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In the World She Never Made

When a person is dead they are dead, she said. What do you do when someone dies? ‘Well, you have to dispose of the body. I don’t go to the funeral. I don’t go to the funeral of anybody, no matter how near to me he was, even “my nearest and dearest”. I regard the funeral, or the cremation more probably, as a necessary hygienic measure; you must dispose of bodies. That is the finish.’¹ And so it was. The day after Barbara Wootton died, Vera Seal went to register her death. The deputy registrar, a young woman, exclaimed with joy when she recognized the name – her aunt, the registrar, was a great fan of Barbara’s. On Wednesday 20 July 1988, nine days after Barbara died, there was a short non-religious funeral at Golders Green Crematorium in London. The flowers on the coffin were picked from Vera’s garden. Vera was chief mourner; Lord Longford came on his bicycle; and there were a few other peers and some of Barbara’s loyal friends and neighbours. The husband of Barbara’s deceased niece attended with his new wife, as did her second cousins, John Ford and Arthur Hetherington, with their wives. From the nursing home in Surrey came a contingent of five carers, in their uniform, in the matron’s car: ‘I was really surprised how few people were there ... For a life like that that seemed incredible ... I remember feeling totally deflated. I can remember that feeling now. This isn’t right. This isn’t good enough; this wasn’t what should have happened.’² The small band of mourners entered to the music of César Franck’s *Violin Sonata*, the last movement, a piece which Barbara’s brother Arthur, who had died in the First World War, had particularly loved. Campbell Adamson and O.R. McGregor both talked for a few minutes about Barbara. The coffin slid away accompanied by the first movement of Elgar’s *Cello Concerto*. Three days later, Barbara Wootton’s ashes were scattered in section I-L of the Crematorium’s Garden of Remembrance.

There were plans for a memorial service, but it never happened. Barbara’s solicitor, Nicholas Morgan, picked a date that did not work for members of the House of Lords. McGregor rearranged it for another day, but there were problems with that date too.³ When people die, and their bodies are disposed of, that, as

Barbara said, is the end. But in the case of people who lived lives like hers, the end is usually followed by a flurry of eulogies, and then there comes a phase of reappraisal in which the person's life is reinserted into its social and temporal context, and seen and valued as part of that. Barbara's obituaries certainly celebrated her many accomplishments: her distinguished career of public service, with its membership of four Royal Commissions and four Departmental Committees; her role on the Home Office Penal Advisory Council and the Advisory Committee on Drug Dependence; her Chairmanship of the Committees which produced the famous cannabis and alternatives to prison reports; her Governorship of the BBC; her Chairmanship of the Countryside Commission; her forty years' service as a magistrate; and her peerage, inhabitation of the Woolsack, and thirty years as a debater in the House of Lords. They followed her trajectory through the academic world, from her first lectures in the handmade double skirt as Hubert Henderson in early 1920s Cambridge, through the earnestly cheerful society of the Workers' Educational Association, the principalship of Morley College, and seventeen years running extra-mural classes in London, to the professorship at Bedford College and the Nuffield Foundation grant; they noted her service on the University Grants Committee, and all the books, the lasting legacy of her social scientific mind, her lucid rationality, her no-nonsense, no-jargon approach to the asking of answerable questions about the problems of human society. Her obituary-writers fastened on the fascination of a life which had emerged from conventional origins to carve an extraordinary path; they alluded to the personal discomforts of that life, with its record of loss and thwarted motherhood. George and his taxi-cab did not escape a few mentions. In *The Guardian*, Lena Jeger called Barbara 'An Architect of the Welfare State';⁴ for McGregor in *The Times*, Barbara was 'Social Philosopher and Public Servant';⁵ in her local newspaper, *The Dorking Advertiser* she appeared as 'A Caring Reformer'.⁶ Rob Canton in the *Probation Journal* chose 'Magistrate and Social Scientist',⁷ and Philip Bean in *The British Journal of Criminology* played on the title of Barbara's own book, 'Testament for a Social Scientist'.⁸ In *New Statesman & Society* she was 'the socialist and social reformer'; Tony Gould, who wrote her obituary there, used as a caption the inscription that Barbara had written inside the copy she had given him of *In a World I Never Made*, 'The Girl Who Never Made It'. This was not modesty, protested Gould, but a reference to the way Americans persistently misread the title of her book.⁹

Barbara's will omitted any arrangements for her considerable literary estate. This is strange, but it does resonate with her decided lack of interest in life after death. It was Vera who one day suggested to her that Girton College might be an appropriate location for her personal papers. During the process of tidying up such a long and productive life, a plan emerged to finance a Barbara Wootton Chair or Research

Fellowship, but, as with the memorial service, nothing happened.¹⁰ What did happen was the publication of four volumes of Barbara's writings in 1992. The editors were Vera Seal and the criminologist Philip Bean, who described in their Preface what a 'labour of joy' it had been to put the collections together: Barbara Wootton's writing remained highly relevant, not least because she was so often ahead of her time, and its fastidious and witty language recalled her often-forgotten talents as a teacher and an orator. Has Macmillan gone mad? asked one reviewer of this labour of joy: 737 pages, or 2 kg of writings and speeches by a charter member of the great and the good. No, he decided: the 2 kg were a lot of use as well as a lot of fun. 'Anyone who wants to be reminded of how to make a civilized society should read Barbara Wootton.'¹¹

