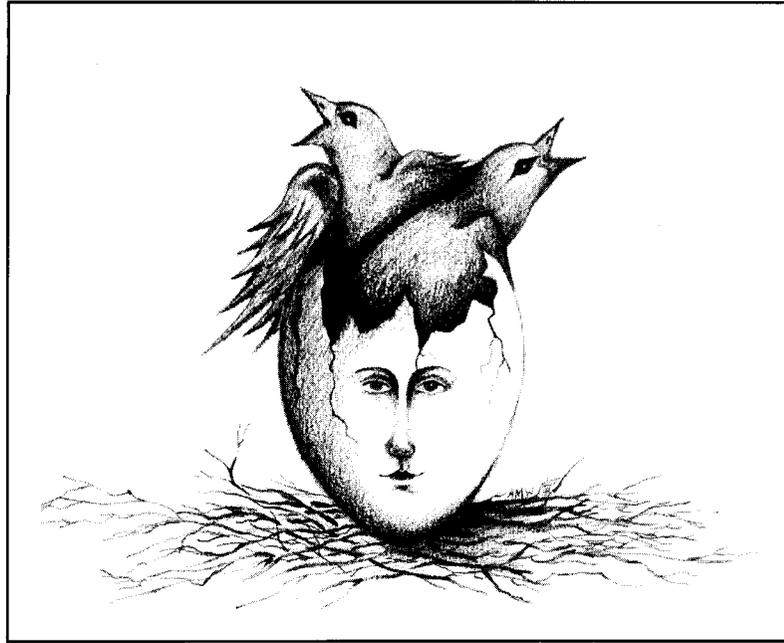


The Myths of the Social Sciences

by Jack D. Douglas



Anna Mycek-Wodecki

Several years ago one of my former roommates at Harvard, now an economist with the United Nations, dropped by for a visit. We drifted into an informal review of the social science courses we had taken at Harvard in the late 1950's. The one overriding memory that we both had of those courses was that they *assumed* that the central planning of societies, especially of the economic segments of societies, worked. This led all of Harvard's social scientists, with no single exception we could remember, to assume that the Soviet economic system was inherently far more rational, creative, and productive than the American.

That was why they believed, along with their counterparts in other Western governments, that the Soviets were such a grave threat to the West. The Soviets would soon surpass us and might "bury us" economically, unless we met their threat with a democratic form of social and economic planning. The form of economic planning they favored, almost universally, was Keynesianism. Government planning of aggregate consumption, through the miracles of deficit financing and the "multiplier effect," would solve the terrible social problem of the business cycle and send us soaring onward and upward. Though they did not have as unified a view of general social planning, some of them soon came up with such a grand proposal and helped to implement it in Lyndon Johnson's Great Society plan, euphemistically called a "program" to provide

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some product differentiation from the totalitarian form of planning.

My friend and I roared with laughter as we reviewed the absurd iron-clad assumptions and arguments of these social scientists. But there was also an undercurrent of sadness to our discussion. We ourselves had wasted an awful lot of our youthful hours studying piles of economic texts and other social science literature built on those bogus assumptions and arguments. It had also taken us years of anguished observation and experience to work our way out of them and find new foundations for our own thinking. America's "best and brightest" social scientists and policymakers had miseducated us and our whole nation. They had set us on a path of terrible waste and our nation on a path of decline, decay, corruption, and conflict from which we have not begun to recover. Indeed, we were both also painfully aware that the social "scientists" in our "elite" universities and the policymakers of our nation were still plummeting deeper into the morass of collectivist ideas. "Reaganomics" and "Bushonomics" involved much rhetoric about "free markets," but they were actually massive plunges into Keynesianism and all that entailed.

