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Article abstract

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Philosophy, Psychology, and History: George Sidney Brett and the Quest for a Social Science at the University of Toronto, 1910 - 1940

Michael Gauvreau

Résumé

Between his appointment to the department of Philosophy at the University of Toronto in 1908 until his death in 1944, George Sidney Brett directed the bulk of his writing and teaching to the preservation of the relationship between the sciences and the humanities. In the face of the unpalatable extremes of scientific determinism and the revolutionary celebration of irrationalism, Brett resolutely asserted the unity of knowledge. This, he insisted, rested upon discovering a point of intersection between nature, mind, and society. Brett's writings emphasized the central role of psychology in preserving this unity. In his estimation, psychology possessed close links to the natural sciences of physiology and biology but, more importantly, the study of the human mind was also vitally related to the traditional humanities of philosophy, history, and literature. His belief — that humanistic, philosophical values underlay the structure of knowledge —points to a fundamental divergence between English-Canadian and American universities in the early twentieth century. Brett's standpoint was directed to resisting the fragmentation and specialization which characterized the development of the social sciences in American universities. The fact that Brett and some influential social scientists at the University of Toronto pursued, until the 1940s, a method of organizing their disciplines which preserved the unspecialized, philosophical, and historical emphases associated with the humanistic ideal, indicates the need to revise explanations of the rise of the social sciences in English-Canadian universities.

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Depuis son engagement au Département de philosophie de l'Université de Toronto en 1908 jusqu'à sa mort en 1944, George Sidney Brett concentra ses écrits et son enseignement sur la nécessité de maintenir unies les sciences et les humanités. Devant les fâcheux excès du déterminisme scientifique et l'exaltation révolutionnaire de l'irrationalisme, Brett défendit avec force l'unité du savoir qui, insistait-il, résidait au point de rencontre de la nature, de l'esprit et de la société. Dans ses écrits, Brett a mis en

The author wishes to thank Carl Berger and Harcourt Brown, who made helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Professor Brown, a former student of George Sidney Brett, graciously consented to two lengthy interview sessions in which he shared his reminiscences of Brett and of the cultural environment of the University of Toronto in the 1920s.

relief le rôle central de la psychologie dans cette unité. A son point de vue, la psychologie possédait des liens étroits avec les sciences naturelles, la physiologie et la biologie. Mais, ce qui est encore plus important, l'étude de l'esprit humain a été fondamentalement liée aux humanités classiques, philosophie, histoire et littérature. En soutenant que les valeurs humanistes et philosophiques sont les assises du savoir, Brett montre qu'il y a, au début du siècle, une façon de penser fondamentalement différente dans les universités canadiennes-anglaises et dans les universités américaines. Brett voulait réagir à la fragmentation et à la spécialisation du savoir, qui caractérisaient le développement des sciences sociales dans les universités américaines. Le fait que Brett et d'éminents collègues en sciences sociales de l'Université de Toronto aient cherché, jusque dans les années 1940, une façon de conserver leurs disciplines générales en mettant l'accent sur la philosophie et l'histoire qui sont associées à l'idéal humaniste, montre qu'il faut réinterpréter le développement des sciences sociales dans les universités canadiennes-anglaises.

> Wisdom, said Aristotle, is above practice; the means do not create the end, it is the end that dictates the means; and wisdom is the inner realization of the end or purpose immanent in all action. If so, the formulae are secondary; spiritualism, materialism, monism, atomism are all names for processes, stages in thought; they serve their purpose not as eternal truths, but as adequate hypotheses. And in psychology the same will be true. . . . In the end it may be true that inorganic, organic, plant, animal, man, are all names for limitations; they may stand for divisions as artificial as the counties in a geographical map; nature may ignore them as the earth ignores its political boundaries.
>
> (George Sidney Brett, *A History of Psychology*, Volume III [1921])

In May of 1919, the fellows of the Royal Society of Canada had the bases of their intellectual certainty disturbed by the address of a newly elected member. George Sidney Brett, professor of Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Toronto, read a paper provocatively titled "The Revolt Against Reason." He informed the assembled members of Canada's intellectual elite that, in the larger world outside the meeting-hall, the war and its eventual aftermath had tested many of their cherished beliefs concerning the rationality and stability of individual human nature and the very principles which underlay society. The carnage of war, the opposition of labour and capital which entered its most acute phase a few weeks later in Winnipeg, and the urgent questioning of the social and political order by farm leaders, radical clergymen, and even by professors within the universities,[1] pointed to the existence of a more fundamental intellectual

1. This unrest has been the subject of several studies published since the mid-1970s. See, for example, John Herd Thompson, *The Harvests of War* (Toronto, 1976), which examines the roots of western-Canadian discontent and which builds upon the older study by W.L. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto, 1950). The "labour revolt" has been extensively treated by the following studies: David J. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg* (Montreal, 1974); Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto, 1977); and by Greg Kealey, who in "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le travail* (spring 1984), revises the prevailing scholarly emphasis on western Canada by arguing that many workers in central Canada and the Maritimes participated in radical working-class action. For the influence of war and the subsequent unrest upon the Canadian Protestant churches, with a particular

problem, one which Brett identified as the perplexing question of the place of reason in modern political and social life.

"What place has reason in modern life," queried Brett, "or again we might ask: Is democracy naturally allied with the philosophy which calls itself irrationalism?"[2] Here was the very issue at the heart of the intellectual dilemma which the philosopher had presented to his audience: was there any possibility of rationally understanding, and ultimately controlling, the nebulous, seething, often chaotic, and apparently irrational elements contained in the human mind? Could one somehow extract from the froth of human experience abiding values which might guide both individual and social conduct? Despite the title of his address, Brett did not celebrate the impulse to liberate human action from a constricting social and political order. Rather, he was preoccupied with the problem of how to preserve what he considered the essential democratic ideal of human free will in the face of what many believed was a deterministic universe.

Science, Brett realized, had played a paradoxical role in nineteenth-century thought. Scientific advances in human physiology and psychology had revealed in most impressive fashion the secrets of nature and the human mind, but they had also steadily undermined the fundamental belief that society was comprised of rational, consciously willing, morally responsible individuals. Instead, these sciences of human nature and behaviour presented a much less flattering view of human beings, and imprisoned them in a universe circumscribed by inexorable chemical, physical, and biological processes. By claiming to free humanity from oppressive political and economic systems, radical political movements such as Marxism, syndicalism, and Bolshevism seemed the most likely allies of human freedom in an increasingly deterministic universe. Brett warned his listeners, however, that these ideologies went too far in the opposite direction, proclaiming a lawless, irrationalist vitalism, one which forsook the guidance of historical experience and denigrated the intellectual and material contributions to civilization made by the discovery of orderly scientific processes in nature, mind, and society. In the troubled postwar world, was there any intellectually respectable middle ground between the unpalatable extremes of scientific determinism and the revolutionary celebration of irrationalism?

Between his first appointment to the department of Philosophy at the University of Toronto in 1908 until his death in 1944, George Sidney Brett directed the bulk of his writing and teaching to the resolution of this dilemma. His published works contained few definitive answers and, indeed, Brett never set forth his ideas in systematic form, but his writings are richly suggestive of what, in his estimation, was the proper method for

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emphasis upon "radical" ministers like Salem Bland, see Richard Allen, *The Social Passion* (Toronto, 1973). For the questioning of prevailing political and economic assumptions among Canadian social scientists, see Doug Owram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto, 1986), ch. 4.

2. George Sidney Brett, "The Revolt Against Reason; a Contribution to the History of Thought," *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* 13:2 (1919) :15. Doug Owram, in *The Government Generation*, 104-106, also devotes several paragraphs to an analysis of Brett's address.

pursuing such inquiries. For Brett, the critical issue of finding a path between scientific determinism and irrationalism turned upon finding a point of intersection between nature, mind, and society. He sought a perspective which would somehow continue to unite what appeared to many educated people in the early twentieth century to be increasingly divergent approaches to knowledge: the philosophical, humanistic search for values in history, the record of human experience, or what Brett termed "the great tradition," on the one hand; and scientific practice, which insisted instead upon directing its search for laws governing the workings of nature and, by extension, of human physiology, mind, and behaviour without reference to the older canons of humanistic research, on the other.

Historical treatments of the rise of the social sciences in English-Canadian universities between 1870 and 1920 trace a linear progress from "morality" to "science," a view derived from a reading of the American academic setting. According to these accounts, the social science disciplines began as an unspecialized, moral, and quasitheological "social science" concerned with social ethics and reform but, by the early twentieth century, had located themselves in universities and had become "objective," "specialized," and "professional."[3] Disciplines like political science, economics, and sociology separated from moral philosophy or "social science" and pursued their researches in a value-free academic environment.[4] The impact of the "Darwinian revolution," some have claimed, spawned the social sciences by opening a

3. Recent American studies of this transformation of the organization of knowledge include Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science: The American Social Science Association and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis of Authority* (Urbana, Ill., 1977); Laurence Veysey, "The Plural Organized World of the Humanities," in *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America, 1860-1920*, eds. Alexandra Oleson and John Voss (Baltimore, 1979), 51-106; Dorothy Ross, "The Development of the Social Sciences," in Oleson and Voss, 107-38. For an overview, see John Higham, "The Matrix of Specialization," in Oleson and Voss, 3-18. In addition to Haskell's fine study of sociology, studies of specific disciplines include Robert L. Church, "Economists as Experts: The Rise of an Academic Profession in the United States, 1870-1920," in *The University in Society*, vol. II: *Europe, Scotland, and the United States from the 16th to the 20th Century*, ed. Lawrence Stone (Princeton, 1974), 571-609; John M. O'Donnell, *The Origins of Behaviorism: American Psychology, 1870-1920* (New York, 1985).

