

the abandonment of evolutionary social theory in america: the impact of academic professionalization upon american sociological theory, 1890-1920

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Nineteenth-century theories of organic evolution exerted a powerful impact upon American social thought during the years between Appomattox and the Great Depression. For the two generations of post-Jacksonian educated Americans who experienced the disorder of sectional conflict and industrialization, the precepts of Spencerian and Darwinian evolutionary biology suggested the reassuring lesson that, for all the apparent chaos of human society, it was in fact as rigidly governed by predictable natural laws as was the world of nature. They looked to the laws of evolution to provide comfort in the present and guidance for the future, rather than to the traditional religious verities and the stable village order which had sustained their fathers. But evolutionary science did more than fill a need: it also colored discussions of man, his behavior and his milieu, in many specific areas of thought. At least since the Great Depression, however, the penchant for using explicit models and analogies from the evolutionary natural sciences in social explanation and theorization has largely disappeared from American life.

At its peak the influence of evolutionary natural science was nowhere more deep and profound in American social thought than in the late nineteenth-century social sciences. The pioneers of our modern social sciences contributed the most elaborate evolutionary social theories, and

they were probably more directly responsible than any other group of thinkers or publicists in America for the dissemination of evolutionary catchwords, slogans and schemes. Thus, when we seek clues for the disappearance of the explicit evolutionary analogy from social theory, it is to the history of the social sciences, and to sociology in particular, that we turn.

The present essay is an exploration of the reasons why social theory based on explicit models, analogies, and determinants of the evolutionary natural sciences was abandoned in American sociology between 1890 and 1920. The central thesis we shall argue here is that the academic professionalization of American sociology had a wholly unanticipated impact upon the intellectual history of the discipline, that is, upon its conceptual horizons and level of discourse. Academic professionalization eventually forced those American sociologists who identified with professionalization to abandon the practice of basing social theorization and explanation on explicit analogies drawn from the evolutionary natural sciences; it gradually made them realize that they could not use the determinants, metaphors and models suggested by biology and psychology. When considered within the context of the disciplinary specialization that was becoming so pervasive in the emerging American university system, professionalization eventually forced academic sociologists to make their nascent discipline fully autonomous, with its own assumptions, methods, concepts and body of data. Disciplinary autonomy and specialization dictated the explanation of social phenomena on their own terms, not with the assumptions and analogies of the evolutionary natural sciences. American sociologists could not readily grasp, in all its implications, the insight that social structure influences human behavior—perhaps the distinctive contribution of the discipline of sociology in the twentieth century—until they had realized that culture could not be reduced to nature, that social phenomena had to be studied on their own terms and not with the perspectives, assumptions, analogies and determinants of disciplines which had as their focus of attention organic rather than superorganic phenomena.

A qualification should be made before proceeding further. In the post-1920 “professional” era, American sociologists have often used an implicitly or explicitly “neo-evolutionary” perspective. The examples of John Dewey and Luther Lee Bernard in stressing the conditioning of original nature by social environment, of Charles A. Ellwood and William F. Ogburn in postulating the existence of social trends within larger patterns of cultural evolution, or, more recently, of Talcott Parsons and other “functionalists” in drawing attention to the development of the “social system,” all spring to mind. However, the advocates of such “neo-evolutionary” perspectives (if these perspectives can be called “neo-evolutionary” in any meaningful way) have differed from their pre-1920 predecessors in several important ways. They have consistently recognized and

understood the distinction between the biological and the cultural levels of existence, thus avoiding the practice, common before the late 1910's, of explaining cultural and social phenomena with explicitly evolutionary models and determinants drawn directly from the natural sciences. Also, they have accepted the notion of a qualitative difference between human and animal behavior, so far as social explanation is concerned. Here, for example, is how William F. Ogburn defined "social evolution" in the 1940's:

We consider social evolution as not including, at least in the past several thousand years, any biological evolution. What is evolving then is society or the various social groupings such as government, and industry, and the state What is evolving is 'culture,' that is to say, the environment which men have, but which the wild animals do not have. This culture, or our social heritage, is a composite of many different parts, such as cities, families, farms, philosophies, art, science, etc.¹

Professionalization is a complex term with many shades of meaning. Historians of American science have used it to refer to a variety of dissimilar events, such as the exclusion of the clergy from the scientific community in the eighteenth century, or the emergence of disciplines, journals, scientific societies, and a more or less autonomous scientific community in the early nineteenth century.² Such phenomena are not defined here as academic professionalization. The term here refers to the sequence of events after 1880 in the history of higher education, science and scholarship in the United States when the university was replacing the college as the dynamic center of American higher education, when the university was becoming the chief institutional identification for the practitioners of the formal disciplines of knowledge, when scientists and scholars with university affiliations (or with ambitions for university affiliations) busily engaged themselves in establishing their disciplines within the university by founding departments and graduate programs and outside it by creating national professional associations and journals on disciplinary lines with the consequent articulation of nationally recognized professional standards of performance.³

