice.

Van Kleeck might arguably be described as a practical utopian. Vigorously anti-theoretical, van Kleeck had high hopes for the future of the United States and its people. Her own life, however, also illustrated the inner tensions that pitted the intellectual currents of the Progressive Era and the 1920s against each other: a leftist leader working for the Republican

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<sup>718</sup> John M. Jordan, *Machine-Age Ideology*; Guy Alchon, *The Invisible Hand of Planning*.

Party and Herbert Hoover; a non-scholar secretary of the Social Science Research Council; a religious socialist; a feminist who opposed the Equal Rights Amendment. That van Kleeck could pack all these contradictions into her life only confirms her position as one of the most prominent anti-doctrinaire leftist leader of the early twentieth century. Describing van Kleeck by examining only one of these dimensions would be to neglect her experiential wealth and to leave untouched key facets of her life that otherwise would shed considerable light on the intellectually effervescent and very rich period of U.S. history that was the Progressive Era and the 1920s.

## CONCLUSION

From the early 1980s on, the neoliberal critique of the welfare state and the postmodernist deconstruction of science have dealt a serious blow to the credibility of social science. The theses of Milton Freedman and Michel Foucault shook the foundations of social science with seismic force. The writings of early-twentieth-century social scientists now seem antiquated and hold little appeal. Paradoxically, the Hooverian notions of reengineering and efficient management have regained a following in the current political and economic ambiance. These approaches have been misunderstood as being ideologically associated with the rise of the neoliberal rejection of the welfare state. It is tempting to compare the present socio-economic situation with the one prevailing in the 1920s. For certain political scientists and economists, Herbert Hoover's associative state now leads toward the so-called Third Way.

### The Proximity between Social Engineering and Social Sciences

Yet the Hooverian ideas of social reengineering and efficient management cannot be separated from the work of social scientists. Unlike later presidents, Hoover was not one for subcontracting out governmental prerogatives to private enterprise; public-sector social scientists, however, fell in another category. In addition, Hoover's individualism did not promote self-serving interests the way neoliberal values later did. Instead, his focused on service to the community. Hoover predicated his vision of efficient management on joint, responsible management of socio-economic problems by the political, business, and intellectual elites of the United States. From union leaders to stockholders, from business managers to consumers and governmental officials, Hoover sought to integrate the various socio-economic actors into a coalition based on motives other than simple self-interest. One of Hoover's fundamental beliefs was that limited intervention by the federal government could foster economic prosperity. The difference between Hoover in the 1920s and Keynesian politicians was that Hoover wanted to prolong economic prosperity while things were going well, whereas the Keynesians sought to bring back economic prosperity in times of economic depression. The major differences between the economics of Wesley Mitchell in the 1920s and that of John Maynard Keynes in the 1930s had to do with means more than ends. They tailored the means to fit the economic conditions of their own times. Mitchell, in the 1920s, supported the idea of public spending to ensure economic

prosperity through consumption; Keynes, in the 1930s, proposed government deficit spending to counter the effects of the depression.

In the 1920s, Wesley Mitchell advised Hoover not to limit the role of the state but rather to expand governmental means for controlling economic turbulence. In Hoover's 1920s, very few economists and intellectuals believed that markets could naturally regulate themselves.<sup>719</sup> This idea extended beyond national and international economics to social relations, which also needed incentives to be imposed from without in order to adjust themselves. As early as 1913, the political analyst Walter Lippmann recognized the role of social forces in bringing about lasting change:

Profound economic forces brought about the beginning of the end of chattel slavery. But the reality of freedom was not achieved by proclamation. For that the revolution had to go on: the industrial life of the nation had to change its character, social customs had to be replaced, the whole outlook of men had to be transformed. And whether it is Negro slavery or a vicious sexual bondage, the actual advance comes from the substitutions injected into society by dynamic social forces.<sup>720</sup>

One of the jobs of social scientists was to discover how these social forces expressed themselves. For example, Robert and Helen Lynd inspired a whole generation of social scientists with their massive quest to uncover social forces in Middletown. Charles and Mary Beard, in their classic *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927), charged historians with the task of locating social forces in the past:

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<sup>719</sup> See Guy Alchon, *The Invisible Hand of Planning: Capitalism, Social Science, and the State in the 1920s* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); Peri Arnold, "Ambivalent Leviathan: Herbert Hoover and the Positive State" in J. David Greenstone (ed.), *Public Values and Private Power in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982): 109-136; Edward D. Berkowitz and Kim McQuaid, "Bureaucrats as 'Social Engineers': Federal Welfare Program in Herbert Hoover's America", *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 1980 (39): 321-335; Barry Karl, "Presidential Planning and Social Science Research: Mr. Hoover's Experts", *Perspectives in American History* 3 (1969): 347-409; *idem*, "Presidential Planning and Social Science Research: Mr. Hoover's Experts", *Perspectives in American History* 3 (1969): 347-409; Patrick D. Reagan, "From Depression to Depression: Hooverian National Planning, 1921-1933" *Mid America* 70 (1988): 35-60; Charles Walcott and Karen M. Hult, "Management Science and the Great Engineer: Governing the White House during the Hoover Administration", *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 20 (1990): 557-579.

<sup>720</sup> Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics* (New York: Mitchell Kennedy, 1913): 156-157.

Bound by the duties of his office to notice intellectual currents as well as mass, number, velocity, and energy, [the historian] cannot ignore an expression of a life force or divine power which represents the striving of mind to get hold of the helm.<sup>721</sup>

It was this very discovery and mastery of social forces that imbued the social sciences with their ultimate purpose in the Hoover era.

Herbert Hoover not only agreed with this purpose, but also went beyond a perfunctory acknowledgement of the allure of social science. He actually hired social scientists; he created forums in which they could express their views on social, economic, and political problems; he listened to their views; he even put some of their recommendations on social issues into practice. There was no better illustration of Hoover's implicit faith in social science than the prominence that Wesley Mitchell, Charles Merriam, and Mary van Kleeck attained in the 1920s.

Social scientists, to be sure, disagreed with Hoover on a number of issues, just as they disagreed among themselves. Their relationships with him were not always peaceful and deferential, in part because neither social scientists nor Hoover had the upper hand. Hoover, for instance, failed in his attempts to induct social scientists into his army of political associates. Conversely, social scientists found themselves unable to dictate Hoover's decisions. Hoover rejected some of their conclusions. But Hoover respected them, and experts in social affairs began to see the political arena as a venue for realizing their ultimate purpose: orienting social forces toward social progress.

The historiography of the social sciences has led many historians to conceive of their transformation in terms of institutional shifts and methodological breakthroughs. For example, historians of social science Hamilton Cravens and Dorothy Ross have taken the institutional approach, focusing on the emergence of professional associations like the American Historical Association, the American Economic Association, the Social Science Research Council, and others.<sup>723</sup> Essentially descriptive in nature, this school has tended to deintellectualize the purpose

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<sup>721</sup> Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1927): p. 829.

<sup>723</sup> See Hamilton C. Cravens, "The Abandonment of Evolutionary Social Theory in America: The Impact of Academic Professionalization upon American Sociological Theory, 1890-1920", *American Studies* (Lawrence, KS), 1971, 12(2): 5-20; *idem*, "History of the Social Sciences" *Isis*, 1985 (1): 183-207; Dorothy Ross, *The Origins of American Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); *idem* ed. *Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994).

and aims of social science. To a large extent, institutional historians have given priority to the circumstantial side of the history of the social sciences, treating, for instance, the grants accorded to associations and institutes and the various professional opportunities that opened up for social scientists. They have also emphasized the conflicts that arose when these organizations vied for existing scientific turf or new terrain. The economic and political conditions of the social science professions figure prominently in their work. Donald Fisher, for example, has sifted through extensive archival minutiae to produce a brilliant and richly detailed account of the founding of the Social Science Research Council, from its funding to its political involvements.<sup>725</sup> Institutional historians have generally traced the emergence of the social sciences from the creases they left in the organizational contours of host governments, philanthropies, and universities.