4. This thesis has been implicitly stated by Brian McKillop in *A Disciplined Intelligence: Critical Inquiry and Canadian Thought in the Victorian Era* (Montreal, 1979), and advanced more explicitly by Ramsay Cook in *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto, 1985). The first attempt to apply this model to the actual development of a discipline has, however, been undertaken by Marlene Shore in *The Science of Social Redemption* (Toronto, 1987), a study of the sociology department at McGill University. Two other recent studies, however, provide an alternative perspective. Doug Owram's *The Government Generation* implicitly urges the historian to pay more attention to the secular roots of social science, and focusses particularly on professionalization and changing attitudes toward state intervention, particularly among political economists. Nancy J. Christie's forthcoming study, *The Cosmology of New Societies*, explores the roots of social science in the assimilation of Darwinian ideas by an important group of popular historians outside the universities, and provides an implicit critique of the model of specialization as applied to English Canada.

fundamental rift which divided the moral imperative and empiricism, the "humanities" and the "sciences" in Canadian universities. In the period between 1880 and 1920, advocates of "liberal culture" competed for authority within the university with the promoters of the "research ideal," a battle won by the proponents of "science" and "research."[5] From this slow triumph of "science" emerged the social science disciplines.

Brett's belief that, in the final analysis, values underlay the structure of knowledge, points to the incompleteness of this process in English-Canadian universities in the early twentieth century. Through his massive three-volume *History of Psychology*, published between 1912 and 1921, Brett contributed to the promotion of the scientific character and autonomy of psychology within the University of Toronto. Yet his work was also animated by a more important concern. This scholar, whose first and abiding loyalty was to philosophy, firmly maintained that, despite psychology's close links to the natural sciences of physiology and biology, the affinities of this discipline lay with the traditional humanities — philosophy, history, and literature. Brett's perspective on the definition and role of the social sciences within the university took the shape of a triad in which the convergence of philosophy, history, and psychology maintained an overarching ideal of learning grounded on the fundamental unity of scientific and humanistic knowledge. The central element of his intellectual enterprise was thus directed to resisting in the Canadian context the very process of fragmentation and specialization which defined the organization of knowledge in American universities between 1870 and 1920. The fact that he and some influential social scientists at the University of Toronto pursued, at least until the 1940s, a method of organizing their disciplines preserving the unspecialized, philosophical, and historical emphases associated with the humanistic ideal, indicates the need to revise explanations of the rise of the social sciences in English-Canadian universities.

George Sidney Brett occupies an ill-defined and enigmatic place within the history of English-Canadian philosophy and higher education. Unlike the great Queen's University philosopher John Watson, who explicitly used Hegelian idealism in a systematic attempt to reconcile evolutionary science and the traditions of Christian theology, Brett's writings on the relationship between history, psychology, and the social sciences have resisted easy classification into one of the competing philosophical schools of idealism, realism, or pragmatism. These vied for the allegiance of academic philosophers in the early twentieth century.[6] Given Brett's wide-ranging interests in classical and oriental civilization, medicine, science, and religion, it is possible to

5. For recent examples of this interpretation, see A.B. McKillop, "Science, Humanism, and the Ontario University," in A.B. McKillop, *Contours of Canadian Thought* (Toronto, 1987), 34-42; McKillop, "The Research Ideal and the University of Toronto," *Contours of Canadian Thought*, 78-95. Although more implicitly stated, McKillop's *A Disciplined Intelligence* conveys a similar view of the impact of Darwinian science on late Victorian culture. S.E.D. Shortt's earlier study, *The Search For an Ideal: Six Canadian Intellectuals in an Age of Transition, 1890-1930* (Toronto, 1976), likewise rests upon a dichotomy between the entities of "idealism," or the values of liberal culture, and "empiricism," the practices of the new social sciences.

6. Irving, "The Achievement of George Sidney Brett," 338.

downplay his contributions as a philosopher while accenting his role as a historian whose work was seminal to the scope and concerns of the emerging history of science.[7] One recent history of English-Canadian philosophy even disqualifies George Sidney Brett and the members of his department from the ranks of those Canadian academics honoured as creators of "original philosophy." Brett emerges from this account as an unsympathetic and negative figure, as a philosopher whose perspective was limited by his Oxford education and his refusal to move outside the "anglophile niche" in Canadian culture.[8]

Far from being a disadvantage, however, it was Brett's Oxford training and continued contact with British culture which supplied the most powerful impetus to his efforts to relate philosophy, history, and the social sciences. Born in 1879 at Briton Ferry in South Wales, George Sidney Brett was the son of a Methodist clergyman. Few details emerge from his early years, beyond the fact that between 1890 and 1898 he attended the Methodist preparatory school at Kingswood, where he displayed a particular aptitude for scientific subjects and even considered taking up medicine as a profession.[9] According to his wife, Brett was perhaps one of the finest products of the English preparatory-school system, with its emphasis on a well-rounded education in classics, science, mathematics, and political economy. The young scholar possessed "an extraordinary memory for logical content, a mind severely disciplined. . . & a power of selection, which alone made possible the volume of work of many kinds which he carried during his academic career."[10]

In 1898, George Sidney Brett entered Christ Church College, Oxford, where he pursued the classics, taking a first class in *Literae Humaniores* in 1902.[11] At first sight, his training in such a traditional discipline with its insistence upon the supremacy of liberal culture and humanistic learning might have disqualified him from his later attempt to link philosophy and the empirical, research-oriented social sciences. Although Oxford still preserved its image as an ivory tower devoted to the preservation of unchanging ethical values and the supremacy of the classics, by the late 1890s it was an institution

7. See University of Toronto Archives (UTA), B74-0036/001/05, George Sidney Brett Papers, box 1; Harcourt Brown, "George Sidney Brett," *Isis* 104 (1946): 110-15.

8. Leslie Armour and Elizabeth Trott, *The Faces of Reason: An Essay on Philosophy and Culture in English Canada, 1850 - 1950* (Waterloo, 1981), 433-35. This lengthy work can be criticized because of the authors' relentless and, at times, misguided propensity to seriously consider only those philosophers who developed some distinctive "Canadian" vision. The achievement of John Watson has also been subjected to lengthy analysis by A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence*, chs. 6 and 7.

9. Irving, "The Achievement of George Sidney Brett," 329-30; UTA, B82-0012/001, Newton Price Harcourt Brown Papers, box A, Marion Brett to Harcourt Brown, 15 November 1944.

10. Ibid. The correspondence between Mrs. Brett and Harcourt Brown on the subject of G.S. Brett's biography contains a significant note of caution for the intellectual historian. Mrs. Brett held firm in her belief that it was impossible to reconstruct Brett's career merely based on the intellectual "influences" under which he had fallen. See ibid., Marion Brett to Harcourt Brown, 8 August 1945.

11. Irving, "The Achievement of George Sidney Brett," 330-31.

which could not ignore the vigorous intellectual and political debates taking place within the wider British culture. Much of this ferment centred precisely on the question of the relationship of the emerging social sciences to the traditional university curriculum of classics and philosophy.

The third quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the transformation in the field of classical scholarship of what the historian Frank Miller Turner has termed "the critical and moral tradition of humanism." For many educated Victorians, the study of classical culture held an ethical significance, as the ancient past was used as a moral or normative guide to the human condition in the present. Until the 1880s, a "humanistic coterie" of historians, men of letters, and philosophers shared a belief in the uniformity of human nature and maintained that "the experience of human beings at one time and place could provide, within limits, instruction for human beings in a later time and place."[12] By 1900, such views had been revised under the impact of historicism, evolutionary interpretations of human behaviour and society, and researches in sociology and archaeology, all of which questioned the traditional picture of ancient Greece as a society ruled by reason and sanity. There emerged a "dynamic or evolutionary humanism," a view that held that the values embodied in classical culture were not static, but had to be rediscovered and given meaning by each succeeding generation.[13]

The young George Sidney Brett was exposed more directly to this new interpretation of classical culture through the influence of his tutor, John Alexander Stewart, White's Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford. Stewart was one of the first English classical scholars to explore the irrational side of human nature as manifested in antiquity. His influential *The Myths of Plato*, published in 1905 just after Brett left Oxford, and his later treatise, *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas* (1909), attempted to assimilate the recent knowledge provided by psychology and sociology to the humanistic tradition.[14] Stewart's writings revealed, however, the influence of another powerful current of ideas. His *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas* contained a devastating refutation of British Hegelianism, whose representatives, Edward Caird and F.H. Bradley, had traced to Plato their belief that ideas were immutable entities. By contrast, Stewart asserted that Plato, in a manner reminiscent of thinkers like Henri Bergson and William James, combined the aesthetic experience and the scientific method in such a way as to imply that ideas "are plastic. . . points of view taken in this world, not things apart by

12. Frank Miller Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, 1981), 15-16. For the Victorian use of the past in drawing lessons for political guidance and conduct, see "All that glitters: political science and the lessons of history," in Stefan Collini, Donald Winch, and John Burrow, *That noble science of politics: A study in nineteenth-century intellectual history* (Cambridge, 1983), 183-205.

13. Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, 17 and 75-76.