I do not mean to imply that everything taught in the social sciences at Harvard and the "elite" universities in general has been wrong for the past 40 years—although I do grant the possibility. After all, anyone seriously surveying this history from the vantage point of what has actually happened over the decades, including the collapse of the Soviet threat and the rapid decline of our Keynesian economies, must carefully weigh the possibility that much of what people learned in

those courses is wrong. For example, the lead article in the October 1992 issue of the *American Psychologist* begins by noting, "Many today are disappointed in the progress that psychology has made in this century." The author, Frank Schmidt, notes that the argument is whether this "slow" progress is due to a faulty philosophy of science or to behaviorism, the dominant epistemology in academic psychology. He argues that the basic statistical assumption used in this overwhelmingly statistical "science," the test of significance, is incorrect and systematically biases researchers to reach the wrong conclusions. A great many psychologists agree with him.

In fact, who now believes that the social sciences have been right, or have made valuable contributions to our society, over the past half century, or the past century for that matter? Our "clite" universities themselves are now overflowing with bright, young social "scientists" who adamantly insist that almost all of the dominant perspectives of these disciplines have been profoundly (or even absolutely) wrong. They march under different banners and labels—public choice economists, post-modernists, feminists, neo-Marxists, and on and on—but the general message is that what has been is radically wrong.

The primary problem is mythical thinking. Behaviorists, such as B.F. Skinner, did not lead psychology down a path of sterility, irrelevance, and mistake because they were dishonest or lazy. Keynes did not lead us to economic stagnation, soaring debt, and eventual crisis because he wanted to destroy capitalism or Western civilization. He did so because he was emotionally committed to the great myths of rationalism, scientism, modernism, and socialism and because these helped to lead him astray. He was empirically wrong about what he called "oversaving" and the "multiplier effect" of government spending. And the great majority of other social scientists who have misled and miseducated us did so because they were wrong, methodologically wrong, because their passions and convictions inspired mythical thinking in their choices of methods.

Sigmund Freud is certainly one of the most influential 20th-century thinkers who has led us astray and whose ideas have distorted and destroyed millions of lives. After 40 years of analyzing his work and of not knowing what to think about his basic ideas, I have become increasingly convinced that Freud was the victim of his own famous analytic method. First, Freud probably had patients who had very vague and garbled memories of their early childhoods, and a small number of them may have been physically attacked or sexually abused. Those two factors set him up for the biggest mistake he made. As Peter Gay has argued in great detail, Freud relied on his own self-analysis to determine what really happened in early childhood. His own memories led him to believe that at the age of four he had experienced full-blown (adult?) lust for his mother when he saw her nude. There may be extremely rare children who experience such extremely premature adolescence, as endocrinologists and neurologists would call it today. But even if Freud fit such a pattern, which is exceedingly unlikely, it would be a mistake to conclude that all other human beings fit the same pattern.

My best guess of what happened is that Freud's memory of early childhood excitement over nudity, which is very common in our very clothed society, led him to mistake fascination with the forbidden for fully developed sexual lust. Once he had that mistaken clue, he then made use of his biological preconception about human nature to conclude that everyone else

would have the same experience. He used that clue to "interpret" what his patients told him. They were strongly biased to believe that what the Herr Doktor told them was true. In short, they were biased by his method and the situation in which he applied it—the medical situation, in which doctors are perceived to hold god-like power.

The overall evidence indicates that Freud was a devoted Scientist (with a capital "S"), an Expert who believed that Science provides us with the Absolute Truth. Like almost all modernist social scientists, he implicitly believed the Myth of Absolute Science and the Myth of the Expert embodied in the idea of "The Genius." In this modernist myth, Science is a mystery that produces miracles—a secularized religion, remarkably like Judaism or Christianity—that produces Absolute Truths discovered and handed down to common people by Experts (Prophets) who are inspired by the mysterious grace of Genius (the Word of God). The Scientist-Expert imposes the Truth upon reluctant sinners.

Frank Sulloway and others have shown this remarkable parallel between the tenets of Freud and the ideas of the Jewish and Christian prophets and heros. Peter Drucker recently pointed out that this same mystique of the Expert is the cornerstone of the social science myths of Marxism, scientific management, Keynesianism, and social planning in general. Common sense tells us that everyone plans rationally, but the Social Planner asserts that only he is a social science Expert who can prophesy the future and plan everybody's life to make everybody happy in heaven on earth.

