

Ethics and Society in England: The Revolution in the Social Sciences, 1870-1914

Reviews of Books

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and the text of works by subsequent economic historians, but the decision eventually to publish now must rank as a brave, not to say foolhardy, one. It remains the best account of the first fifty years of the general limited liability corporation in Britain.

The first section documents the debate on the legal innovation and the spread of the new company form through shipping, iron and steel, and cotton, to its wider adoption by a range of industrial firms, from small-scale family enterprises to the large-scale amalgamations of the turn of the century. The second section analyzes changes in the denomination and character of shares (it has already been partly published in the *Economic History Review* for 1946), and the third section reviews the growth of company promoting and the relationship between shareholders and directors.

Scholars who wish to know more of the workings of the domestic U.K. capital markets, and of the activities of firms like Chadwicks (which played a crucial role in marrying capital and enterprise in the formative years of the divorce of ownership and control), will now find the thesis more readily available. For the general reader, however, this uncorrected, unindexed, typescript reproduction, taking no account of the subsequent forty years of scholarship, is inevitably a disappointment.

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Ethics and Society in England: The Revolution in the Social Sciences, 1870-1914. By Reba N. Soffer. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978. Pp vii, 325.

Any author who dares to write a comparative history of several social sciences taken together deserves our admiration, and our thanks. Such efforts are so rare that they are almost certain to raise major questions among reviewers.

This volume deals with the development of three social sciences—economics, psychology, and political science—during a crucial period in the histories of all three. Professor Soffer takes a confidently "externalist" position on this development, perceiving a complex set of interrelationships among science, social theory, social problems, and ethical convictions. This causes us to be reminded that very similar pressures and challenges existed for William James and Graham Wallas as for Alfred Marshall. The author labels all of the fields she examines as "revolutionary" except the subdiscipline social psychology. Her definition of the term "revolution" is not the familiar one of Thomas Kuhn, nor does it carry any other explicit meaning that can easily be discerned. A revolutionary, she says, is simply "someone who sets out to overthrow an established tradition of thought" and, in the case of those she has under study, a person "who expected progress to occur, in the final analysis, when individuals were able to behave rationally and responsibly." In view of the very substantial efforts devoted in recent years to precise applications of concepts and models in the philosophy of science to the history of the social sciences, the rather casual use of these notions and their terminology gives this book an anachronistic appearance—and makes it annoying to read.

I was most familiar with the material in those portions of the book dealing with the history of economics, and perhaps it is significant that I found them the weakest. To begin with, the author pays very little attention to the substantial secondary literature on the period (except the work of T. W. Hutchison—identified as "Hutchinson"), and even though Alfred Marshall is her central figure, not even a reference is made to the work of John Whitaker and the other important commentators on Marshall of recent years. It is startling to find the marginal revolution in economics pictured as mainly a Marshallian phenomenon begun precisely in 1890 and with no seeming relationship to predecessors, or contemporaries in other countries (there is not one reference to Walras, Menger, or Pareto). Even Jevons (identified as William Stanely [sic] Jevons) is dismissed as a "transitional economist." He is also pictured as "a conservative at heart" and "trapped in the camp of the classical political economists." For anyone who has read Jevons' detailed accounts of walks through the Sydney stums and other unfortunate places, it is surprising to

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