#### The Intellectual Nature of the Social Sciences

A salient shortcoming of institutional histories has to do with the inherent intellectual nature of the social sciences. Institutional histories often place too much emphasis on the financial and organizational aspects of the social sciences while making less room for the influence of ideas and conflicting interpretations concerning the rise and development of the social sciences. Intellectual historians can bring a different perspective to the history of the social sciences by illuminating their philosophical and moral dimensions. It would indeed be absurd to deny the philosophical origins of social science. Although institutional historians rarely reject intellectual history explicitly, their methods and conclusions perpetuate the impression that the social sciences are merely disciplines that serve the ends of those in positions of political and financial authority. This dissertation has attempted to clarify and substantiate this crucial point: social scientists once enjoyed considerable intellectual autonomy from institutional seats of political and financial power.

Essays by Mark C. Smith and John M. Jordan offer cogent examples of the relationship between social science institutions and their historiographers. Both support their conclusions by examining the intellectual history of the social sciences from a methodological rather than a

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<sup>725</sup> Donald Fisher, *Fundamental Development of the Social Sciences: Rockefeller Philanthropy and the United States Social Science Research Council* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993).

teleological perspective. Both maintain that the rational and empirical methods used by Mitchell, Merriam, and van Kleeck forced these three social scientists to adhere to purposeless or objectivist visions of social science. Smith views Mitchell as the main proponent of his era of a “social science of technique”.<sup>726</sup> Jordan associates the rise of empiricism in social science with the search for scientific authority.<sup>727</sup> Both Smith and Jordan attempt to discredit early historiography in the social sciences for linking them to undemocratic limitations on individual and collective freedoms. This attempt to associate Mitchell, Merriam, and van Kleeck—especially Merriam—with an undemocratic project purely on the basis of their use of rational and empirical methods seems particularly odd, if not untenable.

The evolution of the social sciences obviously cannot be adequately treated by considering institutions and methodology alone. To be sure, intellectual history has its own limitations. For example, intellectual historians can hardly pretend to explain the organizational growth of social science institutes. They can, however, depict the way social scientists in the past represented their own fields, the justifications they invoked, and the purposes they assigned to them. The case of Wesley Mitchell is relevant here. A methodological innovator, Mitchell refined the use of quantification and statistics in economics and social science. Yet this same Mitchell also believed that economics could contribute to the definition of a modern code of conduct by rooting it in the fulfillment of economic needs. Certain historians, by casting Mitchell strictly as a quantitative economist, have neglected crucial aspects of Mitchell’s thought, such as his vision of social science or the orientation of his economics.<sup>728</sup>

Another interpretative tendency in social science historiography has been to evaluate the aptness of the push to refashion social ethics. For historians like Christopher Shannon, social scientists were doomed to fail because of the impracticality of their task.<sup>729</sup> Shannon argues that social scientists failed to apprehend and influence social forces even as he refuses to credit their

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<sup>726</sup> Mark Calvin Smith, *Knowledge for What: Social Science and the Debate over its Role in 1930s America*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, 1980: viii.

<sup>727</sup> John M. Jordan, *Machine-Age Ideology: Social Engineering and American Liberalism, 1911-1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994)

<sup>728</sup> See Malcolm Rutherford, “An Introduction to ‘Money Economy and Modern Civilization’ by Wesley Mitchell”, *History of Political Economy*, 28:3 (1996): 317-328; Abraham Hirsch, “Mitchell’s Work on Civil War Inflation in his Development as an Economist”, *History of Political Economy*, 2 (1970): 118-132; Abraham Hirsch, “Wesley Clair Mitchell, J. Laurence Laughlin, and the Quantity Theory of Money”, *Journal of Political Economy*, 75 (1967): 822-843; Eli Ginzberg, “Wesley Clair Mitchell”, *History of Political Economy*, 29:3 (1997): 371-390.

<sup>729</sup> Christopher Shannon, *Conspicuous Criticism: Tradition, the Individual, and Culture in American Social Thought from Veblen to Mills* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996)

justifications for channeling social science toward ethics. He recognizes the historical existence of a moral purpose for social science, and then, while explicitly denying social scientists any moral mission, attempts to demonstrate their ultimate failure. Shannon raises the issue of the descriptive and normative functions of social science. Social scientists, he believes, should not have tried to reorient social values. Interestingly, Shannon reduces the role of social scientists to their technical function of advising politicians, contesting the notion that their influence extended beyond giving counsel.