14. See John Alexander Stewart, *The Myths of Plato* (London, 1905), and his *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas* (Oxford, 1909). For the influence of French philosophy and sociology on Stewart and other British classicists at the turn of the century, see Turner, *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, 378-79 and 115-17.

themselves in another world."[15] Thus, he identified Plato as the direct ancestor of the pragmatist philosophers' insistence on feeling and action as the dynamic basis of human experience and knowledge.

What was most significant in the development of Brett's own perspective, however, was Stewart's role in the formulation of the relationship between liberal culture and the social sciences in early twentieth-century Britain. In an article written in 1876, the Oxford philosopher sought a means of integrating the insights derived from scientific psychological research into more traditional fields of study. In one sense, Stewart stood with the advocates of a more traditional moral philosophy in rejecting the claims of "scientific" or physiological psychology to measure mental phenomena exactly. Yet he clearly emphasized the value of psychology as a point of view, as a means of gathering and interpreting insights derived from a number of disciplines. Thus, Stewart defined psychology, not as a science, but as a "*critique*, a Method, a certain thoughtful attitude in science, morals, and literature. It is the critical examination of my own adult opinions, desires, and tastes in relation to present objects."[16]

John Alexander Stewart's attempt to integrate psychology, classical literature, and philosophy illustrated one of the most significant aspects of British social thinking at the turn of the century. In both Britain and the United States between 1880 and the First World War, psychology and sociology, influenced by the evolutionary perspective, both claimed the status and authority of "sciences" of human behaviour.[17] By contrast with the situation in American universities, however, the social sciences in Britain failed to "specialize" into separate university departments. Some historians have agonized over the "failure" of the social sciences in the British academic setting in the years before the First World War, blaming the persistence of an optimistic, moralistic, social evolutionary perspective which was unable to explain the social anomalies created by

15. Stewart, *Plato's Doctrine of Ideas*, 173. In a letter to William James, written by the English philosopher F.C.S. Schiller in 1905, Stewart was described as a "convert to pragmatism." See Reba N. Soffer, *Ethics and Society in England: The Revolution in the Social Sciences, 1870-1914* (Berkeley, 1978), 286, n. 12.

16. John Alexander Stewart, "Psychology — A Science or a Method?" *Mind* 1:4 (October 1876): 445-51.

17. There exists a vast literature on the rise of the social sciences in the United States. See, for example, the influential interpretation of Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science* and the critical essay by Dorothy Ross in Oleson and Voss, *The Organization of Knowledge in Modern America*. For the British scene, see Reba Soffer, *Ethics and Society in England*, which argues that, like the United States, Britain experienced a "revolution" in the social sciences between 1880 and 1914. See also the fine study by Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology: L.T. Hobhouse and Political Argument in England, 1880-1914* (Cambridge, 1979).

industrialization, and was thus barren of the sociological theorizing characteristic of the United States and Germany.[18]

The role of scholars like Stewart in promoting the insights of the social sciences testified, however, not so much to the failure of academic social science as to the existence of a different mode of organizing knowledge in British universities. Indeed, the social sciences had wide currency in academic discussions in early twentieth-century Britain, but rather than being taught as separate disciplines,[19] their insights into human nature and behaviour were encountered and assimilated within the framework of a traditional curriculum dominated by classics, philosophy, and the study of political economy. Such an approach softened the tensions between "liberal culture" and the "research ideal" so characteristic of the American academic scene. The apparently successful alliance of philosophy and the classics with the evolutionary sciences of man discouraged young Oxford scholars like George Sidney Brett from separating liberal education and scientific pursuits. This offered them the possibility of unifying knowledge through a standpoint which combined humanistic values and the empirical methods of science.

Brett's university career was informed by this strand of social thought, the belief that the new human sciences could be comfortably accommodated within a broad, philosophic culture dominated by the classics and history, rather than hived off into separate disciplines. His first major work, whose publication coincided with his appointment to the faculty of Trinity College, University of Toronto in 1908, was entitled *The Philosophy of Gassendi*. Although Brett was always careful about

18. The beginnings of this debate can be traced to H. Stuart Hughes's seminal work, *Consciousness and Society: The Reorientation of European Social Thought, 1890-1920* (New York, 1958), in which he asserts that, by comparison with German, Italian, and French social thinkers, the British failed to contribute to the central strand of ideas which informed the social sciences. British historians have attempted, in particular, to account for the failure of their intellectual environment to produce sociology of the calibre of Max Weber's. See especially Noel Annan, *The Curious Strength of Positivism in English Political Thought* (London, 1961). More recently, two authors, Stefan Collini in his "Sociology and Idealism in Britain, 1880-1920," *Archives européennes de sociologie* (1978): 3-50, and Reba N. Soffer, "Why Do Disciplines Fail? The Strange Case of British Sociology," *English Historical Review* (1982): 767-802, have emphasized the failings of the social evolutionary perspective and, in particular, the inability of the British Hegelian philosophers, to explain the gap between social and moral ideals and the realities of industrial civilization, the wellspring of so much fruitful sociological theorizing in Germany and the United States.

19. My interpretation of this issue has been influenced by a reading of Nancy J. Christie's forthcoming study, *The Cosmology of New Societies*. In exploring the writing of history in late nineteenth-century Canada and Australia, Christie argues that a social science perspective in these colonial societies arose from a process in which the insights of Darwinism, sociology, and anthropology were assimilated into the writing of traditional historical narratives by popular historians, who were themselves "amateurs," rather than academic professionals. This interpretation offers an alternative to the American model of specialization, and permits a fresh look at the origins of the social sciences in a society like Britain.

proclaiming his own philosophical allegiances, this analysis of the work of the famous seventeenth-century French atomist philosopher, Pierre Gassendi, was in fact an account of Brett's own reflections on the nature and role of philosophy in relation to scientific knowledge, an effort which drew him onto hotly contested ground. He maintained that philosophy was a comprehensive and universal discipline, through which "a man may be the spectator of all times and places." He cautioned, however, that "he must not hope to gain this comprehensive outlook by occupying one solitary peak: he must not flatter himself that there is an essence of all essences, that he can condense all life and thought into one magic drop." The philosophical temper required, in Brett's estimation, that the investigator "must keep the original wealth of material undiminished if he would have a world in which 'life's garden blows'; if he abstracts and simplifies, the product is an 'essence,' a drop of scent in place of the living flower."[20]

This whimsical floral metaphor only thinly veiled what was, in fact, an attempt to offer a radical alternative to the way philosophy had traditionally been regarded in English Canada. Brett's writings, it should be noted, took shape in an academic environment where the traditional humanities curriculum was experiencing some difficulty. The arrival of the young philosopher at the University of Toronto coincided with a period of rapid growth and expansion when, under the presidency of Robert Falconer, the university transformed its outlook from that of a federation of liberal-arts colleges to an institution promoting scientific and industrial research. It was a setting in which social sciences like psychology and political economy secured institutional primacy over the classics and traditional humanities.[21]

"The growth of knowledge in modern times," Brett stated in 1929, "has made specialization necessary. It has also created a need for those points of view which assemble and unite the work of different specialized sciences."[22] The primacy of science raised the question of the status and role of philosophy in relation to the new departments of knowledge. In the colleges and universities of English Canada, philosophy, whether drawn from Scottish Common-Sense Realism or, after 1870, from Hegelian Idealism, was usually regarded as an adjunct to Christian doctrine and moral precepts. As conceived by professors and college administrators, its task was to reconcile religion with the scientific beliefs of the day, to provide an individual and social ethic

20. George Sidney Brett, *The Philosophy of Gassendi* (London, 1908), vi-vii.

21. University enrolment increased from approximately sixteen hundred in 1900 to eighteen hundred in 1932; see Michael Gauvreau, "Sir Robert Falconer, 1847-1943: The Lawful Mind," unpublished paper, University of Toronto, 1981. Robin S. Harris, *A History of Higher Education in Canada, 1663-1960* (Toronto, 1976), argues that, by the late 1920s, the classics course — once the major humanistic study — had been reduced to the status of a minor department struggling for survival. This transition is further documented by Alan Bowker, "Truly Useful Men: Maurice Hutton, George Wrong, James Mavor and the University of Toronto, 1880-1927," PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1975. By 1930, the department of Political Economy was the largest in the University of Toronto Arts Faculty and easily dominated the other departments in terms of staffing and funding; see Ian Drummond, *Political Economy at the University of Toronto: A History of the Department, 1888-1982* (Toronto, 1983).

22. George Sidney Brett, *Introduction to Psychology* (Toronto, 1929), 13.

which would hold in check what was often viewed as a skeptical spirit of research and criticism.[23] In the new university, with its professional faculties and specialized knowledge increasingly devoted to research, was philosophy destined to lose its function as moral guardian? Was it to become, as in some large American universities, a backwater of the social sciences, a small and increasingly esoteric university department[24] which had lost to the specialized human sciences like psychology, sociology, political science, and economics its traditional function of reflecting critically on broader questions of human behaviour?

For George Sidney Brett, the impetus to the reshaping of philosophy's role within the university came from evolutionary science. From biology, he wrote in the third volume of his *History of Psychology*, "came the inspiration to treat the mind as an organism which grows by continuous differentiation, which needs only nutrition and assimilation, which presents ultimately a collection of 'parts' that develop in sustained relations and never change without involving a reciprocal change throughout the whole structure."[25] Evolution, he noted in an unpublished lecture, was at first concerned only with special questions of change and survival in the sphere of biology. He recognized, however, that "it quickly became the basis of a new philosophy for which the fundamental idea was real progress and actual novelty," a philosophy hostile to static systems and premised upon the creative power of thought and "concepts of creative activity, creative thinking, the adventure of faith, and the belief that everything is still 'in the making'."[26]

23. For the traditional agenda of English-Canadian philosophy, see Brian McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence* for the consistent defence of a "moral imperative" by the members of different philosophical schools.

