

achievement and public voice, then one must work to nurture both sides of the see-saw. For an example of a specialist-cum-publicity-hound, he cites historian A. J. P. Taylor, who “remained so consistently in the public eye that he lost his cultural authority” (388–9).

Further, Collini seems to suggest that we accept intellectuals as a permanent part of Western societies, rather than see them as a near-extinct species, and we should regard them as normal human beings rather than creatures possessed of a special dispensation. Intellectuals will always be a part of Western culture, ever adapting, sometimes making mistakes, often doing good, plodding on like everybody else. In fact, the very *ordinariness* of Collini’s intellectuals may prove offensive.¹

Lastly, Collini indicates that intellectuals might do well to understand and harness the power of modern media. No one would doubt that this power at times defies reason, goodness, and good taste. At the same time, it generates new opportunities:

we should acknowledge that a journal as intellectually and politically serious as the *London Review of Books*, whose pages regularly carry long analytical articles by leading writers and scholars, now claims a circulation almost twice as great as the combined *total* of the circulations of the three periodicals in which most of Orwell’s

famous essays appeared: *Horizon*, *Tribune*, and *Polemic*. (489)

Absent Minds is an excellent book. Collini sets out to illuminate specific, potent national accounts and to suggest broader applications, and he accomplishes these aims successfully and in worrying detail. My only complaint about the book is that the details at times obscure the fascinating story that Collini is telling us. The trail is a little too easy to lose. Nevertheless, the book places in relief not only English questions but international ones, and in a fashion that convinces and delights.

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Gattone, Charles F. *The Social Scientist as Public Intellectual: Critical Reflections in a Changing World*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Should social scientists, in the interest of balanced scholarship, stay away from a direct involvement in public life, or are they, due to the nature of their work and vocation, intrinsically unable to do so? According to Charles F. Gattone’s *The Social Scientist as Public Intellectual*, these two questions have been at the heart of

¹ For one instance of offense taken, see Kenan Malik’s review in *The Sunday Telegraph* (14 May 2006) or at <http://www.kenanmalik.com/reviews/collini_absent.html>.

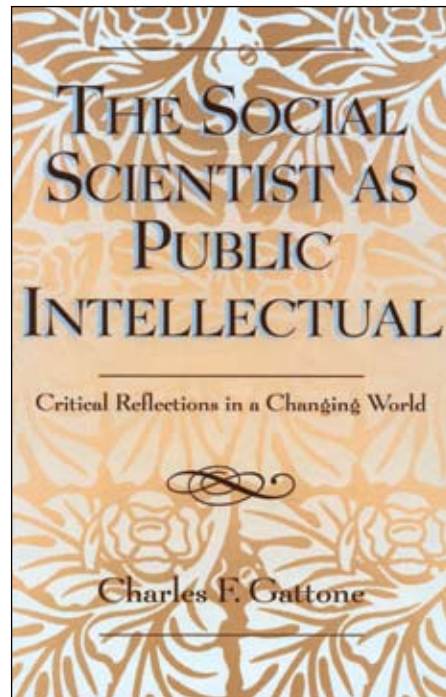
the social sciences from their beginning. The dichotomy clearly illustrates the fragile nature of the relationship between the sciences and politics, knowledge and ideology: it refers to people who are trained to observe social and cultural structures and symbols through scholarly analyses but are also called to evaluate these social frameworks by suggesting their change.

Gattone begins from the premise that the social scientist's knowledge about the world is not a simple gathering and conveying of information, but an active interpretation of "phenomena in a comprehensive, innovative, and enlightening way" (xv). His concerns with whether social scientists are able "to forge analyses that are relevant to the ongoing transformations taking place in the present" (xv), and whether their "conclusions have any bearing on the future path of civilization" (xv), betray the author's opinion that social scientists have not just knowledge about, but also responsibility for, the destinies of their societies. Gattone chooses to examine what is at stake in developing the proper content and methods of such knowledge and responsibility by looking at social thinkers who wrote about these matters. He argues that today we can build on the ideas of our intellectual predecessors by "looking at the relationship between their observations about the trends of their time and their suggestions about how social scientists might proceed as public intellectuals in the face of these changes" (xi).

To accomplish this goal, Gattone explores the ideas of nine thinkers: August Comte, Henri de Saint-Simon, Max Weber, Thorstein Veblen, Karl Mannheim, Joseph Schumpeter, C.