For leftist historians, the utility of social science operates on a level other than moral duty. They see the rise of social science as not unrelated to the general wave of reform that characterized the Progressive Era.<sup>730</sup> The desire to remedy social problems drove social scientists to lead the reform movements of their day. Social science was a prominent part of the grand narrative that issued from these movements in the early twentieth century. The classic example these historians marshal to illustrate their point is John Dewey's collaboration with Jane Addams at Hull House. Historians delight in recounting how the genius of the University of Chicago wandered about the poverty-stricken neighbourhood around Hull House, speaking of Aristotle with philosophically inclined residents. For leftist historians, social scientists were leaders in social movements. "Like Dewey and Jane Addams," Christopher Lasch maintains, "Randolph Bourne thought that education could be used as an instrument of social reform."<sup>731</sup> Thomas Bender also interprets the historical role of social scientists as defined largely by urban reform.<sup>732</sup> The vitality of the reform movement, according to leftist historians, was primarily a consequence of the conceptual wealth that social scientists brought to it.

The existence of a close relationship between reform movements and the social sciences emerged from an early historical analysis of social sciences. Historians of reform had known about it for some time, and some of their analyses even predated the Progressive Era and the professionalisation of the social sciences. Some historians of reform have gone as far as pointing to the influence of scientists on Abraham Lincoln's decision to investigate the state of hospitals during the Civil War. The participation of social scientists in reform movements also helped

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<sup>730</sup> Leon Fink, Stephan Leonard, and Donald M. Reid (ed.), *Intellectuals and Public Life: Between Radicalism and Reform* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>731</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America, 1889-1963: The Intellectual as a Social Type* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965): p. 89.

<sup>732</sup> Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City from 1750 to the Beginnings of our own Time* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1987): pp. 294-317.

publicize the agendas of their disciplines to audiences beyond the professional journals in which their essays appeared. In the *Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter stressed that “if the professors had motives of their own resentment, the social scientists among them had special reason for a positive interest in the reform movements.”<sup>733</sup> Robert Wiebe, in his classic *The Search for Order*, has given a superb account of the relationship between the social scientists’ goal of curing social ills and the scientific and managerial methods they employed to do so.<sup>734</sup>

Gender historians have also studied the influence of educated women on the reform movements. Access to education for women and the emergence of professions in which female social scientists held prominent positions allowed educated women to make their voices heard in a male-dominated society. The experiences of Mary van Kleeck and Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Dean of Women at the University of California at Berkeley before marrying Wesley Mitchell, illustrated the interconnection between social science and the emancipation of women. “When women moved into the federal government to chart child welfare policy,” gender historian Robyn Muncy points out, “they did not integrate an arena formerly occupied by men. They created a whole new field of policymaking for themselves.”<sup>735</sup> Here again, feminist historiography is extensive but limited by its tendency to isolate women’s history from other historical interpretations. Van Kleeck’s interest in the overlap between gender and labour problems suggests the limitations of gender histories that focus only on women’s political and economic rights. Although van Kleeck was a feminist intellectual, she did not call for gender segregation, and she worked closely with male social scientists on a relatively equal footing.

The intellectual history of the social sciences has focused primarily on their philosophical origins, an approach that is also fairly old. Intellectual historian Merle Curti addressed the question of social science in his long essay, published in 1943, on the *Growth of American Thought*.<sup>736</sup> More recently, James T. Kloppenberg published an outstanding analysis of the philosophical foundations of social science.<sup>737</sup> Finally, Louis Menand has analyzed the intellectual atmosphere that prevailed when social science emerged at the turn of the twentieth

<sup>733</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955): p. 155.

<sup>734</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967)

<sup>735</sup> Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in America, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991): p. 156. On women and social sciences, see also Lynn McDonald, *The Women Founders of Social Sciences* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1994).

<sup>736</sup> Merle Curti, *The Growth of American Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1943.): p. 568.

<sup>737</sup> James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

century.<sup>738</sup> The intellectual history of the social sciences now seems to be emerging as the approach that has the breadth and depth required to yield a fresh understanding of the field.