24. See the ironically titled work by Bruce Kuklick, *The Rise of American Philosophy, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1860-1930* (New Haven, 1977), 565-80, which argues that, although the Harvard philosophy department "professionalized," by 1903 philosophers had ceased to be cultural arbiters, and philosophy had lost its synthesizing, comprehensive function.

25. George Sidney Brett, *The History of Psychology* (London, 1921), 3:233 (henceforth cited as *HP*).

26. UTA, George Sidney Brett Papers, box 1, file 9, "Philosophy of Science, Lecture 1," ca. 1925. The reference to "in the making" makes it possible to date this lecture to a time shortly after the publication of the American philosopher Alfred North Whitehead's *Religion in the Making* (1925). Brett's own writings frequently referred to the works of evolutionary philosophers. *The Government of Man* lists Herbert Spencer's *The Data of Ethics*, James Mark Baldwin's *Social and Ethical Interpretations*, and L.T. Hobhouse, *Morals in Evolution*. His *History of Psychology* makes favourable reference to Baldwin's *Darwin and the Humanities*. See also UTA, A69-0003, Department of Philosophy Papers, file 275, "Bibliographies, 1936" for the reading list of senior philosophy students in Brett's department. It includes a large number of works which might be loosely described as "Darwinian" in tone. Brett's belief that the human mind was the determining factor in evolution was by no means unique in either the English-Canadian or Anglo-American contexts. Nancy J. Christie's *The Cosmology of New Societies* argues that forms of "Spencerian" or "Lamarckian" evolutionary thought, which emphasized ethical factors in social evolution at the expense of natural selection, powerfully influenced the historical and social thought of an influential group of historians both within English-Canadian universities and within the wider culture.

Here was perhaps the most forceful statement by an English-Canadian philosopher in favour of extending the evolutionary metaphor to human thought, religion, and morals. To accept Brett's advocacy of evolution, however, would necessitate a radical revision of the nature and scope of philosophy as taught in English-Canadian universities before 1900. Although recent Canadian historical writing has focussed on the emergence of the social sciences from the moral concerns of idealist philosophy, and particularly from the emphasis upon community as superior to the individual will,[27] idealist philosophers like John Watson had shown little understanding of what was actually central to the concerns of the new disciplines of psychology and sociology: the idea that evolution provided an adequate, secular, naturalistic explanation of how both individuals and societies developed and behaved. Idealists like John Watson who followed Hegel's persuasive synthesis had attempted to defend the moral imperative by limiting the application of evolution to questions of biology[28] and, by thus affirming philosophy's ties to religion, to maintain a superior place for philosophy in relation to the natural and the human sciences.

This, in Brett's estimation, was an arbitrary limitation of philosophy's sphere, one which might disqualify it from any accurate understanding of the logic and concerns of sociology, psychology, and the new political economy, the chief beneficiaries of the "revolution" which occurred in the human sciences in both Britain and the United States after 1890.[29] For one like Brett, who accepted the logic of evolution in the human sphere, this was but a vain hope, one which would confine philosophy to irrelevance by denying it the tools necessary to understand the methods and implications of the social sciences. Indeed, Brett belonged to a generation that had so thoroughly assimilated evolutionary explanations of nature, mind, and society, that he saw no need to engage in the elaborate

27. See, in particular, A.B. McKillop, *A Disciplined Intelligence*, 224-28 and Marlene Shore, *The Science of Social Redemption*, ch. 2. Doug Owram's *The Government Generation*, 5-7, emphasizes the conflict between "idealism" and "individualism" in early twentieth-century academic attitudes towards the state.

28. This has been most perceptively noted by Ramsay Cook in *The Regenerators*, 13-14, where he argues that John Watson decisively rejected scientific naturalism, and particularly Darwinian and Spencerian evolutionary theory.

29. The concept of the "revolution" in the human sciences forms an important element in the chronology of both British and American intellectual history. See, for example, Reba Soffer, *Ethics and Society in England: The Revolution in the Social Sciences, 1870-1914*, which examines the development of psychology, the new political science, and economics. For British sociology, see Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and Sociology*. The European scene has been analyzed by H. Stuart Hughes, *Consciousness and Society* and, for a synthesis exploring the transatlantic manifestation of this movement, see James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York, 1986). American historical literature on the social sciences also focusses on the 1890s as the crucial decade. See, for example, Thomas L. Haskell, *The Emergence of Professional Social Science*, which explores the emergence of sociology as an independent discipline. For psychology, see the interpretation advanced by John M. O'Donnell, *The Origins of Behaviorism: American Psychology, 1870-1920* (New York, 1985), which argues that the 1890s witnessed the popularization of the new evolutionary psychology in American academic culture.

reconciliation of science and religion that so characterized the outlook of the British Hegelians.

"Philosophy," Brett forcefully reminded his readers in 1908, "mistakes its function if it in any way undertakes to dictate results to the special sciences." Far from being irrelevant, Brett maintained that it still had a critical role to perform, that of engaging in "a dialectic of results, a sifting of ends. Above all things, it must follow withersoever the wind carries it, and not pre-determine its haven in the face of all the forces upon which it relies for progress."[30] Such a statement forged one of the most crucial links in Brett's accommodation of the older humanistic perspective with the new evolutionary human sciences. Philosophy was not so much a repository of abstract, immutable moral principles by which academics defended the intellectual and social status quo as an independent and critical discipline. "Our business," Brett reminded his students in a lecture significantly entitled "Philosophy of Science," "is not so much to learn philosophy as to learn how to think philosophically. As an attitude of mind philosophy belongs to all fields of intellectual work: whatever may be the particular subject of study, there will finally emerge a stage of reflection which will be called its philosophy."[31]

In an age of constant scientific progress and specialization, the proper task of the philosopher did not involve the construction of grandiose abstract systems, but required a willingness to wait and learn, to "interpret human experience." This was a task which, in Brett's estimation, "must be undertaken afresh whenever significant changes have occurred."[32] This implied that, in his view, all philosophies were in fact provisional and uncertain, and open to periodic revision from the insights and methods of the entire spectrum of the natural and the human sciences. In an address to the clerical alumni of Trinity College in 1927, Brett informed his audience that the "most fundamental belief of the world to-day is that nothing can be final." The consciousness of change, in his estimation, "has become the most dominant feature of modern thought."[33] This very uncertain quality of human thought and experience, he later declared, had rendered old distinctions obsolete. "In a world which is no longer static in any degree," he wrote, "the old antithesis of realism & idealism has now vanished."[34]

The recognition of the uncertainty and provisional nature of human knowledge, founded upon a frank recognition of evolution as the dominant element in the interpretation of natural science and human behaviour, placed Brett's perspective at odds with that of the Hegelian Idealists. What Brett particularly deplored was the propensity of the Hegelians to erect immutable, deterministic laws of thought and progress, to deny the radical uncertainty of human experience, to erect abstractions, to create a "cleavage. . . between those who reflected and those who observed" which, in his estimation, was "a disaster in all cases where a distinction of outer and inner served a

30. Brett, *The Philosophy of Gassendi*, 301.
31. UTA, George Sidney Brett Papers, box 1, file 9, "Philosophy of Science," n.d.
32. Ibid., "Philosophy of Science, Lecture I," n.d.
33. George Sidney Brett, "The Modern Mind and Modernism," *Canadian Journal of Religious Thought* (1927): 95.
34. UTA, George Sidney Brett Papers, box 1, file 8, "The Impossibility of Realism," 7 December 1931.

good purpose."[35] The ground of reality, Brett emphasized, lay not in mind but in experience and, as he explained, "our world is real in the anti-idealistic sense that it is not made by mind."[36]

His greatest praise was reserved for thinkers like Gassendi, Leibniz, Lotze, and Green — "physical philosopher[s]" for whom "experience is life, the life of thought and will and feeling," whose philosophy was "grounded in experience." What characterized all these philosophers was their attempt to occupy a middle ground between idealist and empiricist tendencies, a concern central to Brett's own delicate skirting of the extremes of Absolute Idealism and scientific materialism.[37] His overt identification with this philosophical heritage placed him within a current of revolt against the dualisms of religion and science, spirit and matter, subject and object which had so characterized the thought of the nineteenth century. In several important respects, Brett's ideas resembled those of an influential transatlantic community of "renegade philosophers," the Americans William James and John Dewey, the Englishmen Thomas Hill Green and Henry Sidgwick, and the German thinker Wilhelm Dilthey. The main outlines of their thought, elaborated between 1870 and 1920, attempted to define a *via media* between idealism and empiricism.[38] Knowledge, they maintained, must be cut free from metaphysical notions of eternity and necessity and grounded in human experience, which was never definite and subject to revision.[39] These thinkers emphasized the dynamic and provisional quality of experience. All were pluralists in the sense that they were critical of closed systems and advocates of "multiple paths" in interpreting that experience.[40]

For Brett, idealism was thus less a systematic philosophy than an attitude or approach to philosophical questions, one that sought to preserve the role of mind in interpreting phenomena in the natural and human spheres. He described his own perspective as "neo-idealist" in contrast to those Absolute Idealists who submerged freedom and the individual personality in the abstract unity of the universe.[41] According