There were two distinct phases of the academic professionalization of American sociology. The first was institutional. It was the direct result of both the quickening of public interest in social problems and the rapid expansion of universities and colleges after 1880. Starting in the 1870's, institutions of higher learning began offering courses in "Social Science," which might mean social problems, economics, or the philosophy of history; or, apparently less commonly, courses in "Political Economy" based on Herbert Spencer's cosmic evolutionary social science. By the 1890's the "Social Science" courses began to give way to courses in "sociology," although it was not until after 1900 that there was a commonly recognized

distinction between them. The rapid expansion of college courses in "sociology" in the 1890's (between 1889 and 1900 ninety-seven colleges and universities introduced courses in "sociology"), the founding of the first academic department of sociology at the University of Chicago in 1893, the launching of the first journal of the new discipline, *The American Journal of Sociology*, by the Chicago department in 1895 and the establishment of promising graduate programs in the new discipline at both Chicago and Columbia University, all suggest that institutional professionalization was well under way by the end of the 1890's. After 1900 institutional professionalization quickened its pace, but it did not change its character, as appointments in sociology were made at major universities, as the number of Ph.D. graduates rapidly grew, and as a national professional association, the American Sociological Society, emerged to serve the purposes of disciplinary and professional communication.⁴

The second phase of the academic professionalization of American sociology was intellectual and methodological, a direct consequence of institutional professionalization. Within the context of disciplinary specialization it was incumbent upon academic sociologists to define their discipline, to identify its content, methods and assumptions, and to differentiate it from other disciplines. This was a difficult task. A body of sociological thinking existed in America before 1900, most conspicuously the humanitarian-reformist Social Science and the evolutionary Spencerian traditions. But there was no commonly agreed upon definition of the subject matter, basic assumptions, concepts and methods of sociology. So, while it might be said that there were some American "sociologists" before the 1890's, generally speaking they did little to establish an impersonal discipline which could be used by later generations of practitioners as the basis of further work. As Thomas Kuhn has commented in another context, there was no research based on prior achievements that could be used as the basis of further practice.⁵ American "sociologists" before 1890 postulated highly personal systems of sociology which reflected their own philosophical points of view and which were therefore useless to anyone who did not accept the philosophical premises of the system in question. The example of Lester Frank Ward, often called the "father of American sociology," illustrates the point perfectly. In the 1880's and 1890's Ward did much to popularize the term sociology, to demonstrate its utility for social reform, and to suggest that sociology should be "scientific" in approach, spirit and method. But Ward devoted most of his efforts in sociology to expounding his own system, which was highly personal, almost idiosyncratic, a prodigious and intricate intellectual construct which was both an extension of his particular philosophical premises and a codification of his special definition of sociology as the queen of the sciences. As such, Ward's sociology was useless to those sociologists who did not share his premises, his outlook, or his sense of

dilettantism, as a professional academic sociologist was to remark in the 1940's:

. . . Ward worked out his cosmic system which had organization and range, even if its scope doomed it. . . . few persons would have had the breadth of education which would qualify them to handle it. Ward did teach courses expounding his system at Brown University, but scarcely anywhere else could his lectures be handled. After his death his successors at Brown made some attempt to carry on the tradition, but within fifteen years it became extinct even there.⁶

a generation of professionals

In the 1890's a small cadre of seventeen academic sociologists who were the products of institutional professionalization came to the fore. They took the lead in promoting intellectual professionalization. In many ways they were a transitional generation, prominent between the late nineteenth-century amateurs who wrote cosmic schemes of society and the post-1920 generation who prided themselves on their quantitative methods and fields of specialization. As a group the seventeen were young men just embarking on their careers in the 1890's when sociology was becoming a university discipline; twelve of them had been born between 1861 and 1874. As a group they were academic men, trained in a social science, most commonly in economics or in history. Fourteen of them possessed earned doctorates in a social science or history, ten of the fourteen having received their doctorates between 1893 and 1902. They had academic careers, many of them wrote important textbooks of sociology, and all but one were elected President of the American Sociological Society before the end of the 1920's. But what marked them off even more than such simple and obvious criteria was their behavior: they all busied themselves with the task of intellectual professionalization, of attempting to define the content, the assumptions and the methods of sociology as a discipline.

But the seventeen cannot be depicted as merely a homogenous group of academic professionals. Nor is it clear that they were self-conscious professionals who fully understood the implications of professionalism. In many ways they were a diverse group, each one mixing public and professional values in somewhat different proportions. Many of them, most conspicuously Edward A. Ross and less notoriously William I. Thomas and Charles A. Ellwood, identified with the progressive movement, or at least with a number of progressive reforms; yet William Graham Sumner and his disciple Albert Galloway Keller did not, at least not publicly. A number of them sprang from Protestant ministerial backgrounds, and some—Ross and Ellwood for example—embraced liberal Protestantism, believing in the existence of evolutionary laws of society which the new science of sociology could discover to further the progress

of mankind. Yet others, such as Thomas and Sumner in their mature years, exhibited wholly secular and empirical outlooks. Some, like Edward Cary Hayes, Ross and Ellwood, were proud of their Middle Western village heritage and sought to sustain it, whereas others, like Thomas and Albion W. Small, were quite urban in outlook. Several—Small, Ross and Sumner, for example—studied in Germany, respected German social science, and wanted to infuse American higher education with what they understood to be the spirit of German university scholarship. Yet Thomas, Charles H. Cooley and Franklin H. Giddings, who never attended a German university, made conspicuous contributions to both the theory and the methods of the new discipline of sociology.