Common sense would lead us to expect that Sigmund Freud was basically ignorant about sex and most other everyday things, simply because he lived such a limited, constrained life. Anyone interested in pursuing this matter should look at the stark contrast between Freud's ignorance of sexuality, especially of the deviant kind his patients were reporting, and Havelock Ellis's very real knowledge based on a wide range of experience, both personal and secondary, through the lives of his friends and contacts. Freud, however, played the Scientist-Expert role superbly, while Havelock Ellis had nothing on his side but the humble methods of empiricism and simple, problematic truth. Freud became the Genius of Sexuality in the mass media and the academic world, thereby condemning tens of millions of the best and brightest in our Western nations to some of the most bizarre myths in history.

Strictly speaking, Freud is more an example of medical myths than of social science myths. Freud always remained grounded in the biologicistic ideas of 19th-century medicine (before behavioral biology, ethology, and the whole complex of ideas now known as "holistic medicine"). The true Scientific Geniuses of the social science of sex were Margaret Mead and Alfred Kinsey. Mead, of course, was the great pioneer in the mass media of cultural relativism (whereas Freud was a rigid biological determinist). She was actually following firmly in the footsteps of her teachers, especially of Franz Boas and Ruth Benedict, but the media saw her as the Genius who went to the faraway mountain (Samoa) and brought back the divine book of sexual relativism—*Coming of Age in Samoa*—which students are destined to read as the modernist bible of casual sex in introductory courses in utopianism at Harvard and elsewhere.

Mead studied a small group of Samoan girls in a missionary school, was told by them that they made love under the palms

with the local boys with no bad afterthoughts or unintended pregnancies, generalized her findings on the basis of these few dozen self-reported nymphettes, and concluded that sex and all its trappings are merely cultural phenomena, not matters of human nature. Roughly 60 years later Derek Freeman published a book on *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth*, in which he reported that those same girls told him, many years after Mead left Samoa, that they never made love under the palms but were merely putting Mead on, because they were embarrassed by the strange lady asking all those dirty questions. As Freeman points out, traditional Samoan culture, especially in matters of religion and sexual morality, had largely collapsed early in the 19th century, a century before Mead arrived, and had been replaced by the Christian sexual morality taught by British and other missionaries.

Freeman's book led to an explosive controversy in anthropology. Though the whole issue is now overwhelmed by academic complexities, I am quite convinced that we shall never know, even at the commonsense level, let alone at that of systematic science, whether the girls put Mead on or whether they later lied to cover up their earlier wickedness. It really does not matter, except to Mead's posthumous reputation as Genius. Even at their most cunning, the girls never said anything very different from what some local "tarts" or "sluts" might have said in the very heart of Puritan New England if they had been guaranteed anonymity. Nuns were sometimes found to be less than puritanical in 15th-century Florence, but almost never admitted it. But none of this means that human nature does not exist, that sex is all culturally determined, or that the Samoan girls were lying or telling the truth. As far as human sexuality was concerned, there was no news in Mead's findings.

Mead's methodology was actually quite similar to Herodotus' travelogue methods. Herodotus was a cultural determinist (opposed by Thucydides' belief in natural *and* cultural influences on individual choices) who believed in wild stories of casual sex among the "primal hordes." The problem was that Meade presented her findings as Scientific Truth, the mass media and social scientists taught them as sacrosanct, and tens of millions of miseducated people believed them. Herodotus admitted he did not know if his stories were true by noting that he had only *heard* these things, hence acknowledging that they might be mere rumors. Mead's anthropological research was simply not as good as that of Herodotus 2,300 years earlier and was nowhere near as good as the methods of Thucydides (who was a complete insider in the war he studied). There were other anthropologists in her own day studying love and sex on nearby islands, such as Hortense Powdermaker and Bronislaw Malinowski, who did much better than Herodotus. But modernist America loved Mead and forgot the others. (The best anthropologists, a true oasis in an academic wasteland, did not forget Malinowski.)