35. Brett, *HP III*, 76-77.
36. Brett, *The Philosophy of Gassendi*, 255-56.
37. Ibid., 253, 270-71, 299-300, and 301-02. See also George Sidney Brett, "William James and American Ideals," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 6:2 (January 1937): 159-73; George Sidney Brett, "Thomas Hill Green," in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. VI*, 435-40; UTA, Fulton H. Anderson Papers, box 30, George Sidney Brett, "Henri Bergson — *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*," 1938-39. Anderson was Brett's successor as chairman of the department of Philosophy, and his papers contain a number of Brett's notes and lectures.
38. James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York, 1986), 3-4. Kloppenberg advances the provocative argument that the ideas of these philosophers also form the intellectual roots of the emerging political traditions of social democracy and welfare state liberalism.
39. Ibid.; Kloppenberg also locates the ideologies of both liberal progressivism and social democracy in the thought of these maverick philososphers.
40. Ibid., 46-49 and 61-66.
41. UTA, Brett Papers, box 1, file 8, "The Impossibility of Realism," 7 December 1931.

to Brett's perspective, it was possible to construct and defend the unity of the universe, but only on the basis of the reciprocal activity of individuals whose personality was not simply submerged in the whole.[42] "Human society," declared Brett in 1908, "seems the culminating point of all development" in which "we have the fullest exhibition of reciprocal activity." In his estimation, reciprocal activity implied a plurality of being which necessarily meant that there existed a plurality of ends in the universe. "The progress of society," he concluded, "is a perpetual production of minds which become more concrete in every generation, each one more capable of interpreting through itself the end for its society, and thereby increasing the number of ends that are efficient factors in life."[43]

What was significant about Brett's pluralistic approach to knowledge and his scattered writings on the subject of evolution and the method of modern philosophy was the lack of any conviction that philosophy should play the role of mediator between science and religion, a chore happily assumed by an earlier generation of English-Canadian philosophers.[44] Indeed, his reflections clearly indicated that philosophy possessed closer links to the evolutionary sciences than to the traditions of Christian doctrine. Brett's secular perspective on the social sciences was, however, not achieved at the expense of his religious faith. Although Canadian intellectual historians have viewed early twentieth-century philosophy and social thought as "substitute religions," as replacements for an evangelical creed displaced by the post-Darwinian "crisis of faith,"[45] such an interpretation does not account for the fact that George Sidney Brett found it possible to combine critical philosophy and evolutionary social thought with a devout and active Anglicanism.[46]

"Religion and science," wrote Brett in *The Canadian Journal of Religious Thought* in 1926, "have no relations sufficiently exact to cause conflict or demand reconciliation." What conflicts had arisen were, in his estimation, based upon one of two erroneous

42. Ibid., 295.

43. Ibid., 295-97.

44. This was, in fact, the dominant tendency of both the Scottish Common-Sense Realists and Hegelian Idealists discussed in Brian McKillop's *A Disciplined Intelligence*. Brett differed significantly from these earlier philosophers because he recognized no "moral imperative" which would limit research or scientific inquiry.

45. This interpretation has been most forcefully advanced by Ramsay Cook in *The Regenerators*. The movement from religion to philosophy to sociology forms, however, the central theme of Brian McKillop's *A Disciplined Intelligence* as well as the more recent work by Marlene Shore, *The Science of Social Redemption*. Indeed, Shore argues that the central figure of her study, Carl Dawson, a Baptist minister who established the Department of Sociology at McGill University, lost his faith during his social-science studies at the University of Chicago. For a criticism and alternative explanation of this position, see the forthcoming work by Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century: College and Creed in English Canada from the Great Revival to the Great Depression.*

46. This is attested to by Brett's former students John Irving and Harcourt Brown. See Irving, "The Achievement of George Sidney Brett," 332-33; the author interviewed Harcourt Brown on 16 December 1986. Brown informed the author that Brett was a "confirmed Christian," and an active member of St. Alban's Anglican Church on Walmer Road, Toronto.

interpretations of knowledge. The one assumed that "religion is a means by which scientific questions can be settled," and the other "that science is the only instrument for the comprehension of life."[47] What was evident in this article was a further divergence with the idealist legacy of English-Canadian moral philosophy, for Brett clearly indicated that science and religion were so different in their basic emphases and methods that they did not need to be reconciled. Indeed, implicit in this writings on religion and science was the firm conviction that the two functioned in separate spheres, a separation he found necessary both at the intellectual and institutional levels to preserve the independence of philosophy. One of his students later recalled that Brett never introduced questions of theology into his class, for he did not find them interesting or profitable for discussion.[48] His attempt to establish philosophy as a window on the natural and social sciences even cost his department access to funding during the difficult years of the 1930s. The compartmentalization of religion, philosophy, and science ran into frequent opposition from powerful university administrators like Sir Robert Falconer and H.J. Cody,[49] clergymen who saw philosophy (as did John Watson) as primarily concerned with ethics and theology, and an adjunct to the theological colleges in the university.

The compartmentalization of science, philosophy, and religion was, however, more of a convenient division of labour in the interpretation of different aspects of reality than a modernist celebration of the retreat of religion in the face of naturalistic interpretations of human experience. Although Brett was quite clear that the forms in which Christian doctrines had been historically expressed needed periodic recasting and revision, and that "Bibles and hymn-books and prayer-books alike must be read differently by different generations,"[50] his structure of knowledge was premised upon the fundamental conviction that neither philosophy nor social science could be accepted as a substitute for religion. In an address to the Knox College alumni in 1935, Brett dismissed the attempt of many "Modernist" and "Humanist" thinkers to reduce faith to a matter of individual psychology. Rather, he retorted,

> in religion there is an ultimate reality, an inescapable truth no less valid than the ultimate laws of Nature. . . . The surest criticism of humanism, naturalism, and modernism is that they are half-hearted, that they shut themselves up to life in its least complete forms, share with modern science a common incapacity to understand history and in general refuse to apply to the obvious data of the spiritual life their own principles of unprejudiced observation.[51]

47. George Sidney Brett, "The Evolution of Orthodoxy," *CJRT* 3 (April 1926): 97-98.
48. Harcourt Brown interview.
49. UTA, Fulton Anderson Papers, box 25, Fulton Anderson to Professor M. St. A. Woodside, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, "Report on the Department of Philosophy," 1954. For further insight into the difficulties of the department of Philosophy during the 1930s, particularly over the question of recruiting new staff, see UTA, Department of Philosophy Papers, file 217, Budget 1930-31, "Department of Philosophy Report, 1930"; file 224, Budget 1937-38, F.H. Anderson to George Sidney Brett, 12 February 1937.
50. Brett, "The Evolution of Orthodoxy," 97-98; see also Brett, "From Philosophy to Theology," *CJRT* (September-October 1930): 320-24.
51. George Sidney Brett, "Transformation of Belief" and "Humanism and Modernism," Knox College Alumni Association Lectures, delivered at the annual conference, 1935.

As a philosopher who acknowledged the plural nature of reality, Brett could not simply apply the deterministic methods of natural science to religion and the realm of human belief and conduct. What was needed, in Brett's estimation, was a different perspective, one which assembled and interpreted the rich, varied and, at times, chaotic texture of human experience, without simply reducing it to a series of inflexible abstractions or immutable laws. An important question remained: how to find a standpoint, in an intellectual climate where many of the old certainties were besieged, one which would respect the necessary distinctions between a natural universe ruled by deterministic laws and a world of human action defined by values, freedom, and moral choice?

In this search, Brett was not without resources. His belief in the creative power of the human mind as the most important factor in evolution placed emphasis upon the thought, will, and feelings of the individual as the crucial factors in the shaping of human knowledge and society. His evolutionary, pluralist reworking of idealism and the example of his classical training at Oxford led him to that nebulous borderland between nature, mind, and society, to the meeting-place of rational human freedom and the seething, chaotic, well-nigh impenetrable world of passions, desires, and unconscious purposes: psychology.

At the turn of the twentieth century, psychology occupied an ill-defined place in Anglo-American thought. Indeed, because of its status somewhere between philosophy and medicine, psychology involved, not simply the question of the contents and function of the human mind, but questions of ethics, religion, and epistemology.[52] The psychology that the young George Sidney Brett encountered at Oxford consisted of three separate and ill-fitting strands. The first was the older, philosophical psychology, the introspective "science of the soul" which had traditionally held a prominent place in Western thought. This had been supplemented and to some extent displaced in the 1870s by the "new psychology" introduced in the laboratory of the German scholar Wilhelm Wundt. This was a discipline which sought status as a natural science by relying upon physiological experiments which attempted to expose the structure and activities of the brain. Finally, the popularity of dynamic interpretations of evolution and the frustration at the lack of practical results of "experimental psychology" had seen the rise, in the 1890s, of various "applied psychologies" which were especially popular in the United States. "Applied psychology" rested upon a functionalist, activist interpretation of the human mind, and stressed its ultimate capacity to predict and control human behaviour.[53]

The first two decades of the early twentieth century witnessed the reorientation of the psychological profession in the United States along the lines of "applied psychology" and the proliferation of a host of new studies such as educational psychology, social psychology, and animal psychology, all of which shared a common concern with the observation, prediction, and control of human behaviour. By 1920, the majority of

52. William R. Woodward and Mitchell G. Ash, eds., *The Problematic Science: Psychology in Nineteenth-Century Thought* (New York, 1982), 8.