Yet intellectual history, just as was the case for social history when it gained ascendancy thirty years ago, is neither a monolithic nor a static approach. In fact, various approaches within the field set intellectual historians apart from one another. Historians interested in cultural problems would be closer to ethnologists than to intellectual historians who work on philosophical topics. Although there are many ways of doing intellectual history, the great majority of intellectual historians share a single focus: the cultural production of intellectuals in a given milieu. The primary point of contention between social and intellectual historians arises over the social origins of ideas. Social historians of ideology have little doubt that social and economic factors determine the flow of ideas. Intellectual historians, however, consider the issues to be much more complex. They trace the transformations that result when one idea comes into contact with other ideas past and present. Of course, they do not deny the influence of socio-economic conditions, but they do refuse to reduce the influence of an idea to its social milieu.

Methodologically, as is true for other historians, intellectual historians of the social sciences favour certain sources over others. The documents on which intellectual history is based are mainly those that present the thoughts and reflections of thinkers. The choice of these documents constitutes a pivotal point in the work of the intellectual historian. Certain historians prefer to work with the papers of famous intellectuals, which often echo the political history of influential leaders. Robert Westbrook, in his study of John Dewey, maintains that the definitive intellectual biography of the most famous American philosopher is yet to be written.<sup>739</sup> This trend toward making well-known intellectuals the focus of historical analysis raises questions about the place of biography in intellectual history. Many intellectual historians consider researching the lives of famous thinkers to be the soundest approach to history.

#### The Contribution of Intellectual History to the Study of Social Sciences

Is intellectual history therefore no more than a collection of biographical accounts of the lives of great thinkers? Arguments may be made on both sides of the question. Biography constitutes the first type of work done by intellectual historians. In order to understand prominent intellectuals

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<sup>738</sup> Louis Menand, *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America* (New York: Farrer, Straus and Giroux, 2001).

<sup>739</sup> Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991)

sufficiently to produce biographies of them, historians typically rely heavily on the professional and social contacts and experiences that shed light on them as people. Yet the experiences common to the great majority of intellectuals are the forging and expressing of ideas and visions about the surrounding world, which take them beyond their daily lives. One of the pitfalls of the biography genre is thus the temptation to localize the origins of intellectual thought in the personal. Sometimes personal events do determine the thinking of intellectuals, but most of the time the signal moments in their lives have more to do with the conceptual frameworks that they devise and then test on their environments. Unfortunately, intellectual historians cannot enter directly into the minds of these intellectuals. McGill professor of literature Marc Angenot has illustrated this futility by citing the Soviet attempt to dissect Lenin's brain after his death to find the source of his genius.<sup>740</sup> The only access historians have to the thought processes of intellectuals is through the published and unpublished works they have produced. No thinker can be autarchic to the point of being impervious to the opinions and visions of his or her colleagues, contemporaries, and predecessors. The spirit of an age indeed often reveals itself through such conceptual lineages and interwoven relationships. Despite being considered a grave offence against intellectual property, instances of plagiarism have often offered the most cogent testimony about the ideas that dominated a given era. Historians who focus on the thought of one intellectual thus run the risk of missing certain essential aspects of the spirit of an age.

This spirit does not necessarily refer to the dominant or even, to borrow Gramsci's oft-quoted concept, to the hegemonic premises of an historical period. The spirit of an age encompasses both hegemonic currents and opposing visions. For example, the Progressive Era and the 1920s were marked by a belief that morals and ethics were vanishing. The quest for modern morals preoccupied large numbers of intellectuals and social thinkers, who broke off into many factions. Intellectuals debated how to refashion new values. In a society as diverse and complex as the United States of the Progressive Era and the 1920s, it was impossible to specify hegemonic morals; however, it was possible to observe the lively interest these questions elicited in social scientific circles, which in turn influenced politicians, business managers, religious and labour leaders, and others.

