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Robert C. Bannister  
*Swarthmore College*

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Social Science in the Crucible: The American Debate over Objectivity and Purpose, 1918-1941* by Mark C. Smith

Review by: Robert C. Bannister

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tors of art. Art faculty, she notes, should have the same freedom in research and publication as other faculty members, whether or not their ideas are offensive, but artwork exhibited for the academic community or the public cannot be wholly without restriction, though not of propriety or ideology. Acceptable rules “may include qualitative standards, provisions for participation to be ‘refereed’ or ‘juried,’ and general regulations on ‘time, place, and manner.’”

Some years ago members of the AAUP staff amused themselves imagining a series of television programs to be titled “From the AAUP Files!” Sheila Slaughter, after studying the AAUP case reports from 1970 to 1990, has come up with twenty-nine that she calls “Dirty Little Cases,” five of which she comments upon at some length. Presumably none of them will be tapped for prime-time television. But it is gratifying to find a serious analysis of these extraordinary AAUP contributions to the history, sociology, and advancement of American higher education. Slaughter finds certain common denominators among the twenty-nine cases, most particularly a conflict between administrators zealous to preserve what they consider administrative prerogatives and faculty members seeking professional recognition, largely through participation in the government of their institutions.

Stressing the vital relationship of academic freedom and the faculty role in institutional government is common to all these essays, and it is one of the book’s most valuable contributions. It is given the fullest treatment in the Slaughter essay and the essays of David Rabban and Sandra E. Elman that follow it. Rabban, elaborating upon a subject he has addressed earlier, concentrates on separating the kinds of professorial speech that he believes should be protected under academic freedom from those that should not. Much speech, he notes, is protected by the First Amendment, and some is defensible on other grounds; but the justification of academic freedom is its benefit to the public from the search for knowledge by specialized experts. Exercising the role outlined for the faculty in the *Joint Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities*, “which clearly draws on professional expertise to ad-

vance the search for knowledge,” is thus protected by academic freedom. Rabban contends, however, that faculty members and the AAUP itself have gone beyond that justification in claiming the protection of academic freedom for much extramural and intramural speech. From intramural speech he draws such examples as “complaints regarding inadequate salaries, parking, and health and pension benefits.” A primary concern for him is that, without convincing justification, “decision makers and judges [are less likely] to take seriously the implications for academic freedom in close cases.”

Over the years academic freedom has clearly been expanded to protect much more than the freedom of the classroom and research. But probably most issues of consequence at a college or university have some bearing—to use Rabban’s words—on the “specialized expertise of professors in advancing knowledge and critical inquiry.” AAUP, in any event, has always borne in mind that faculty members are officers of their institutions; and, with that fact graved in the 1940 *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, it is hard to see why, when a faculty member speaks out as an institutional officer on parking, salaries, or fringe benefits, he or she should not be said to employ the protection of academic freedom. Perhaps something may be lost in the courts, but much more is gained in the profession.

A particularly interesting aspect of the Elman essay, “Academic Freedom and Regional Accreditation,” is that it was written by an officer of a regional accrediting association. The AAUP established Committee D on Accrediting primarily to further AAUP objectives in academic freedom, tenure, and institutional government through the accrediting associations. Had the views expressed in this essay—based largely on the New England Association’s *Standards for Accreditation*—been shared or implemented by the officers of those associations thirty-five years ago, Committee D would probably never have come into existence. Numerous passages might be cited, but perhaps one will suffice to give something of the essay’s flavor: “Faculty members are often steadfast in their intellectual commitment to a particular view.... That

these faculty are able to articulate and defend their views, irrespective of the fact that others disagree, is essential.”

These seven essays hardly can address every academic freedom question likely to arise in the everyday life of faculty members and administrators. But they, together with the editors’ introduction, focus attention clearly and perceptively both on major current issues and on the enduring principles that distinguish the academic profession. The title of the volume is well chosen: academic freedom is indeed an everyday concern.

## Social Science in the Crucible: The American Debate over Objectivity and Purpose, 1918–1941

Mark C. Smith. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994, 353 pp., \$49.95 (cloth), \$15.95 (paper).

ROBERT C. BANNISTER

WHEN THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO dedicated its new Social Science Research Building (“Eleven Twenty-Six”) in December 1929, speakers celebrated a new era in the social sciences. To the economist Wesley Mitchell, the building symbolized the victory of the man of “facts” over the “man of hunches.” John Merriam, president of the Carnegie Foundation and brother of one of Chicago’s leading political scientists, predicted that such contentious issues as Prohibition and the tariff would “melt away” once social scientists collected sufficient data. For the inscription for the building’s facade, the sociologist William Fielding Ogburn provided a paraphrase of Lord Kelvin’s maxim: “When you cannot measure... your knowledge is...meagre [and] unsatisfactory.”