What unified these men as a group was not so much their personal characteristics, values and backgrounds (although there were some similarities to be sure), but the essentially impersonal circumstances in which they found themselves as academic professionals. It was professionalization—the need to define the new discipline within the university system; the obligation to articulate national rather than local or amateur standards of training and competence; the necessity of differentiating sociology from other disciplines, of delineating its methods, assumptions, body of data and of creating an impersonal discipline which could be used by any practitioner regardless of his personal outlook—which made them into something of a cohesive intellectual circle for several years and which gave their activities a certain uniformity despite their rather different attitudes on many issues, including, at first, their definitions of sociology.⁷

In the 1890's some of the seventeen made the first attempts to define their discipline according to the standards of a university profession. They began by rejecting Herbert Spencer's biological sociology, his analogy between the biological and social organisms, which had so dominated sociological theory to that point. They agreed that social forces were psychological and mental in character, that the proper focus of sociological theory was the individual, and that society might be defined as the mental interactions of individuals. They looked to the new individual physiological psychology of the 1890's, most often to William James' instinct theory in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), for their basic conception of man and society. They apparently saw no contradiction between borrowing assumptions and analogies from a wholly separate discipline and insisting at the same time that sociology was an independent science whose practitioners should not depend upon the assumptions, methods, data and point of view of other disciplines. In 1894, for example, in one of the earliest statements of sociological theory by any of the seventeen, *An Introduction to the Study of Society*, Albion W. Small and George E. Vincent declared that society was "a complex of activities and movements originated by the energy of those physical and psychic attributes which determine human motives." At the same time, however, they insisted that the methods and assumptions of the biological sciences were completely

inappropriate for the discipline of sociology; sociologists should use historical and analytical methods to study man as he actually was, without reference to the viewpoints of the natural sciences. Sociology, they argued, was concerned with the thoughts of individuals, and these were “in a very large degree, an acquisition from the resources of society. The individual believes not merely the results of his own sensations and cognitions, but accepts on faith a vast body of social knowledge.” Small and Vincent also insisted that sociology was a science which only persons formally trained in the discipline, and who shared its sense of autonomy from other disciplines, should practice. Permitting amateurs to study sociology “would be like setting an artist in oils to build bridges, or allowing a boiler maker to take command of a navy.” But that did not prevent them from concluding that it “. . . is the psychical potencies of society, knowledge, taste, and criteria of conduct, which persist and constitute the real life of the social organism.”⁸

In his well-known text, Columbia sociologist Franklin H. Giddings, another of the seventeen, declared in 1896 that sociology should be a psychological rather than a biological discipline, for rigid biological analogies were inappropriate for sociology. “Every distinct science,” he explained, “must have its own classifications and its own names for phenomena which, however they resemble the phenomena studied by other sciences, are yet different, and are the subject matter of a separate science only because they are different.”⁹ Several years later Giddings argued in *Science*, the widely read journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, that sociology would have to work out its own distinctive assumptions and methods apart from other disciplines. Sociologists, he insisted, would have to understand that they dealt with phenomena that could not be reduced to mere natural forces. Giddings believed that social association, rather than natural forces, had a decisive impact “on the natures of individuals, and adapts them to social life. It creates a social nature.”¹⁰

When American sociologists said that sociology was a psychological science, they were generally borrowing the functional instinct psychology of James and other physiological psychologists. They ignored psychologist James Mark Baldwin’s careful dissection of the new functional instinct psychology in the late 1890’s. Baldwin had argued that the collapse of the Neo-Lamarckian principle of heredity implied that man had a social as well as a physical inheritance, and, of the two, the social was clearly the more important determinant of human behavior. Essentially Baldwin anticipated the post-1900 Boasian concept of culture, with its profoundly anti-naturalistic implications.¹¹ The seventeen sociologists, again, saw no contradiction between depending on the naturalistic assumptions of psychology and asserting that sociology should be autonomous from all other sciences. Charles A. Ellwood, for example, wrote his doctoral dissertation for Small at Chicago as a defense of the instinct

theory as the correct theoretical basis for the new discipline of sociology.¹² Edward A. Ross attacked the old Spencerian biological sociology in his famous *Social Control* (1901). He insisted that society exercised its control over the individual by informal social means, such as public opinion, law, belief, suggestion, education, custom and ceremony, rather than biological means. Human differences, he said, had biological causes, whereas human uniformities had social causes. He thus segregated social phenomena from biological, although not psychological, causes. And he, like the other sixteen sociologists, defined sociology as the study of the individuals of society rather than of groups, classes and social institutions. Yet he believed that sociology should be distinct from all other disciplines. Analogies from other sciences have suggested what to look for, he said in 1905, but it "is certain, however that no recognized science borrows its laws from other departments of knowledge. The lasting possession of sociology will be regularities which, instead of being imported from without, have been discovered by patiently comparing social facts among themselves."¹³ Ross argued that sociology had to move from detecting vague and superficial analogies among a small number of facts to discovering large numbers of social facts that could be explained on their own terms. Yet, almost in the same breath, he declared that sociology was a psychical science, and that no ultimate non-psychic factors—factors that is, derived from the social order—could be admitted until it was shown how they affected individual motive and choice.¹⁴

In 1902, another of the seventeen sociologists, Charles H. Cooley, blended individualistic instinct psychology and sociology. Organic evolution had established human nature, he explained, but while man had an original endowment of innate instincts and other tendencies, his nature and personality could only develop in a social environment. Whatever original nature man had was "very vague and incapable to [sic] producing definite phenomena without the aid of experience." Man was a part of society, and sociologists had to study the thoughts and motives of people, which could be properly understood only in the social context that allowed them to develop. All original human nature really provided, declared Cooley, was the capacity to think and act. He saw no tension between this statement, which was a logical consequence of professionalization, and his affirmation that sociology was a psychological discipline.¹⁵