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<sup>740</sup> Marc Angenot, *D'Où Venons-nous ? Où Allons-nous ? La Décomposition de l'Idée de Progrès*. (Montréal: Trait d'Union, 2001)

Another central problem in intellectual history, as in other kinds of history, is the ultimate utility of history itself. Contrary to the case of more practical disciplines, historians cannot pretend that their work will settle specific issues that affect people's daily lives. This inability does not, however, mean that history is devoid of social utility. The import of history and historians lies in their capacity to inspire. Historians, because they amass substantial quantities of information that is both specific and general, usually have something to say about the past and the human condition. The role of historians, and particularly of intellectual historians, is to deploy this information in a way that sparks thought and debate. The fact that an idea is old does not mean that it will not have resonance for contemporary problems.

The intellectual history of the social sciences may be one of the most promising avenues for informing debate about the role of social science. By studying the intellectual debates in process when the social sciences were taking shape, leaders can step back and thereby appreciate how their fields of inquiry came to be the way they are. The history of the social sciences reminds current experts about the moral obligations that prompted the creation of their disciplines. Moreover, it delineates the relationship between politics and social science. In many regards, the work of progressive social scientists in a bygone era can still inspire modern counterparts by leading them to reconsider issues that were left unresolved. One of these concerns the purpose of social science.

### The Purpose of Social Sciences

Should social scientists restrict their role to the description of social events, or should they recommend avenues of action? Ninety years ago, John Dewey raised this same question, although he framed it differently:

Information is knowledge which is merely acquired and stored up; wisdom is knowledge operating in the direction of powers to the better living of life. Information, merely as information, implies no special training of intellectual capacity; wisdom is the finest fruit of that training.<sup>741</sup>

Empirical social scientists viewed the role of social science as accumulating information and diffusing it as it existed and appeared in society. The descriptive social sciences encounter

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<sup>741</sup> Dewey, *How We Think* (Minneapolis, NY.: Dover Publication, 1997 [1909]): p. 52.

fewer obstacles to their enterprise, especially in the age of computerized data bases when information may be compiled and published without being subject to review or critique. Postmodernist critiques of the social sciences were right to stress that in the name of descriptive social science, scholars could propose paths of action without acknowledging their normative bent. By contrast, the task before normative social scientists is difficult and risky because they must treat their data critically and acknowledge from the outset that their conclusions will lead them in a definite direction.

Social scientists are responsible for evaluating and analyzing social problems, but to do so they have to master two essential skills. First, social scientists must constantly refine and improve their methods. Social science methodology needs to be adapted to changing social situations, new intellectual thinking, and different technical resources. Sociology, psychology, economics, and anthropology have undergone extensive shifts in practice; a rigid adherence to outdated methodology will eventually undermine their relevance. Moreover, intellectual orientations determine how problems and their solutions are framed. A case in point was the way urban surveys in Chicago in the early 1920s influenced city planning and development. Finally, social science methods depend on developments like improvements in interview and survey techniques and computerization. This aspect of social science, however, is often over-emphasized at the expense of its human and social dimensions, which cannot be adequately treated through technical prowess alone.

The second skill social scientists must cultivate is more controversial: the capacity to analyze, evaluate, and question their own data. Obviously social scientists must describe the information they have gathered. But the implications of formulating informed positions on social problems are much more far-reaching than most social scientists suspect. Information analysis is only the first step toward taking action. Social scientists construct a vision of the future as they analyze the data they have collected. This vision comprises their personal interpretations—which obviously may be critical as well—of the past, present, and future of the events under study. These interpretations are determined to some extent by the methods social scientists have employed to carry out their field surveys. The training and methodology they use will ultimately have to support their analyses.

Recommending actions and orientations does not mean that social scientists are equipped to determine policy. One capital role historians have assigned to social scientists is to inform

public opinion. The American variant of social science differs in this regard from the totalitarian versions in the Soviet Union and in Italy and Germany. Social scientists in the United States perceived their role as public educators and not as servants of the powerful. One critique theoreticians on the right have voiced concerning political involvement by social scientists is that they could exploit their authority as scientists to exercise undemocratic control over government decision-making. For conservative thinkers like Friedrich von Hayek (1889-1992) and Milton Friedman, the advice of experts is irrelevant because individuals must accept sole responsibility for their own choices. This point of view raises a central issue about the role social scientists have played and will continue to play in the future. According to Friedrich von Hayek's reasoning, social scientists would lead people down the "road to serfdom".<sup>742</sup> Hayek's work challenged the whole project of state intervention based on what he considered the forgotten sediment of Western culture: the sovereignty of the individual. Though Hayek has not elaborated his vision of Western culture, he did confer on the individual the responsibility for leading the life he or she desired to live. But as with other conservative individualists, he makes little room for advice from social scientists.