53. The nature and status of psychology in late nineteenth-century American universities has been ably described by John O'Donnell in *The Origins of Behaviorism.*

American psychologists, prodded by researchers like John B. Watson of Johns Hopkins University, had adopted, in the name of disciplinary autonomy, a form of "behaviorism" which eschewed psychology's traditional links with philosophy and metaphysics.[54] This transformation was, however, neither sudden nor complete. Despite the creation in the early twentieth century of separate departments of psychology in large American universities like Chicago, Johns Hopkins, and Harvard, the traditional links between philosophy and psychology were difficult to sever. Psychologists of the stature of William James and James Mark Baldwin, whose writings in the 1880s and 1890s did so much to formulate the evolutionary, functionalist concepts which informed the work of a later generation of "applied" psychologists, had, by the mid-1890s, actually abandoned their laboratories to pursue their primary interests in questions of metaphysics and ethics.[55]

As a product of the Oxford university system, George Sidney Brett's exposure to questions of psychology was even more firmly circumscribed by tradition. The social sciences in Britain made headway in the early twentieth century, not by fragmentation or disciplinary autonomy, but through accommodation and incorporation into the classical curriculum. It is, in fact, highly doubtful if Brett ever set foot inside an experimental laboratory during his undergraduate years,[56] but his own early interest in medicine, and the use of psychological theory by his tutor, John Alexander Stewart, to reinterpret Plato would have introduced the young classical scholar to current debates on the nature, function, and physiology of mind and brain.

For George Sidney Brett, however, what lent the most compelling urgency to the study of psychology was the status of English political thought in the early twentieth century. Since the late eighteenth century, the English "science of politics" as practised by men as diverse as Dugald Stewart, Thomas Macaulay, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Walter Bagehot, Sir Henry Maine, and the entire English school of political economy, had encompassed a broad field of study with affinities to economics, sociology, and the philosophy of history. What united these historians, philosophers, and political observers was a shared belief that, while external conditions might circumscribe the actions of individuals, it was possible to have political activity of an instructed and considered kind, with potentially far-reaching consequences.[57] In other words, politics

54. For the origins of "behaviorism," and an important distinction between Watson's ideology and the more limited adoption of his methods by the American psychological community, see the final chapter of O'Donnell's *The Origins of Behaviorism*. Watson's views were set forth in polemical fashion in *Behaviorism* (Chicago and London, 1924), a lengthier version of his 1913 manifesto delivered at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association.

55. On this aspect of the careers of James and Baldwin, see Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior*, 409-503. James's decision to abandon laboratory work was, in fact, roundly criticized by his professional peers E.B. Titchener and James Cattell. On this aspect, see Daniel Bjork, *The Compromised Scientist: William James and the Development of American Psychology* (New York, 1983).

56. In fact, Oxford did not separate psychology from philosophy until after the Second World War.

57. Stefan Collini et al., *That noble science of politics*, 8-9.

was premised upon appealing to the intelligence of the individual voter. In the first decade of the twentieth century, however, British social thinkers were questioning these assumptions in the light of evidence concerning human behaviour supplied by the new social sciences.

The most seminal contribution to this reorientation was that of Graham Wallas, a professor at the London School of Economics, whose major works, *Human Nature in Politics* (1908) and *The Great Society* (1915), sought to interpret human society as an intelligible whole. During the course of his research, Wallas came to see that there was a great gap between the liberal-democratic theory inherited from the eighteenth century, and democratic reality as displayed by the urban English mass electorate. Indeed, Wallas concluded that, because "public opinion" was not autonomous and rational in a democracy, the traditional institutional and philosophical approach to politics was in fact seriously flawed, and he was especially critical of the central myth of the rational, intelligent individual political actor. Indeed, in his estimation, the problem of politics was how to come to terms with the findings of psychology, that people did not respond to rational appeals but to unconscious forces acting on both individuals and groups. For the twentieth-century liberal democrat, the problem, in light of Wallas's debunking of the older political theory, was how to predict and control, in the absence of traditional elites and in light of the breakdown of the older status-based politics, a potentially volatile, irrational electorate? Thus, for Wallas, political science and the education of public opinion must be rooted in psychology, in an explicit attempt somehow to understand rationally the unconscious forces governing human behaviour.[58]

That Brett was perplexed by the question of the role of reason in democracy, and the implications of psychology for traditional philosophical and political assumptions, was evident from the central concerns of his own research. He was, in fact, directly familiar with Wallas's work, and even wrote a laudatory review of *The Great Society* in 1915, in which he praised the British social thinker for his courage in attempting to link democracy and social psychology. With the rise of democracy in the nineteenth century, it was now necessary, Brett argued, "to study the attitude which each man adopts towards his life, to ask after the exact influence which controls his vote, the exact motive which drives him to seek or to avoid office, the exact extent to which his desire for knowledge or success or moral goodness or reputation determines his mode of behaviour."[59] The passion for exactitude was a direct product of Brett's own encounter with evolutionary anthropology and sociology, studies which had made him aware that much of individual behaviour was nonrational and, in fact, was "dependent on relatively permanent factors such as the customs of the tribe." Thus much of individual action was

58. For the life and ideas of Graham Wallas, see the fine discussion by Martin J. Wiener, *Between Two Worlds: The Political Thought of Graham Wallas* (Oxford, 1971), 59-70. Wallas's relationship to the dominant tradition of English political thought has been assessed by Collini et al. in *That noble science of politics*, 367-77.

59. George Sidney Brett, "Concerning the Common Mind," *University of Toronto Monthly* (henceforth cited *UTM*) 15:5 (March 1915): 243-48. Harcourt Brown, a student of Brett's, later recalled that Brett made frequent reference to the works of Graham Wallas in the 1920s. Harcourt Brown interview.

"automatic in character," a "function of imitation" with "no connection with fully rational conduct."[60]

"Psychology," wrote Brett in 1924, "is in essence bound up with the spirit of democracy."[61] His basic agreement with the new tendencies in English political thought raised, however, the difficult problem of how to bridge the gap between the older democratic theory and the new democratic reality revealed by the evolutionary social sciences. In his political treatise, *The Government of Man*, written in 1913, Brett supported Wallas's fundamental contention that the problem of government had become one of psychology, "the question whether the common good was determined by the superior knowledge of the ruler or simply by the persistent clamour of the people."[62] Like Wallas, Brett urged the convergence of political theory and psychology because

> as a scientific inquiry psychology claims to be . . . a theory of those forces which result in conduct and should be studied by the political theorist in preparation for law-making. It is particularly in the formation of penal codes and the practical work of controlling groups of individuals that . . . psychology has proved valuable. For the speculative mind it has a further value in that it as least tends to prove a natural basis for social union and an inherent solidarity in human society.[63]

The promise of psychology held both liberal and conservative implications. It would, in the estimation of social thinkers like Brett and Wallas, rescue the old individualist political theory from irrelevance by placing the study of politics on a more "scientific" basis. At the same time, psychology would reveal a new basis of social harmony and community life, by which the fragmentation, class conflict, and economic dislocations of urban, industrial society could be overcome.

Although the interpretation of the results of the scientific study of the human mind occupied the central place in Brett's social philosophy, it is difficult to encapsulate exactly what he meant by the term "psychology." Indeed, his monumental *A History of Psychology* began with the assertion that human nature formed the centre of "three great lines of interest, namely, the study of human activities as the psychologist sees them, the study of human life as the doctor looks at it, and the growth of systematic beliefs as reflected in philosophy and religion." Thus he termed psychology "an autobiography of the human mind" and stated that his object was to "exhibit the evolution of ideas about the soul."[64] Only by adopting such a broad definition, Brett argued, could the historian appreciate the contribution made by ancient civilizations to the understanding of the human mind. "History alone," he reminded his readers, "can adequately unfold the content of the idea denoted by the word 'Psyche' or explain the various meanings that have from age to age been assigned to the phrase 'science of the soul'."[65]

60. Brett, "The Revolt Against Reason," 16-17.
61. George Sidney Brett, "Some Beliefs About Psychology," *CJRT* 1 (November-December 1924): 473-74.
62. Brett, *The Government of Man*, 222.
63. Ibid., 252-53.
64. George Sidney Brett, *A History of Psychology, Volume I: Ancient and Patristic* (London, 1912), vii-viii.
65. Ibid., 4-5.

The prominence of the phrase "science of the soul" seemed, at first sight, to identify Brett as a defender of the traditional attempt to enlist psychology in the service of a particular system of ethics or metaphysics. Although often hidden under a cool, dispassionate tone, Brett's preference for the older, philosophical, introspective study of the conscious individual life was evident. Indeed, the characteristic feature of *A History of Psychology* was the sympathetic attention devoted to Plato, Aristotle, the early Christian fathers, and the great medieval philosophers, whose writings contained a good deal of psychological speculation, and modern thinkers like Kant, Lotze, and James Ward, who attempted to preserve the substance of the old philosophical psychology in the face of physiological and chemical explanations of mental processes.[66] Like his mentor, John Alexander Stewart, and the great American philosopher-psychologists William James and James Mark Baldwin, Brett displayed a corrosive skepticism towards the claims advanced by experimental psychology — the "brass instrument" approach which earned the scorn of William James — to offer a definitive explanation of the nature of mental activity. Brett argued that the laboratory work, the celebrated "new psychology," rested upon the dubious premises of "illusion and physiology" and thus possessed no independent scientific status. The working hypotheses of experimental psychology, in his estimation, were constantly open to question because the quantitative analysis of mental structures and functions simply could not offer a precise, value-free description of human nature.[67]

So far, Brett's position seemed to resemble that of his Oxford tutor, J.A. Stewart, who in the 1870s maintained that psychology was not a "science" of human nature, but an auxiliary "method" employed by classicists, philosophers, and social thinkers. Despite his reservations concerning the validity of laboratory experiments, however, it was the central irony of Brett's academic career that, as professor of Philosophy and Psychology after 1921, he encouraged the formation of a separate department of Psychology, a step accomplished with the appointment of Edward Alexander Bott, a former student of Brett's and the director of the laboratory, as full professor of Psychology in 1926.[68] Commenting on the relationship between philosophy and

66. In fact, Brett's own position was close to that of the British psychologist James Ward, who employed biological insights to assert the unity of consciousness in order to refute the Associationist psychology of the British empiricist tradition. Ward viewed mental life as a process of continuous activity. See *HP III*, 230-34.