Three of the seventeen sociologists, Small, William I. Thomas and Frank W. Blackmar, argued in various important statements published before 1907 that social phenomena were entirely distinct from biological phenomena, that sociology in consequence had to be an autonomous discipline, and that because human nature was in large measure innate, sociology was a psychological discipline.¹⁶ In his presidential address before the newly formed American Sociological Society in 1906, for example, Small declared that we "agree to differentiate sociology from antecedent psychology or cosmology or metaphysics," but he still believed that while

sociology should be a distinct science, sociologists might learn some things from natural scientists. However, when Small said that sociologists studied human social relations, an order of phenomena that natural scientists were unqualified to examine, he had come close to following the professionalization impulse to its logical conclusion.¹⁷

After 1906, as the seventeen sociologists discussed the boundaries of their new discipline, there were unmistakable signs that some of them were beginning to recognize the contradiction between insisting that sociology was an autonomous science with its own order of phenomena to account for and their continued reliance upon naturalistic analogies borrowed from another discipline, psychology. In *Folkways* (1906), for example, William Graham Sumner offered an explanation of society without any biological or psychological metaphors, an explanation which concentrated on superorganic group behavior.¹⁸ In *Social Psychology* (1908) Ross paid the customary homage to psychology by invoking the instinct theory as an explanation for much human behavior, but he forthrightly conceded that the sociologist was chiefly interested in the interaction of human minds which occurred only in a social environment.¹⁹

the shift to the group

Cooley made the first decisive break from the metaphors of naturalistic psychology in his *Social Organization* (1909). He shifted the focus of attention of sociologists from the individual to the social group. He insisted that human nature could only develop in face-to-face primary social groups like the family, the playground and the nursery, which meant that, for Cooley, human nature was something more than mere instinct and something less than formal institutions. Human nature Cooley defined as a group nature which developed after birth in association with other humans, and which atrophied in social isolation. As Cooley followed professionalization to its logical conclusion and insisted that man's behavior should be explained on social and cultural grounds, he had come very close indeed to recognizing that it was not necessary for sociologists to depend upon psychologists for their basic assumptions.²⁰ In 1909, Edward Cary Hayes, another of the seventeen, made the semantic and conceptual break when he declared in the *American Journal of Sociology* that sociology and psychology were wholly independent sciences whose practitioners studied entirely different orders of phenomena, neither of which could be explained in terms of the other.²¹ George Herbert Mead, a brilliant philosopher and psychologist at the University of Chicago, informed the seventeen sociologists in several articles that there was a qualitative difference between animal and human intelligence, that social psychologists and sociologists studied an entirely different order of phenomena than did the physiological psychologists, and that social behavior—the proper concern of sociology—had social rather than psychological, physiological or natural determinants.²² William I. Thomas, one of the

seventeen sociologists, and a colleague of Mead's, argued in 1909 in a famous compendium that the social sciences could learn more from each other about human behavior than they could from the natural scientists. Thomas specifically recommended the work of the Boas circle in cultural anthropology.²³

After 1911 the movement away from dependence on psychology was especially clear among the young men who had taken their Ph.D.'s with the seventeen sociologists after 1900. They were more attuned than their elders to the values and outlook of the new university professions, especially to the strictures for empirical research into concrete phenomena. In the 1910's this younger generation began to emerge within the profession of sociology, to take their Ph.D.'s, start their university careers, and to engage in the research and publication that would bring them professional reputations. The example of one of these younger sociologists, Luther Lee Bernard, illustrates the point nicely. Bernard started his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago in 1910 on the hereditary determinants of anti-social conduct. As his graduate professors had told him to read all the literature on heredity and instinct carefully before turning to original research—a characteristic admonition in the new university graduate programs—he did. He found no satisfactory definition of mental heredity and no scientific system of classification of human instincts. Consequently, he simply gave up on the concept of original human nature, deciding such determinants of the natural sciences as mental heredity and instinct were both unscientific and inappropriate for the social scientist. Subsequently Bernard became one of the most celebrated critics of the instinct theory, and at every point he advocated the divorce of sociological theory from the conceptions of the natural sciences.²⁴ By 1923 Bernard could look back at the results of the professionalization impulse in sociology and say that

Sociology is at last shaking itself free from biological dominance and is developing an objective and a method of its own. Thus it promises to be a science, not merely a poorly organized and presumptuous branch of biology, as some biologists formerly seemed to regard it.²⁵

But some of the older men, the seventeen sociologists, also made an accommodation with the professionalization impulse. Charles A. Ellwood, who taught sociology at the University of Missouri for three decades, devoted most of his academic career to espousing various social reforms and to writing treatises defining the boundaries of sociological theory. At first, Ellwood, who regularly taught Sunday school and who was a liberal Protestant, tried to fashion social theory on evolutionary patterns. In such books as *Sociology and Modern Problems* (1910), *Sociology in its Psychological Aspects* (1912) and in several essays published before 1914, Ellwood embraced two contradictory assumptions, the idea that human nature was innate as the functional psychologists said it was,