Conservatives have reasons for suspecting that social scientists might aspire to positions of authority. In the context of public dialogue and debate, however, social scientists are duty-bound to intervene actively in political matters and economic questions. In a world dominated by journalistic appeals to emotion, social scientists have the intellectual authority to promote intelligent responses to complex political and economic issues. According to the cliché, the media are the guardians of democracy. I would like to make the reverse argument: social scientists are a bulwark against media excesses. Social scientists must exercise what John Kenneth Galbraith termed "countervailing power" to offset the undue influence of the private media and public institutions through the rigorous application of their knowledge and methods.<sup>743</sup>

Moreover, the role of social scientists is not simply to oppose and decry current affairs and institutions. Social experts must also offer a "social project" in which they collectively express a coherent vision for the future and specify goals that the society should attain during the generation to come. The power of the social sciences lies in their aptitude for proposing such a

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<sup>742</sup> Friedrich A. von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944)

<sup>743</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, *American Capitalism: The Concept of Countervailing Power* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1952): 109-134.

vision for the future. The promise of social scientists inheres not so much in their capacity to realize this social project on their own as in their ability to initiate dialogues with society and persuade it of the validity of their project. Social scientists must therefore relearn how to exchange with other actors in society on an equal footing and how to disseminate their views to the entire population.

Yet facilitating dialogue is not sufficient to realize the aspirations of social science. Social scientists must also present a sophisticated but credible social project. The substance of this project will embody the essence of their scientific achievements. They must be able to define a vision for a future society and then promote it convincingly to the people and their leaders. Marxist and progressive social sciences excelled at communicating a vision of the future that reflected high expectations. Today, aside from ensuring material prosperity and pursuing “national security”, there is no shared positive vision of the future. Social scientists will need to develop this kind of foresight. The purpose of social science is broader than describing events. Normative social scientists did not seek to impose norms on society; instead, they suggested possible futures and discussed the opportunities for achieving them.

### The Morals of Social Sciences

Recently, the recipient of the 1998 Nobel Prize in economics, Amartya Sen, recalled that political economy was originally a moral discipline. Reacting against the misuse of economics to further individualism and materialism, Sen argued that economists must now return to pursuing goals that go beyond merely producing and increasing material wealth.<sup>744</sup> Inspired by the philosopher John Rawls, Sen brought back the complex notion of social ethics in social science, which emerged at the turn of the twentieth century when great fortunes were being amassed by wealthy business elites also known as robber barons.<sup>745</sup> In 1916, the Chicago reformer Jane Addams addressed the problem of defining social ethics in her essay *Democracy and Social Ethics*:

[Social ethics] could be reduced to a modicum if we could preserve a sense of the relation of the individual to the family, and of the latter to society, and if we had been given a

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<sup>744</sup> Amartya Sen, *L'Économie est une Science Morale* (Paris: La Découverte / Poche, 2003)

<sup>745</sup> John Rawls, *Théorie de la Justice* (Paris: Seuil, 1993)

code of ethics dealing with these larger relationships, instead of a code designed to apply so exclusively to relationships obtaining only between individuals.<sup>746</sup>

She pointed out that the surest way to devise a suitable code of ethics was to arrive at a perfect understanding of the relationships that must be rebuilt.<sup>747</sup> She concluded her essay by emphasizing that “our maladjustment in social affairs arises from the fact that we are acting upon a code of ethics adapted to individual relationships, but not to the larger social relationships to which it is . . . applied.”<sup>748</sup> Though Addams did not mention social scientists by name, she stressed that gaining an intelligent understanding of social relationships from social science was the key to reconstructing social values.