67. Brett, *HP III*, 274-75. Brett on page 280 approvingly quoted the French psychologist Ribot on the subject of experimental psychology: "It is evident that this work teaches us nothing of the ultimate nature of thought: observers do not propose to themselves this end, when they treat this problem from the standpoint of experience. Science has nothing to do with such insoluble problems. Its work consists in resolving each whole called a fact, and submitting to experiment and measure all its constituent elements. It can do no more. Scientific knowledge of a fact is the complete determination of all its relations: what remains is the business of metaphysics."

68. UTA, Office of the President, *President's Report, 1926*. For Brett's instrumental role in the establishment of an independent department of Psychology, see C. Roger Myers, "Psychology at Toronto," in *History of Academic Psychology in Canada*, eds. Mary J. Wright and C. Roger Myers (Toronto, 1982), 79. Edward Alexander Bott was born in 1887 and, between 1905 and 1909, taught school in order to secure sufficient funds to attend

psychology in 1922, Brett stated that "there is no advantage in the connection beyond the fact that it keeps alive the tradition." In his estimation, the contribution made by psychology to the understanding, prediction, and control of human behaviour through studies of individual character, analysis of social and industrial problems, and work in the sphere of abnormal psychology, had cemented psychology's links to the natural sciences of biology, physics, and chemistry.[69] Although he continued to believe that psychology occupied a somewhat ambivalent position between the concerns of physiology and the realm of metaphysics,[70] his statement delivered in the preface to the second volume of *A History of Psychology* in 1921, that "psychology is in some sense a new science, but it has progressed far enough to be conscious of its own claims,"[71] confirmed his acceptance of a shift in balance towards the natural sciences.

Both intellectual and institutional factors prompted a revision of Brett's position on the relationship between philosophy and psychology at the University of Toronto. Between his Oxford days and his promotion to the headship of the department of Psychology, he had become increasingly aware of the permeation of applied psychology into education, mental health, the rehabilitation of criminals, and the explanation of political and social phenomena characteristic of modern industrial societies.[72] Even after the separation of the departments of Philosophy and Psychology in 1926, Brett continued to involve himself in the application of psychology to social reform, serving on the board of directors of an experimental nursery school in Toronto established by Bott and Helen MacMurchy, and funded by the Canadian National Committee for Mental Health.[73] As well, he joined his counterparts in the department of Political Economy in promoting the involvement of academics on the Social Service Council of Canada.[74]

university. In 1912, he graduated with a BA in philosophy from the University of Toronto, although his interests lay primarily in the psychological laboratory. He entered the doctoral programme under Brett's supervision, and planned to write a thesis on the emergence of Western scientific method in early Greek thought. According to Bott's own account, the thesis was "lost" during the wartime chaos at the university, but a more believable account is that Brett blocked the awarding of the PhD degree on the grounds that Bott could not read Greek! Rejected for active service during the First World War, Bott plunged into civilian war work, and ran a clinic for the rehabilitation of injured soldiers. So successful was this effort that, in 1918, he was awarded the honorary rank of captain in the Canadian Army Medical Corps. In 1920, Bott was appointed assistant professor of Psychology and, in 1922, head of the laboratory under Brett's headship. For details of Bott's training and career, see UTA, A73-0026/033, Department of Graduate Records, "E.A. Bott"; Myers, "Psychology at Toronto"; C.R. Myers, "Edward Alexander Bott (1887-1974)," *The Canadian Psychologist* 15:3 (July 1974): 292-302.

69. G.S. Brett, "Psychology in the University," *UTM* (1922): 298-300.
70. *HP III*, 91.
71. G.S. Brett, *A History of Psychology, Volume II: Mediaeval and Early Modern Period* (London, 1921), 6.
72. The final section of Brett's *A History of Psychology, Volume Three*, 288-96, provides a favourable estimate of the new "applied" fields of social, child, and animal psychology.
73. UTA, Department of Graduate Records, "E.A. Bott"; "Will Bring Up Children in New Nursery School on Scientific Principle," *Star Weekly*, 23 January 1926.
74. UTA, A69-0007 001/03, Department of Political Economy Papers, box 1, E.J. Urwick (head of the Political Economy department) to Brett, 29 January 1930 and 14 February 1930.

Indeed, given Brett's belief that a "scientific" understanding of human nature would promote social cohesion, it is not surprising that applied psychology acted as an important component of his reformist social philosophy. Even the formal separation of academic departments did not seriously disturb his conviction of the fundamental links between philosophy, psychology, and political thought; the unspecialized orientation of British social thought dictated the close, interdisciplinary cooperation of psychology, political economy, sociology, and medicine in the cause of social improvement.

Within the academic scene at the University of Toronto, there existed, however, a central tension which threatened the status of psychology as the point of intersection between George Sidney Brett's liberal creed, based upon the value-oriented humanistic disciplines like classics and philosophy, and the natural sciences, which viewed human nature as the sum of deterministic biological, chemical, and physical processes. If, as Brett maintained in the early 1920s, the affinities of psychology lay with the natural sciences, would the new science of mind and behaviour present a picture of human nature at variance with the principles of pluralism and moral freedom so fundamental to his evolutionary humanism? The prospect of a final rupture between natural and human sciences was raised in most acute form by a feud which developed at the end of the 1920s between Brett and his former student, Bott, over the question of Rockefeller Foundation funds for psychological research in Canada. Although one historian has ascribed the quarrel to "jealousy and suspicion,"[75] there existed a more profound reason why Brett, who only a few years before had been a warm advocate of applied psychology, would oppose the efforts of his colleague.

Despite his initial training under Brett in the department of Philosophy, Bott, like many American applied psychologists in the 1920s, carried on his research with little reference to philosophy. Indeed, there exists considerable evidence to indicate that by the time the department of Psychology secured its independence in 1926, Bott had already adopted a good deal of the outlook and agenda of behaviourism, and spoke in terms of analyzing and measuring elemental and instinctive responses.[76] Speaking in 1925, Bott declared that the recent advances of psychology were due to the turning away from introspection, a method which, in its focus on the nebulous entity of consciousness, subordinated psychology to philosophy, towards an objective, nonmetaphysical, value-free analysis of human behaviour.[77] Much as Brett might encourage the links between psychology and the natural sciences, he did not believe that psychology could dispense with metaphysics. "A true psychology," he declared in 1930, "must have for its

75. This is the interpretation advanced by Marlene Shore in *The Science of Social Redemption*, 216-17.

76. E.A. Bott, *Studies in Industrial Psychology*. University of Toronto Studies, Psychological Series, vol. IV (Toronto, 1920), 3-4.

77. UTA, Department of Graduate Records, "E.A. Bott"; "Professor Bott Delivers Fourth Alumni Lecture," *Varsity*, 1 December 1925; "Mental Health Benefits Most from Progress of Psychology in the Present Generation," *Varsity*, 2 December 1925. For the efforts of American psychologists who, after 1910, sought to secure the independence of their discipline from philosophy, see O'Donnell, *The Origins of Behaviorism*, 205-42.

basis a true philosophy."[78] Writing in the final volume of *A History of Psychology* in 1921, Brett directed his scrutiny at those psychological methods which advanced the claim to rigid objectivity. "Psychology," he concluded, "proves to have a private metaphysics at least, or it avenges itself by giving a psychological explanation of all other metaphysics."[79] Behaviourists, he stated, "are actuated by a kind of desperate positivism; they acknowledge almost no machinery of explanation but what is comprised in the formula of stimulus and response."[80]

Behaviourism, with its almost complete disregard for the "great tradition" of philosophical psychology, posed a direct threat to Brett's belief that psychology formed the point of intersection between the natural sciences and the humanities. The institutional separation of psychology and philosophy at the University of Toronto, and the subsequent academic warfare between Brett and Bott, could be interpreted as a recognition of the fact that the two disciplines dealt with fundamentally different aspects of reality. Any attempt to preserve a continued conversation was intellectually flawed. Indeed, this was the solution adopted in both the United States and Germany by a number of leading philosophers and psychologists who were influenced by a revival of Kantian ideas after 1860. Because of their difficulties in reconciling a transcendent God, a spiritualized universe, and a mechanistic theory of nature, these "neo-Kantians" were driven to a dualistic interpretation of reality, and posited an absolute difference between the "natural sciences," which operated according to abstractions and simplifications of the physical world, and the "cultural sciences," based upon a recognition of difference, diversity, and the quest for values.[81]

Although this dualistic approach to the interpretation of reality had the advantage of establishing a clear demarcation between the sciences and the humanities, thus minimizing the potential for jurisdictional disputes, the disadvantage, in Brett's estimation, was that it conceded psychology to the "natural sciences," thus removing the study of human nature from the realm of values. For philosopher-psychologists of his stamp, it was enough to observe the activities of the Harvard psychologist Hugo Muensterberg, recruited by William James in the 1890s as his replacement in the psychological laboratory. Despite Muensterberg's neo-Kantian idealism, his rigid belief that psychology was in fact a natural science actually pioneered the behaviouristic

78. George Sidney Brett, "Review of *Le probleme de la sensation*, by Maurice Pradines," *Philosophical Review* 34 (May 1930): 297.