Not everyone was persuaded. “And if you cannot measure it, measure it anyhow,” one economic theorist grumbled. But for historians of the social sciences, the spirit of “Eleven Twenty-Six” eventually translated into the view that a

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*Robert C. Bannister teaches history at Swarthmore College and is author of Sociology and Scientism: The American Quest for Objectivity 1880–1940 (1987).*

“true quantitative, antinormative science of society” emerged in the interwar decades, triumphing after 1945. Mark C. Smith now challenges this “commonly accepted interpretation” in a well-written collective biography of five prominent social scientists of the interwar years: political scientists Charles Merriam and Harold Lasswell; economist Wesley Mitchell; sociologist Robert Lynd; and historian Charles Beard.

In their debate over objectivity and purpose, Smith argues, these figures divided into two camps, pitting “service intellectuals” (Mitchell, Merriam, along with more extreme “objectivists” such as Ogburn) against “purposivists” (Lynd, Beard, and Lasswell), the latter insisting that social scientists be guided by “preconceived goals and ends” which they themselves help formulate. For both groups the path between objectivity and purpose proved to be a rocky one. Merriam, despite his frequent endorsements of quantitative, value-free social science, wrestled publicly and privately with the conflict between the demands of scholarly detachment and social activism, a tension, as Smith describes in a useful opening survey, that existed within American social science from its origins in the early 19th century. For Mitchell, ironically, the belief that empirical study would produce change led finally to an “extreme empiricism unrelated to and even sometimes opposing such reform.” Merriam was also a study in contradiction: a theorist who denied the value of theory, a quantifier who could barely calculate, and a politician who insisted that social scientists be apolitical.

The purposivists, unwilling to jettison the ideal of objectivity, were equally conflicted. In “Written History as an Act of Faith,” his presidential address to the American Historical Association (AHA) in 1933, Beard “insisted on... the scientific method... and critical uses of facts and sources,” thus avoiding a total relativism even while arguing that the historian’s perspective inevitably shapes interpretation. Lasswell, although later singled out as the epitome of the amoral technician, was even more systematic in his attempts to build a “purposive” social science on a strict empiricism.

The outcome of this debate was not a happy one for either side. Mitchell and Merriam, despite their early commitment to reform, ended as high priests of value neutrality, unaware that their emphasis on technique in its own way represented “a clearly biased approach to the study of society.” The purposivists were no more successful. Lynd’s statement of “human needs” in *Knowledge for What?* (1939) was “painfully disappointing.” Beard, although exposing the “ethical vacuum” at the heart of “objectivism,” failed completely “to validate those personal values central to his own purposive approach.” By the early 1940s, Lasswell, for all the sophistication of his individual and social psychology, adopted a value-free empiricism that seemed to justify an earlier characterization of him as “the new Machiavelli.”

Smith’s book joins a growing literature represented most notably by Peter Novick’s *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (1988) and Dorothy Ross’s *The Origins of American Social Science* (1991). Like Novick, Smith places “objectivity” at the center of the story, rather than Ross’s theme of “American exceptionalism.” But, like Ross, he cuts across the disciplines, arguing that these social scientists shared a common discourse. If other earlier works (including my *Sociology and Scientism* [1987]) left an impression that the value-free ideal was unchallenged or emerged victorious by the late 1930s—and I believe Smith exaggerates the hold of this “conventional interpretation”—his detailed recreation of these debates demonstrates that value neutrality was hotly contested until events during and after the Second World War assured its ascendancy. By placing these five figures against the background of pre-World War social thought—particularly that of John Dewey, whose influence is pervasive—Smith also locates them as links between early pragmatism and the recent revival of pragmatism by Richard Bernstein, Richard Rorty, and others.

Smith’s account is not without problems. The dichotomy between “service intellectuals” and “purposivists,” however useful for dramatic purposes, oversimplifies the far more complex and interesting story he himself tells of

often-agonized attempts of a generation of social scientists to honor both objectivity and commitment, empirical investigation and personal values. Since the two groups do not divide along generational, institutional, or even class lines, and since all five made statements at one time or other that could place them in either camp, Smith falls back on the problematic argument that the work of the different individuals “in its entirety” and “in the context of... behavior... almost always [produces a] clear position.” Despite passing references to a “purposive school,” Beard becomes “truly purposive,” others being presumably less so. Although representatives of the two camps sometimes clashed (Merriam and Beard over the conclusions of an AHA committee report on secondary education in 1926, for example, or Ogburn and Lynd over the latter’s contribution to *Recent Social Trends*), conflict also occurred among “service intellectuals,” notably Merriam’s battle with Ogburn, also over the *Recent Social Trends* project.

Smith’s promise to explore the institutional, professional, and personal context is only partially fulfilled. The educational foundations and overspecialization, sometimes in conjunction with personal ambition, take the usual blame for fostering a chilling value neutrality. Thus Harold Lasswell, addressing an increasingly specialized audience, and beset by career reversals in the late 1930s, placed his technique “in the service of existing government and private industry.” Lynd projected the small-town values of his youth as universally human. But on the whole the “failure” to negotiate the chasm between objectivity and commitment is described rather than explained, leaving one to wonder if these individuals would have gotten it right had they only been smarter—as with Beard’s inability to “understand the intricacies of Dewey’s logic” concerning scientific method, with Merriam’s blindness to potential conflicts between politicians and experts, or with Mitchell’s “commitment to gathering facts and more facts.”