Alfred Kinsey did basically the same thing as Margaret Mead, but on a far grander scale and in far more pretentious forms of Absolute Scientific Truth. I doubt that any social scientist who looks at Kinsey's interviews and questionnaire surveys would now believe that his quantitative conclusions are at all justified. I doubt anybody, social scientist or otherwise, who looks at some of his reported methods, such as his unquestioning acceptance of "anonymous" findings that infants subjected to genital stimulation can have massive orgasms in rapid succession, would deny the fact that Kinsey also "discovered"

some of the most bizarre myths in human history. On the other hand, anyone with any knowledge about human history or with any experience in a big city will not be at all surprised by Kinsey's conclusion that the world is full of sexual "outlets"—intercourse, masturbation, sodomy, and much else.

To this day there is a great controversy raging whether Kinsey "discovered" or "proved" that ten percent of the adult population is "gay." Kinsey, among others, was aware of the fact that very few people who are socially labeled as "homosexual," or who label themselves as "homosexual," are exclusively so. For example, it is well known from every conceivable source that prisoners, who were highly overrepresented in Kinsey's samples, commonly engage in homosexual acts in prison (willingly or by force), that they do not often see themselves as homosexuals, and that they routinely escape homosexual practices when released. These and a great many other complexities considered by Kinsey and almost everyone else who studies sex are completely overlooked in the media.

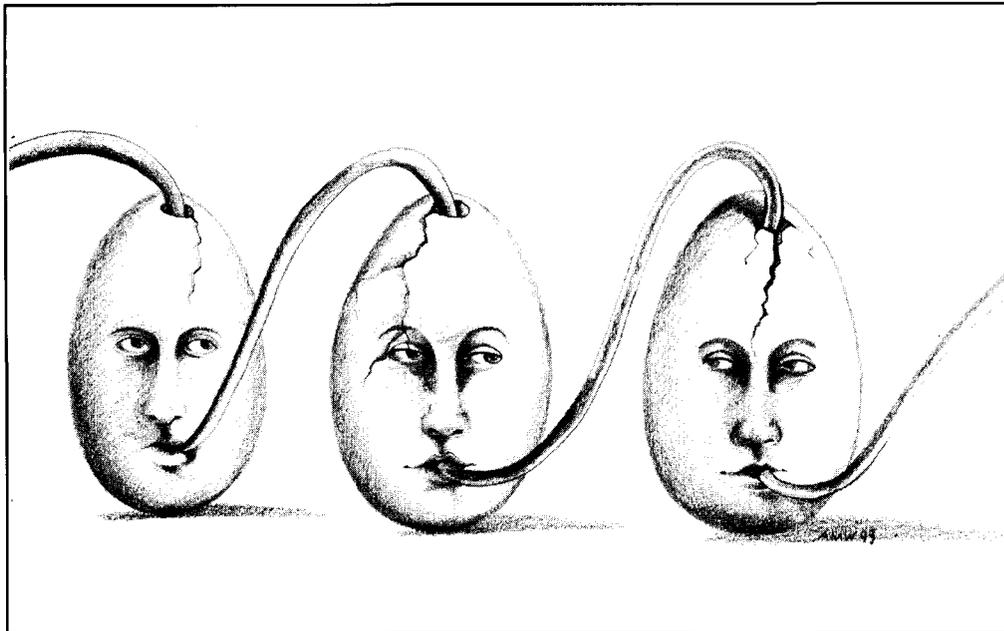
But one can easily show far more horrendous problems—and absurdities—in Kinsey's data. Kinsey's reports on sexually potent infants are indeed shocking, but not merely because they indicate that someone actually stimulated children to orgasm. Kinsey's reports were shocking because they were preposterous in every respect, from beginning to end. They read like some kind of pederastic science fiction, but of the most bizarre kind. Though pederasty is one of the most secretive forms of deviance in our society, I do not know anyone who admits to being an infant pederast in any circumstances. There are criminal convictions for molesting or raping infants, but I do not believe that there is a kind of mad-scientist pederast of the sort reported by Kinsey. It seems far more likely that someone, probably out of Kinsey's prisoner sample, got a tremendous "kick" out of fooling Kinsey and his whole team, just as some of Mead's adolescent girls probably got a tremendous "kick" out of putting her on about love under the palms.