and the concept that sociology was a distinct and independent science with its own data and assumptions. There was a close correlation between his liberal Protestant theology and his teleological conception of the social order. For Ellwood, purpose existed in nature and in society; God had implanted certain innate traits and impulses in man for His purposes. Indeed Ellwood was so much a naturalist that for a few years he even lent support to the eugenics movement.²⁶ But a sabbatical year (1914-15) studying under R. R. Marett in England exposed him to cultural anthropology. The experience made him realize that cultural and social phenomena operated autonomously from natural forces, and that sociology could never be a science unless sociologists divested themselves of the concepts, assumptions, methods and analogies of the natural sciences. Ellwood returned from England determined to write another treatise in sociological theory from the cultural rather than the psychological or naturalistic point of view.²⁷ In 1915 he favorably reviewed bacteriologist H. W. Conn's blistering attack on eugenics, a fact of some importance, as Conn had argued that social phenomena had social rather than natural causes.²⁸ In 1916 Ellwood wrote that Gobineau's famous book on race had only "historical value, and as such it may possibly fill a useful place in our libraries."²⁹ In 1917, he published his new theoretical statement, *Introduction to Social Psychology*. There he examined social phenomena from a cultural rather than a psychological or naturalistic point of view. He still viewed society in evolutionary terms, as a progressive and unilinear development toward perfection, probably because of his profound religious commitments, and he refused to shift from the individual to the group, becoming a strident opponent of statistical methods in the late 1920's.³⁰ But from 1915 on Ellwood insisted that cultural phenomena could not be reduced to natural causes if sociology was to be a reputable science.³¹ In the late 1910's he roundly criticized that sociology which was based on the assumptions of the natural sciences. He became aware of the work of Boas and his students in cultural anthropology, as did sociologists after 1916, and he now accepted Baldwin's concept of social heredity, as well as its intellectual first cousin, the Boasian idea of culture.³² In 1919 he wrote in a major psychology journal that the "assumption that the mores, institutions and adult behavior of a civilized group can be explained through 'instinct' is open to grave doubt."³³ In the 1920's he worked out a reasonably consistent sociological theory based on the assumption of social rather than natural causation.³⁴

Several of the other seventeen sociologists made a similar shift. As early as 1915, for example, Edward Cary Hayes insisted that cultural and social phenomena were the primary determinants of human behavior and that social scientists should stop looking to the natural sciences for the laws of human behavior.³⁵ In *Social Process* (1918) Charles Horton Cooley analyzed society without recourse to evolutionary conceptions or

the determinants of the natural sciences.³⁶ Probably the most profound transformation was made by William I. Thomas. Thomas had read deeply and widely in cultural anthropology since the early 1900's, and Boasian cultural anthropology had gradually made him realize that social scientists could not look to the natural sciences for the laws of human behavior if social scientists were to become professional scientists with an autonomous discipline. By 1918, when Thomas and the Polish sociologist Florian Znaniecki published their five volume monograph, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, Thomas had fully understood the implications of professionalization for sociological theory and method. He argued in the long methodological note which introduced the monograph that social investigation had to be based solely on facts rather than values, and that social facts had to be interpreted on their own terms, not in the way that physical and natural scientists interpreted their phenomena. Only experts trained in proper sociological methods could properly appreciate the complexity of social facts.³⁷

Furthermore, some psychologists declared in the late 1910's that cultural phenomena could not be reduced to natural phenomena. In 1917, Robert H. Gault, a psychologist who specialized in criminology and who had been a eugenicist and a believer in the instinct theory, took note of behaviorist John B. Watson's experiments on instincts in humans; Gault declared that "there are but few instincts, properly speaking, and . . . these are less specific than generalized."³⁸ In his presidential address before the American Psychological Association in December, 1916, John Dewey called for the emancipation of social psychology and sociology from the narrow and deforming emphasis of individual physiological psychology, for the reconstitution of the social sciences on the basis of research into the specific social interaction among humans and to the details of group behavior. The human mind and personality, he argued, could only develop in a specific social situation, and it was that social situation that was the proper focus of attention for the social scientist.³⁹

By the early 1920's the professionalization impulse had run its course and had exercised a decisive impact upon American sociological theory. The new generation of empirical sociologists, such as Luther Lee Bernard, Robert E. Park and Ellsworth Faris had come of age within the profession and had, by insisting on the autonomy of social from natural phenomena, effected a transformation in sociological theory, moving it from grand evolutionary and naturalistic models and concern with issues of public policy, to cultural determinism, a commitment to specific empirical research and investigation of discrete areas of specialization.⁴⁰ As Luther Lee Bernard noted in the late 1920's, in the last decade or so sociologists had abandoned the early twentieth-century philosophical and theoretical approach for a more dispassionate factual one, in which statistical and case study methods were used. In an obvious reference to the older generation of sociologists, Bernard remarked that there "are

still some belated attempts in sociology to take seriously the making of concepts and of social laws, but most sociologists are now persuaded that if they get the facts the concepts and the laws will take care of themselves.”⁴¹ In 1924, Albion W. Small recognized the changes that had swept over American sociology in the past three decades. Remarking on the tendency of the early twentieth-century sociologists to rely upon theoretical statements rather than to bother themselves with hard empirical research into concrete social phenomena, Small concluded that “a humiliating proportion of the so-called ‘sociology’ of the last thirty years in America, both inside and outside of the goodly fellowship of scholars who were self-disciplining themselves and one another into the character of scientific specialists, has been simply old-fashioned opinionativeness under a new-fangled name.”⁴² “The true story of the American sociological movement,” Small concluded, “would be a treatment of the theme: Up from Amateurism.”⁴³ What Small said was true enough, when considered in its proper historical context. But it was also true that the professionalization of American sociology had done much, quite inadvertently, to destroy the explicitly evolutionary schemes of late nineteenth-century social thinkers.