To his credit, however, and despite an occasional tendency to editorialize concerning the “bias” implicit in the ideal of “objectivity,” Smith finally provides a balanced, even sympathetic view

of his subjects. One reason, as he himself suggests, is that his own career, before landing him at the University of Texas at Austin, took him from college in the 1960s to a stint in clinical social work, a world where verifiable proofs and absolute solutions to specific problems are at a premium. More importantly, these “public intellectuals” of an earlier generation seem to him to be the more impressive when compared with some denizens of the contemporary academy. In a brief but provocative conclusion, Smith takes aim at the “hyperspecialization” of experts who no longer worry about serving power; the failed promise of “critical theory”; and the excesses of poststructural theorists who “deny the validity of any knowledge and consequently [pay] scant attention to empiricism or their own value as intellectuals” while at the same time hiding behind “abstruse language that makes Lasswell seem like Hemingway in comparison.” By this standard, the earlier debate over objectivity and purpose, however flawed its participants may appear, is eminently worth revisiting.

## Places of Inquiry: Research and Advanced Education in Modern Universities

Burton R. Clark. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, 284 pp., \$40.00.

PHILIP G. ALTBACH

RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES ARE IN trouble in many countries. Budget cutters and government planners in Washington, Sacramento, and Albany, not to mention London and Rome, seem to have forgotten that research-oriented universities have played a central role in the development of modern science and technology. It is argued that research can be conducted by private industry. In many countries, there is a surplus of doctorates in some disciplines. Budget cutting, stimulated by a movement to reduce public spending at all levels, is linked to the ideology of privatization.

*Philip G. Altbach (Education, Boston College) is the co-author of, most recently, The Academic Profession: International Perspectives (1994).*

The forces arrayed against the universities are powerful.

Burton Clark's *Places of Inquiry* comes at an opportune time. Clark argues for the importance of advanced scientific training and research as part of the central role of universities. He brings an international perspective to the topic and points out how research and advanced education have evolved in the academic systems of the United States, Britain, France, Germany, and Japan. Clark assumes the centrality of universities to modern scientific development and to research—an assumption that may no longer be shared by many in authority.

Research is not an immutable part of the higher education enterprise. As a central function of the university, it dates back only to the establishment of the University of Berlin in 1810, based on the ideas of Wilhelm von Humboldt. The Humboldtian idea, with its reliance of *lehrfreiheit* and *lernfreiheit*—the freedom of the professor to teach his or her specialty and the freedom of the student to choose what to study—enshrined research.

*Places of Inquiry* discusses the ways in which advanced study and research are carried out in five of the world's major academic systems. Although each of the countries discussed is technologically advanced, each has quite different approaches to university-based research and training. Burton Clark is clearly partial to the American approach, with its large and highly differentiated system and a university structure based on departments and multidisciplinary centers. He argues that this arrangement has helped ensure American scientific preeminence. He sees the American academic system as the most successful in the world, and he admires its ability to absorb large numbers of students while at the same time maintaining elite, research-oriented institutions at the top. He implies that a weakening of this academic infrastructure will inevitably result in a downturn in American science and technology.

The other four countries analyzed in this book have significant weaknesses in the provision of graduate-level education and research. Germany, which is the home of the Humboldtian university, saw its academic system dramati-

cally weakened during the Nazi period. German scientific preeminence never reemerged. Clark points to the disjunction between the government-funded research institutes (the Max Planck Institutes) and the universities. The institutes are well funded and have excellent research facilities in the various disciplines, while the universities tend to be overcrowded, with conditions deteriorating. Clark argues that the existence of a strong nonuniversity research network tends to draw university-based research out of academic institutions, and that the German system deemphasizes advanced training in the universities.

Of the countries considered in *Places of Inquiry*, Germany has the strongest research system after the United States. Clark points out that Britain, France, and Japan have seriously flawed arrangements for advanced education and research in the arts and sciences. Britain, with its strong Oxbridge undergraduate traditions, was late to develop graduate education. Programs were established outside of the traditional universities at such places as University College, London, and the University of Manchester, only later were incorporated into Oxford and Cambridge, and even now are in an uneasy relationship with the wealthy undergraduate colleges. Recent developments in Britain have weakened academic structures painstakingly built up in the period following the Second World War. The abolition of the University Grants Committee and, most recently, the upgrading of the polytechnics to university status, have weakened top-level training and research.

The French university system was abolished during the French Revolution and reestablished by Napoleon with a purely teaching function. Further, the *grandes écoles*, which educate the French elites, do not have a significant research focus. As in Germany, there are some government-funded laboratories and institutes outside of the university system, but these do not have organic links to the universities.

Japan is an interesting case, especially for Americans, because of its persistent trade surpluses and the high achievement of Japanese students in comparative tests of mathematics and science. By all accounts, however, Japanese