Wright Mills, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Pierre Bourdieu. He focuses on these authors because of, in his words, a "somewhat grueling list" of reasons (xii): first, the considerable time the thinkers spent examining the rationalization of social life and the manner in which it affects culture; second, their consideration of the coexistence of the democratic and authoritarian aspects of modern life and how the tension between the two impinges on the role of social scientists as public intellectuals; and third, the inclination of the thinkers to consider the ethical aspects of the role of social scientists as both observers of and participants in the world of politics.

Throughout six chapters, Gattone demonstrates, for example, that a number of social scientists from Weber to Bourdieu have been concerned that the growing rationalization of societies and the insti-



tutionalized structures of the academy constrain scientific individuality and intellectual originality. The result is often the inability of social scientists to evaluate societies in which they live as objectively and as critically as needed.

Gattone is successful at showing how the historical contexts in which social scientists live and write shape their views of social scientists as public intellectuals. He explains a two-fold framework for Saint-Simon's and Comte's assertion that savants, the men of science, will save the day: contextually, the socio-economic chaos of their society was in need of something to bring order to it; philosophically, this assertion stemmed from the two thinkers' blind belief that the natural and social sciences could transform political decision-making into a more scientific enterprise.

In Mannheim's and Schumpeter's cases, the same context—the rise of Fascism in Europe and the increasingly public character of political life—resulted in two very different views. For Mannheim, the scientific knowledge of his day was too contemplative and needed to be more prescriptive to enable the world to deal with the moral issues that arose with modernity. For Schumpeter, on the contrary, social scientists as public intellectuals were a nuisance and a group that got more attention than it deserved. Even more importantly, social scientists were for Schumpeter part of the problem of modern societies because they sped up societies' rationalization and had a very narrow view of history.

Gattone's book is an informed study of the ideas of Comte, Saint-Simon, Weber,

Veblen, Mannheim, Schumpeter, Mills, Galbraith, and Bourdieu, and the historical contexts in which their ideas originated and to which they responded. Regrettably, the book never moves from the descriptive toward an analytic level of discussion. Gattone makes sporadic comparative references to thinkers, presents them in the same chapter because they share the same historical time frame, or introduces their individual insights when that helps him to address better the individual concerns and roles of social scientists today. But the analytic approach—the one that would suggest important and systemic commonalities among thinkers and bring their insights into a legacy pertinent to the principal *philosophical* and *moral* concerns of social scientists as public intellectuals—is absent.

One idea shared by the nine thinkers that Gattone discusses is the notion of the progress of human affairs and history. As something built into the foundation of social sciences, the notion of progress affected these thinkers' views of how social life ought to develop and what role social scientists as public intellectuals should have in that development. Consequently, the critical consideration of the idea of progress should find its place in any discussion of social scientists as public intellectuals today, Gattone's included.

Another common thread among the thinkers from Weber and Veblen to Galbraith and Bourdieu is a belief that intellectuals can and do influence social order by defining and redefining its structural and symbolic structures. Even Schumpeter, who criticizes the role of

social scientists, actually admits to their importance. It is analytically relevant that social scientists inherited this self-understanding from Saint-Simon and Comte. That is, while Saint-Simon's and Comte's descendants abandoned the unrefined positive philosophy of the two French thinkers, they did not reject their understanding of the public relevance of social scientists. Even when the tension between intellectual humility and intellectual courage is recognized as necessary for both balanced scholarly work and a constructive public role—the necessary tension between knowing one's disciplinary, historical, and ideological confines and the audacity to go beyond them—today's social scientists often think of themselves as called to save the day. One of the outcomes of such a view is a recurrent blurring of the difference between public intellectuals and activists.

Gattone does not see the continuity in these social scientists' self-understanding as analytically useful for, or constitutive of, his own arguments about public intellectuals. He speaks of Saint-Simon's and Comte's naivete in defining the public role of social scientists, not acknowledging the fact that the core of that same idea—which is in their case inseparable from their positive philosophy—has survived. Gattone himself implicitly, albeit in a careful and qualified manner, adopts the same core notion when, in his last chapter, he elaborates on the specialized public roles that social scientists play and the questions they encounter in contemporary societies.

Gattone's book offers a careful look at the ways in which a group of selected social scientists deals with the relationship

between their scholarly understanding of modern societies, on the one hand, and, on the other, the manner in which these societies shape social scientists' views of public life and their role in it. Gattone's book is clearly written and informative, but it would have been substantively enriched by some definitional considerations, especially by a closer examination of the differences between public intellectuals and activists, and between intellectuals and scientists. Where Gattone's book does not fully meet its goals is in not building on the ideas of the nine thinkers—on what they had in common and what they assumed—in order to learn from their legacies.

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