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footnotes

1. Unpublished and untitled manuscript attributed to William F. Ogburn, as cited in “Introduction,” Otis Dudley Duncan, ed., *William F. Ogburn on Culture and Social Change, Selected Papers* (Chicago, 1964), xviii. On the other sociologists mentioned above see John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct* (New York, 1922); Luther Lee Bernard, *Instinct: A Study in Social Psychology* (New York, 1924); Charles A. Ellwood, *Cultural Evolution* (New York, 1927); William F. Ogburn, *Social Change, with Respect to Culture and Original Nature* (New York, 1923); Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, Ill., 1951). An excellent discussion of modern sociological theories is Don Martindale, *The Nature and Types of Sociological Theory* (Boston, 1960). An earlier version of this paper was read at the second annual conference of Cheiron: The International Society for the History of the Behavioral and Social Sciences, May 9, 1970, Akron, Ohio. The author wishes to thank the Department of History, Iowa State University, for financial assistance in the preparation of this essay, and he wishes to thank the following persons for offering criticisms of earlier drafts of the present article: Walter Rundell, Jr., Roscoe C. and Gisela J. Hinkle, John C. Burnham, Barton C. Hacker, Leon J. Apt, Monte A. Calvert and Robert O. Richards.

2. See Maxine Schoor Van de Wetering, “The New England Clergy and the Development of Scientific Professionalism” (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 1970) and George H. Daniels, *American Science in the Age of Jackson* (New York, 1968).

3. An excellent recent work by sociologists on the professions and professionalization is Wilbert E. Moore and Gerald W. Rosenblum, *The Professions: Roles and Rules* (New York, 1970); their “scale” of professionalization, 3-23, is especially helpful. Other sociological discussions of the professions and of professionalization include A. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson, *The Professions* (Oxford, England, 1933) and Talcott Parsons, “The Professions and Social Structure,” *Social Forces*, XVII (1939), 457-467. On the rise of universities and the development of academic professions see the following: Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University* (New York, 1962), 221-440, especially 394-416; Lawrence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago, 1965), 121-179 and *passim*; Richard Hofstadter and Walter P. Metzger, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States* (New York, 1955), especially 277-412, where the correlation between the values of academic freedom and professionalism emerges, almost accidentally and certainly incidentally. An interesting contemporary view is Maurice Caulley, *Universities and Scientific Life in The United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1922 trans.). For a helpful perspective on the professions and the universities in Europe during the Middle Ages, see Vern Bullough, “Education and Professionalization: An Historical Example,” *History of Education Quarterly*, X (1970), 160-169. See

also Bullough, *The Development of Medicine as a Profession* (Basle and New York, 1966). Two excellent recent discussions of professionalization in American scholarship and science are Barry D. Karl, "The Power of Intellect and the Politics of Ideas," *Daedalus*, LXXXVI (Summer, 1968), 1002-1035) and Stanley Coben, "The Scientific Establishment and the Transmission of Quantum Mechanics to the United States," *American Historical Review*, LXXVI (1970-1971), 442-466.

4. For information on the institutional aspects of the academic professionalization of American sociology, see, for example: Luther Lee and Jessie Bernard, *Origins of American Sociology. The Social Science Movement in the United States* (New York, 1943), 527-669; Luther Lee Bernard, "Some Historical and Recent Trends of Sociology in the United States," *Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly*, IX (1928-1929), 274-281ff; Luther Lee Bernard, "The Teaching of Sociology in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology*, XV (1909-1910), 164-213; Jessie Bernard, "The History and Prospects of Sociology in the United States," in George A. Lundberg, Read Bain, and Nels Anderson, eds., *Trends in American Sociology* (New York, 1929), 1-71; W. P. Meroney, "The Membership and Program of Twenty-Five Years of the American Sociological Society," *Publications of the American Sociological Society*, XXV (1930), 55-68; Roscoe C. and Gisela J. Hinkle, *The Development of Modern Sociology* (New York, 1954), 1-17 and *passim*.

5. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Second edition, enlarged; Chicago, 1969), 1-22, especially 10-22 and 19.

6. Robert E. L. Faris, "American Sociology," in Georges Gurvitch and Wilbert E. Moore, eds., *Twentieth Century Sociology* (New York, 1945), 541. Albion Small wrote in *Origins of Sociology* (Chicago, 1915), 342 ff, that although Ward had an impact on American sociologists, he soon became something of an intellectual—and professional—anachronism. What the first generation of American academic sociologists actually thought of Ward is amply documented in John C. Burnham, *Lester Frank Ward in American Thought* (Washington, D.C., 1956), which, although quite hostile to Ward is essentially accurate in pointing out the gap between Ward and professional academic sociologists. For evidence that many of the latter disliked Ward's sensitivity to criticism, see Albion W. Small to Edward A. Ross, November 24, 1903; Edward A. Ross to Albion W. Small, November 28, 1903; Albion W. Small to Edward A. Ross, December 7, 10, 1903; Edward A. Ross Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin Manuscripts Library, Madison (here after cited as Ross Papers). There is some evidence that Ward was elected president of the American Sociological Society because he had a prominent public reputation which would enable the new group to gain prestige; see the above cited correspondence and also Albion W. Small to Edward A. Ross, January 9, 1906; C. W. A. Veditz to Edward A. Ross, October 13, 1906 and November 6, 1908, Ross Papers.