79. Brett, *HP III*, 129-30.

80. Brett, "Memory," *CF* 4:46 (July 1924): 311. See also Brett, "Philosophical Essays," *CF* 10 (November 1929): 61-62; *Introduction to Psychology* (Toronto, 1929), 13.

81. For an examination of the outlook of the German "Neo-Kantians," see Thomas E. Willey, *Back to Kant: The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860-1914* (Detroit, 1978).

applied psychology popularized by John B. Watson after 1910.[82] The drawing of absolute distinctions between the natural and the human sciences, as well as the apparent relegation of the study of human nature and behaviour to the realm of deterministic processes, did not appeal to a pluralist like Brett, who maintained that the natural and the human sciences interpreted different aspects of a single reality. His rejection of the neo-Kantian attempt to resolve the conflict between the sciences and the humanities was not, however, isolated or anachronistic. Indeed, Brett's position, that there was no fundamental distinction between the objects studied in the natural and the human sciences, resembled that of the "renegade philosophers" William James and Wilhelm Dilthey, who believed that although the scientific standpoint was the point of departure in the interpretation of reality, it must be supplemented by knowledge derived from the human sciences.[83]

But how to defend the psychological perspective as the bridge between the humanities and the sciences? Brett's scientific interests and dynamic interpretation of reality precluded any refuge in formal, abstract philosophy, and suggested the need of a mode of study which would respect the varied quality of human experience without establishing artificial divisions among different approaches to knowledge. The neo-Kantian approach as promoted by psychologists like Muensterberg, he wrote in 1921, with its arbitrary division between "natural" and "cultural" sciences, had raised a problem "which is not yet clearly formulated, and that problem is the very question of the relation between history and psychology."[84]

It was the elucidation of a link between history and psychology, undertaken to preserve the "great tradition" of philosophical psychology, which proved to be Brett's most important contribution to the transatlantic attempt to resolve the troubled relationship between the humanities and the natural and social sciences. History shared with psychology the terrain of human nature, motives, and behaviour, and it supplied the new "natural" science, conscious of its status, with the values of individual diversity, discovery, and moral choice which emerged from the record of the past. Thus the continued relationship between philosophy could, in Brett's estimation, only be confirmed through the medium of historical study, by understanding that psychology had been, "from the beginning of time," an arena which had witnessed "the most passionate desires, the most distorted theories, the most bitter disputes, and the most refined thought possible to the human being."[85] In other words, despite the attempt by

82. For Muensterberg's life and thought, see the fine study by Matthew Hale, Jr., *Human Science and Social Order: Hugo Muensterberg and the Origins of Applied Psychology* (Philadelphia, 1980), especially "Values and Science: A Search for Philosophical Order," ch. 6. There is considerable evidence that Brett considered Muensterberg's separation of psychology and philosophy in his attempt to make of the former an "exact science" one of the most difficult problems which he faced. Brett devoted a lengthy critical discussion to Muensterberg's ideas in *HP III*, 182-84.

83. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*, 66. The third volume of Brett's *History of Psychology* lists a treatise of Dilthey's in the bibliography.

84. Brett, *HP III*, 183-84.

85. Ibid., 6-7.

twentieth-century psychologists to claim scientific status for their discipline, to posit universal, deterministic laws which governed the human mind and behaviour, Brett argued that psychological theory and practice was, in fact, a function of time and place. Scientific discoveries, he stated, held meaning only against the background of "the great panorama of human effort"[86] — that is, within the context of a particular social and intellectual setting in time.

History, in Brett's view, formed the great central arch binding together philosophy and science, and supplied the vantage point from which it was possible to affirm the unity of knowledge in the modern world. However, his reliance upon history, the shifting flux of human experience, as the source of value, rather than upon a more rigid system of philosophy or theology which viewed values as eternal and universal, raised in acute form the problem of relativism.[87] Yet like his older counterparts William James and Wilhelm Dilthey, he maintained that the obverse of relativism was freedom. Because values entered into immediate human experience, they could not be eliminated as part of a quest for exact science, a realization which lay at the basis of his historical sensibility.[88] "A history of science," he wrote in the opening section of the second volume of *A History of Psychology* in 1921,

> is a unique species of history. For the content of the science the student may go to the last textbook, where he may learn the established truths without any reference to their genesis or to the men who established them. For those who require no more a history is superfluous: it can add nothing to that knowledge and may be wholly disregarded. But there is another and a different object for which it has a specific function. If the student is not to be left with the idea that knowledge is a fixed quantity of indisputable facts, if on the contrary he is to acquire a real understanding of the process by which knowledge is continually made and remade, he must learn to look at the movement of ideas without prejudice as a separate fact with its own significance and its own meaning for humanity. To despise forgotten theories because they no longer hold good, and refuse on that account to look backward, is in the end to forget that man's highest ambition is to make progress possible, to make the truth of to-day into the error of yesterday—in short, to make history.[89]

History revealed the dynamic play of human will and the creative movement of ideas. The fact that human beings made history pointed to the sterility of relativism and to the vitality of human freedom.

Because, in Brett's view, all aspects of human knowledge unfolded historically, all the sciences reflected the values dominant in a particular time and place. Thus the attempts of neo-Kantians and behaviourists to exempt the natural sciences from the

86. Ibid.

87. Speaking in 1935, Brett cast doubt upon the possibility of constructing an exact science of history. Indeed, he accepted the view of the Italian neo-Idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce that all history is contemporary history; see Brett, "Transformations of Belief."

88. See the fine discussion of the use of history by the European and American thinkers treated in Kloppenberg's *Uncertain Victory*, 107-12.

89. Brett, *HP II*, 6.

realm of values were an unwarranted fragmentation of knowledge. It thus made little sense to speak of a "value-free" study of human nature, society, or politics. Although he recognized that an academic division of labour between disciplines was necessary in a society characterized by complexity and specialization, this was "purely conventional and not binding on anyone or destructive of the unity of thought."[90] Thus the unity of science and philosophy, the "great tradition" inherited from Plato, Aristotle, and the great English empiricists need not be ruptured: philosophy, history, and the new sciences of human nature and behaviour attested to the values of human free will and creativity.

ii

In one sense, George Sidney Brett's bold affirmation of the unity of scientific and humanistic knowledge must be regarded as a failure. From a purely institutional standpoint, this most celebrated historian of psychology was unable to convince his more practically minded colleagues of the value of philosophical psychology, and was thus forced to witness the fragmentation of philosophy and psychology at the University of Toronto in the early 1920s. Although unacceptable within his own department, Brett's central concerns challenge the conventional picture of the displacement of the humanities by the natural and social sciences in the interwar years. Far from being merely a desperate attempt to preserve a humanistic perspective in an intellectual environment increasingly devoted to academic specialization and the pursuit of a value-free "research ideal," his attempt to unify philosophy, history, and psychology found expression in a number of influential quarters at the University of Toronto.

Within the dominant department of Political Economy, for example, R.M. MacIver, Harold Innis, and Edward Johns Urwick, whose collective leadership of that department spanned the years between 1926 and 1952, shared Brett's belief that it was possible to maintain an unspecialized "social science." This discipline was constructed upon a framework of political economy but accommodated the insights of philosophy, history, sociology, geography, and psychology. Their pursuit of such a perspective indicated that Brett's evolutionary humanism was not simply an isolated protest against scientific culture, but was in fact part of a larger current of ideas within the university. Indeed, from the 1920s until 1963,[91] it may be argued, political economists sought to organize the social sciences according to a British, rather than an American, pattern.

At a more personal level, Brett's preoccupation with the problem of values and scientific knowledge, and the role of mind and human nature in democracy, directly influenced the social thought of his younger colleague Harold Innis. As perhaps the leading Canadian social scientist in the 1920s and 1930s, Innis's writings on the biases and limitations of the social sciences in the 1930s and 1940s, and his later, more opaque

90. "The Philosopher's Stone," 372. See also Brett, "Review of *Education for Freedom*, by R.M. Hutchins," *International Journal of Ethics* 54 (April 1944): 226-27.

91. Sociology was only separated from the department of Political Economy in 1963. See, on this point, Ian M. Drummond, *Political Economy at the University of Toronto: A History of the Department, 1888-1982* (Toronto, 1983), 108.

treatises on the theory of communications, addressed George Sidney Brett's earlier concerns.[92] For both men, modern civilization was the fruit of a fine balance of humanistic and scientific knowledge; here was the high road between freedom and determinism. At stake was the question of how to preserve that freedom in the face of the knowledge that much of human behaviour was determined by biological and environmental forces. The work of both Brett and Innis thus rejected the view that the social sciences involved simply the application of value-free techniques of description and measurement to social problems: any attempt to analyze human behaviour returned the social thinker to the question of human will and values, where only the guidance of philosophy and history assured the possibility of rational action.

92. The origin of Harold Innis's social thought has proved a most elusive and problematic question for Canadian historians. Perhaps the best discussion remains Carl Berger's "Harold Innis: The Search for Limits," in *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writings: 1900 to 1970* (Toronto, 1976), which emphasizes Innis's efforts to avoid the deterministic implications of economics and geography. Nancy J. Christie's *The Cosmology of New Societies* argues that Innis's concepts of history and geography were derived from a social evolutionary perspective provided by an earlier generation of historians.