As these examples make clear, the current state of our big universities (not our small liberal arts schools) and especially of the social (pseudo) sciences is that of a wasteland. The era of modernist scientism is still with us in many of these big bureaucracies. Jargonism, rationalism, statisticism, sterile typologism, and ad hoc conceptualism still run rampant in the massive questionnaire surveys of sociology, political (pseudo) science, and family studies. But who now believes those textbook questionnaires measuring compatibility in love or employee morale in industry? Few intelligent members of the public still believe these myths. Even executives are beginning to flee the absurdities of business science and business school credentialism. The absurdities of the social sciences make it clear that these disciplines are already on life-support today. Americans only let them continue because they provide convenient credentials for their children.

But I have faith that in death will be the rebirth of the social sciences. The interwar Wasteland that T.S. Eliot, Oswald Spengler, and so many others described did not lead to the fall or death of the Western world. The awful decay of values in those years led to a reinvigorated search for meanings. I believe something similar will happen, even in our dead universities, in the decades ahead. The social sciences will be rebuilt—re-grounded—on the foundations of human nature and wisdom. They will once again become handmaidens of common sense and ancient values, not tyrants of modernist Science and social planning.

Mimesis and Perjury

by E. Christian Kopff



Anna Alvecke-Wrudecki

A tidal wave of intellectual, and sometimes financial, fraud is hanging above the happy tropical village of American academia, threatening to crash down on it and sweep it away into the off-shore reefs. The danger has a distinctly different appearance if observed from the Olympian heights where physical scientists view the approaching storm with Lucretian calm, or from the bustling lowlands where the busy teacher of humanities courses scurries to and fro, lecturing to a crowded classroom here, grading the papers from his senior seminar there, in his spare moments scribbling out his notions for an academic journal.

The physical scientist, who in America will allow to no other the name of “scientist,” sees the end of his reign as the only true scholar, a reign that began in the 17th century and, with the support of the Enlightenment Project, itself drawing to its close, exercised ever more power until the explosion in numbers, wealth, and prestige that followed the Second World War. His claim to objectivity and to a unique vision of the world, to possession of the key that opens the door to technology and wealth, is under assault from many directions, grim-mouthed feminists, giddy Nietzscheans, solemn votaries of Gadamer. These would perhaps have little influence without the growing evidence of fraud in the temple of Holy Science.

The plight of the humanities may be even more desperate. A few years ago, René Girard came to Boulder to tell us, “We live in a world where plagiarism has become a philosophical impossibility. It simply cannot exist. If a dean tells you that there can be such a thing, she must belong to some benighted field like computer science. This is very good news indeed. It is so

good that literary critics should be discreet about it for fear of appearing a little self-serving.”

Girard, it is fair to warn you, was speaking ironically, but truthfully. Departments of English and of the languages and literatures of modern Europe have fallen almost completely under the sway of Nietzsche, more than a century after he resigned his chair of classical philology to pursue his vision. There is no objective truth, and claims to such truth are merely obtrusive signs of the will to power of church or state. A century ago it took a carefully educated and brilliant classicist to deconstruct, to point out the hidden and perhaps unconscious agendas of bureaucratic state and popular morality and canonical text. Even a generation ago, it took a decent education and a lively French pen. Now every monoglot American graduate student in comparative literature can do it.

More than a decade ago Stanley Corngold of Princeton wrote an essay on “Error in Paul de Man,” where he presented to the readers of the prestigious theoretical journal *Critical Inquiry* the discovery that De Man, guru of the Deconstructionists at Yale, had mistranslated a key passage in Nietzsche that he was “deconstructing.” *Critical Inquiry* gave De Man space to reply, and De Man said, more or less, “Well, let’s take Corngold’s translation. I can reach the same results no matter what words the author used.” Some time ago a heavily published young physicist at the University of California-San Diego was forced into early retirement when it was shown that he was using the same math equation in totally different papers on substantially different topics. De Man did essentially the same thing. He admitted that no matter what words he shoved into his theoretical meatgrinder, the same baloney issued forth. It had no negative effect on his reputation. Now, for totally other reasons, his reputation is at a low ebb, and colleagues are

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