7. The seventeen sociologists are Frank W. Blackmar, Charles H. Cooley, James Q. Dealey, Charles A. Ellwood, Franklin H. Giddings, John M. Gilette, Edward Cary Hayes, George E. Howard, Albert Galloway Keller, James P. Litchenberger, Edward A. Ross, Albion W. Small, William Graham Sumner, William I. Thomas, George E. Vincent and Ulysses G. Weatherly. For biographical information on these men see: Hamilton Cravens, "American Scientists and the Heredity-Environment Controversy, 1883-1940," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1969), 378-383; Hinkle and Hinkle, *The Development of Modern Sociology*, 1-17; the essays on Giddings, Small, Thomas, Ross, Cooley, Ellwood and Hayes in Harry Elmer Barnes, ed., *An Introduction to the History of Sociology* (Chicago, 1948); Howard W. Odum, *American Sociology. The Study of Sociology in the United States through 1950* (New York, 1951), 75-158; the essays on Small and Giddings in Odum, ed., *American Masters of Social Science* (New York, 1927), 149-228. For evidence that Sumner shifted away from his well-known laissez-faire attitudes at the end of his life see Bruce Curtis, "The Middle Class Progressivism of William Graham Sumner," (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Iowa, 1964) and Curtis, "William Graham Sumner 'On the Concentration of Wealth,'" *Journal of American History*, LV (1969), 823-832.

8. Albion W. Small and George E. Vincent, *An Introduction to the Study of Society* (New York, 1894), 76, 305. But Small and Vincent could not emancipate themselves completely from biological analogies—see *ibid.*, 369.

9. Franklin H. Giddings, *The Principles of Society* (New York, 1896), 63.

10. Franklin H. Giddings, "The Psychology of Society," *Science*, (N.S.) IX (1899), 16.

11. James Mark Baldwin, *Mental Development in the Child and the Race* (New York, 1895); Baldwin, "Consciousness and Evolution," *American Naturalist*, XXX (1896), 249-255; Baldwin, "Physical and Social Heredity," *American Naturalist*, XXX (1896), 422-428; Baldwin, "A New Factor in Evolution," *American Naturalist*, XXX (1896), 441-451, 536-553; Baldwin, "Personality Suggestion," *Psychological Review*, I (1894), 274-279; Baldwin, "Determinate Evolution," *Psychological Review*, IV (1897), 393-401; Baldwin, "The Psychology of Social Organization," *Psychological Review*, IV (1897), 482-515; Baldwin, "On Selective Thinking," *Psychological Review*, V (1898), 1-24; Baldwin, "Social and the Extra-Social," *American Journal of Sociology*, IV (1898-1899), 649-655; Baldwin, *Development and Evolution* (New York, 1902), *passim*. A suggestive but incomplete article on Lamarckianism is George W. Stocking, Jr., "Lamarckianism in American Social Science, 1890-1915," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXIII (1962), 239-256.