Jane Addams was not alone in her quest for social ethics. Other intellectuals of her time pushed for the modernization of American values. The pragmatist philosopher John Dewey was another key figure in this intellectual mission. The notion of vanishing morals appeared early in Dewey’s essays and articles.<sup>749</sup> In 1920, Dewey explicitly asked the question underlying the work of many progressive social scientists: “Where is the moral progress that corresponds to our economic accomplishments?”<sup>750</sup> Dewey then gave his definition of the reconstruction of social ethics. Dewey did not consider ethical systems to be conceptual constructs imposed by a powerful authority on the minds of weak individuals and communities, nor did he advocate moral dictatorship:

Morals are neither a catalogue of acts nor a set of rules to be applied like drugstore prescriptions or cook-book recipes. The need in morals is for specific methods of inquiry and of contrivance: methods of inquiry to locate difficulties and evils; methods of contrivance to form plans to be used as working hypothesis in dealing with them. And the pragmatic import of the logic of individualized situations, each having its own irreplaceable good and principle, is to transfer the attention of theory from preoccupation with general conceptions to the problem of developing effective methods of inquiry.<sup>751</sup>

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<sup>746</sup> Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1916): 100-101.

<sup>747</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>749</sup> “Teacher and student alike tend to set up a chasm between logical thought as something abstract and remote, and the specific and concrete demands of everyday events. The abstract tends to become so aloof, so far away from application, as to be cut loose from practical and moral bearings.” Dewey, *How We Think*...51.

<sup>750</sup> John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1920): 125.

<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170.

It is important to emphasize here that for Dewey the defining of values and the methods for defining them were intermingled. Thus, there was a central but hidden moral dimension behind the progressive tenet of acting as knowing.

John Dewey's mentor and colleague, William James, discussed these same ethical issues. Like Dewey, James did not view ethics as imposed by an overriding authority, but as chosen by individuals. On reaching the plane of ethics, James believed, "choice reigns notoriously supreme. . . . The problem with man is less what act he shall now choose to do, than what being he shall now resolve to become."<sup>752</sup> James suggested the moral direction to be taken in this choice, emphasizing the social dimension of the ethical decisions facing an individual:

The social self as a whole . . . ranks higher than the material self as a whole. We must care more for our honor, our friends, and our human ties, than for a sound skin or wealth. And the spiritual self is so supremely precious that, rather than lose it, a man ought to be willing to give up friends, and good fame, and property, and life itself.<sup>753</sup>

The works of Jane Addams, John Dewey, and William James illustrate the thinking about moral issues that was going on in the Progressive Era. Their campaign for social ethics did not become a search for a powerful authority to dictate codes of conduct to the masses. The redefining of social ethics by Progressives had few paternalistic overtones. The quest for social ethics was a personal and collective task undertaken under the auspices of these intellectual giants by social scientists in the early decades of the twentieth century. Historians have long known about the close collaboration between pragmatist philosophers and progressive social scientists. The resulting relationships went deeper than mere institutional affiliations because they were based on reciprocal exchanges of ideas. The pragmatist philosophers such as John Dewey, William James, and George Herbert Mead recognized the methodological breakthroughs being made by social scientists. For their part, social scientists such as Wesley Mitchell, Charles Merriam, and Mary van Kleeck not only shared the philosophical purposes that the pragmatists detected in their methods, but pragmatist ideas also helped them envisage their fields as transforming and improving society.

Certain ideas are ageless. To be sure, the context has changed considerably since the Progressive Era and the 1920s. Still, intellectual historians of the social sciences have an

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<sup>752</sup> William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I (New York: Dover Publications, 1890): 287-288.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*, 314-315.

obligation to dissect past thinking and revive certain pertinent questions that were not fully resolved. As issues of social ethics continue to re-emerge in multiple fields of scholarly inquiry, from political science and economics to literature and philosophy, intellectual historians can add valuable depth to the debate by explaining how social ethics developed at the turn of the twentieth century. One prime difference between the Progressive Era and the 1920s and the present age is that the social sciences are now extremely specialized. A second crucial distinction is the political uses to which public institutions now put social science. In the early decades of the twentieth century, it was easier for social scientists to be independent from governmental authorities because of the structural weaknesses of public organizations. Intellectual historians can contribute to the social ethics debate by bringing to light the political pitfalls that the founders of the modern social sciences encountered then. Those same historians can remind us that the original aim of social scientists was not solely to improve material well-being in day-to-day existence, but also to enhance spiritual well-being.

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