12. Charles A. Ellwood, *Prolegomena to Social Psychology* (Chicago, 1901).
13. Edward A. Ross, *Social Control* (New York, 1901), 5, 12-14, 35, 41-47, 57-61, 411 ff. The quote is from Ross, *The Foundations of Sociology* (New York, 1905), 54.
14. Ross, *The Foundations of Sociology*, 75-76, 159-171, 181. See also Ross, "The Present Problem of Social Psychology," *American Journal of Sociology*, X (1904-1905), 469.
15. Charles H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order* (New York, 1902), 1-7, 12-13, 21, 44, 50-51, 61-69, 84-87, 94, 101, 105-107, 139-147, 160-169, 210, 229, 232-240, 248, 258-259, 284-289, 292.
16. William I. Thomas, "The Gaming Instinct," *American Journal of Sociology*, VI (1900-1901), 750-763; Thomas, "The Province of Social Psychology," *American Journal of Sociology*, X (1904-1905), 445-455; Frank W. Blackmar, *The Elements of Sociology* (New York, 1905), 12, 17-21, 32-34, 44-46, 51-62, 69-70, 75-76, 134, 218-230; Albion W. Small, *General Sociology* (Chicago, 1905), ix, 3, 7, 17, 21-22, 35, 39, 46, 49-82, 100-114, 131, 142-143, 147-149, 153, 167, 170, 184-188, 197-199, 203-209, 213-214, 217-223, 339, 371, 442, 446-447, 472, 474.
17. Albion W. Small, "Points of Agreement Among Sociologists," *American Journal of Sociology*, XII (1906-1907), 635, 643.
18. William Graham Sumner, *Folkways* (Boston, 1907), iii-iv, 2-4, 19-20, 34-38, 59-74, 75-118, 119-157, 172-260. Obviously Sumner had made something of an intellectual shift since the 1880's when he wrote Spencerian canards. Recent corrections of the view that Sumner was an evolutionary naturalist include Bruce Curtis, "The Middle Class Progressivism of William Graham Sumner," and Stow Persons, ed., *Social Darwinism: Collected Essays of William Graham* (New York, 1965), 1-8.
19. Edward A. Ross, *Social Psychology* (New York, 1908), 1-3, 7-8, 11-41, 43-337. Ross still firmly believed that human nature was biosocial and that society had evolved. See Edward A. Ross, "The Nature and Scope of Social Psychology," *American Journal of Sociology*, XIII (1907-1908), 557-583; Ross, *Sin and Society* (New York, 1907), 107ff.
20. Charles H. Cooley, *Social Organization* (New York, 1909), 29-31, 36-37, 63, 68, 70, 80-81, 88, 113, 121-134, 209-215, 229, 237.
21. Edward Cary Hayes, "Sociology and Psychology; Sociology and Geography," *American Journal of Sociology*, XIV (1908-1909), 371-407.
22. George H. Mead, "Concerning Animal Perception," *Psychological Review*, XIV (1907), 383-390; Mead, "Social Psychology as a Counterpart to Physiological Psychology," *Psychological Bulletin*, VI (1909), 401-408; Mead, "The Psychology of Social Consciousness Implied in Instruction," *Science* (N.S.), XXXI (1910), 688-693; Mead, "What Social Objects Must Psychology Presuppose?" *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Method*, VII (1910), 174-180; Mead, "The Mechanism of Social Consciousness," *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Method*, IX (1912), 401-406; Mead, "The Social Self," *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method*, X (1913), 374-380.
23. William I. Thomas, ed., *Source Book for Social Origins* (Chicago, 1909), 4-26, 130-133, 316-317, 436-439, 530-534, 635, 373-735, 856-858. As late as 1907 Thomas accepted at least some naturalistic assumptions. See Thomas, *Sex and Society* (Chicago, 1907).
24. Luther Lee Bernard, "Hereditary and Environmental Factors in Human Behavior," *Monist*, XXXVII (1927), 163-165. Bernard summarized his case against instinct—and for the autonomy of sociology—in *Instinct: A Study in Social Psychology* (New York, 1924).
25. Luther Lee Bernard, "Neuro-Psychic Technique," *Psychology Review*, XXX (1923), 437.
26. Charles A. Ellwood, *Sociology and Modern Problems* (New York, 1910); Ellwood, *Sociology in its Psychological Aspects* (New York, 1912); Ellwood, "Marx's Economic Determinism in Light of Modern Psychology," *American Journal of Sociology*, XVII (1911-1912), 35-46; Ellwood, "The Influence of Darwin on Sociology," *Psychological Review*, XVI (1909), 188-194; Ellwood, "The Instinctive Element in Human Society," *Popular Science Monthly*, LXXX (1912), 263-272; Ellwood, "The Psychological View of Society," *American Journal of Sociology*, XV (1909-1910), 394-404.
27. Charles A. Ellwood to Floyd N. House, November 14, 1935, Charles A. Ellwood Papers, Duke University Libraries. On Marett, see H. R. Hays, *From Ape to Angel: An Informal History of Social Anthropology* (New York, 1959), 139-142. English anthropologists maintained the evolutionary outlook much larger than American anthropologists, which may explain why such a devout evolutionist as Ellwood was attracted to Marett.
28. Review of H. W. Conn, *Social Heredity and Social Evolution*, *Psychological Bulletin*, XII (1915), 472-473.
29. Review of A. de Gobineau, *The Inequality of the Human Races*, *Psychological Bulletin*, XIII (1916), 481.
30. Charles A. Ellwood, *Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York, 1917).
31. Charles A. Ellwood, "Social Psychology," *Psychological Bulletin*, XIV (1917), 374-378; Ellwood, "Theories of Cultural Evolution," *American Journal of Sociology*, XXIII (1917-1918), 779-800; Ellwood, "The Educational Theory of Social Progress," *Scientific Monthly*, V (1917), 439-450.
32. *Loc. cit.*

33. Charles A. Ellwood, "The Instincts in Social Psychology," *Psychological Bulletin*, XVI (1919), 71.
34. Charles A. Ellwood, "Mental Patterns in Social Evolution," *Publications of the American Sociological Society*, XVII (1922), 88-100; Ellwood, *Cultural Evolution: A Study of Social Origins and Development* (New York, 1927). Ellwood always believed in social evolution and progress.
35. Edward Cary Hayes, *Introduction to the Study of Sociology* (New York, 1915).
36. Charles H. Cooley, *Social Process* (New York, 1918).
37. William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (5 volumes; n.p., 1918), I, 1-86.
38. Robert H. Gault, "Psychology in its Social Relations," *American Journal of Sociology*, XXII (1916-1917), 737.
39. John Dewey, "The Need for Social Psychology," *Psychological Review*, XXIV (1917), 217-272.
40. On the emergence of empiricism in American sociology, see: Hinkle and Hinkle, *The Development of Modern Sociology* (New York, 1954), 17-35; Hugh Carter, "Research Interests of American Sociologists," *Social Forces*, V (1927-1928), 209-212; Bernard, "Some Historical and Recent Trends of Sociology in the United States," 281-293; Meroney, "The Membership and Program of Twenty-Five Years of the American Sociological Society," 56-68.
41. Bernard, "Some Historical and Recent Trends of Sociology in the United States," 289.
42. Albion W. Small, *Origins of Sociology* (Chicago, 1924), 349-350.
43. *Ibid.*, 347. Meroney, "The Membership and Program of Twenty-Five Years of the American Sociological Society," noted, p. 63, that prior to 1922 American sociologists did not seem to be sure of their field, their subject matter, or their method, and they tended to argue and discuss "many questions which now seem of little moment." Meroney was writing in 1930: what he said corroborates, at least in my mind, that there was a definite break—a completion of the professionalization impulse—in the early 1920's.