Her generation was born into a world that exploded around its ears: two world wars; the development of cars and aeroplanes and atomic power; the arrival of mass broadcasting and of men on the moon. When Barbara Wootton was born, Britain had no national health service, no sickness or health insurance, no old age pensions or family allowances, no public system of secondary education and no Labour Party. Victorian Britain was certainly not a world of her choosing. She hated its class structure and the attitudes that went with it, no less because she was a beneficiary of it. She saw the economic and social system of capitalism as inefficient, unjust and destructive of human community. Religion was an excuse for not facing up to reality. Aggression and violence, whether towards individuals, communities or nations, were dismissed as unacceptable in a philosophy that placed the value of human life at the centre of everything – this 'brief flash that illumines the interval between birth and death'.¹² Her passion for social equality, 'the fire at the centre without which great things are never done',¹³ burnt undiminished across the many shifting political landscapes of her life. She wore the mantle of what Noel Annan called 'a wonderful old battle-axe of the left'.¹⁴ That was why, although being a deeply political animal and an almost lifelong member of the Labour Party, she was not at home in party politics, and refused many approaches from constituency parties looking for candidates.¹⁵ She could not swing with the wind: if an incomes policy was morally and economically correct, the official Labour Party policy on it was irrelevant; if the Labour ministers of the day did not agree with her efforts, as Chair of the Countryside Commission, to put the principle of conservation first, she would fight the battle and she would win it.¹⁶ She was what sociologist and poverty campaigner Peter Townsend, in his eightieth-birthday tribute, called 'The Unrepentant Democratic Socialist'.¹⁷

She was many other things too: 'one of the outstanding intellectuals of our time',¹⁸ 'one of the most eminent women of her generation',¹⁹ 'one of the most distinguished social scientists produced by this country',²⁰ and 'an iconoclast whose formidably critical mind challenged many conventional wisdoms'.²¹ She was an

example *par excellence* of a 'public intellectual': someone whose powerful mind was devoted to the analytic activities of thought and reasoning in the interests of a wide community, and in an open and accessible way.²² In the 1960s, Barbara Wootton was 'almost a household name in contemporary Britain';²³ as the writer Rebecca West indelicately phrased it, 'Lady Wootton of Abinger is dear to all of us because we see her so often on TV, and in other places of exposure, among people who look as if they had died long ago and been stuffed by a skilful taxidermist, and she alone seems alive'.²⁴ When *In a World I Never Made* was published twenty-one years before Barbara's death, a number of reviewers had observed the disingenuity of its title. One of the noble Lords in that place of taxidermy complained that, whatever fresh field he found himself turning to in order to prepare for this debate or that, he found she had been there before him. 'I believe she titled her biography *In a World I Never Made*. She may feel that, but I do not believe I am alone in finding myself in a world that she has greatly influenced.'²⁵ As *The Birmingham Post* put it: 'Anyone who didn't know better might say that here was a woman with a man's clarity of mind and singleness of purpose who had made an extravagant success in a man's world'.²⁶

For more than sixty years, Barbara Wootton provoked and inspired social scientists, politicians, political activists, bureaucrats and professionals of all kinds to think more clearly and act more wisely with respect to economic and social policy. In the 1930s, she was an intellectual leader in international movements for peace and human rights. Through her analysis of one of the great debates of the twentieth century – the dialectic between individual freedom and state planning – and her contribution to the Beveridgean welfare state, she acted as 'fairy godmother' to the post-war Labour Government.²⁷ 'I seem to be always saying our whole system is wrong,' she observed, with mordant clarity, in 1967.²⁸ No topic or policy arena or group of experts was ever quite the same once she had turned her critical gaze on it. Criminology never recovered from her allegations that opinion is not the same thing as systematically tested knowledge; penal policy was fundamentally altered by her questions about the role of punishment, the appropriateness of prison, and the kinds of control that need to be imposed on people's freedom to use mind-altering substances; and laws relating to killing and physical violence reflect her particular brand of respect for human life. Economists were so threatened by her rigorous surveillance of their abstract theories and models that all they could do was forget her. When she called sociology 'a lot of waffle' and theoretical sociology 'bunk',²⁹ she did not expect to endear herself to sociologists, and so she did not; this was a view, pronounced David Martin, Professor of Sociology at the LSE, which definitely limited her accomplishment.³⁰ In a memorable metaphor, criminologist Nigel Walker called

her 'one of those intellectual helicopters who hover over other academics' fields, spraying defoliants'.³¹ She never worried about upsetting people. 'Once she had come to a conclusion, she would go for it.'³² She was a source of perpetual irritation for her ability to ask awkward questions that nobody else had bothered to ask: 'She kicked holes in things that it never occurred to me to kick holes in, and having kicked holes in them, I could see why she did it, and I thought why didn't I think of that?'³³

What Barbara Wootton did throughout her long life was persistently and successfully to advocate the application of scientific method to the analysis and resolution of social problems. Her work was characterized by a utilitarian commitment to relevance and public service.³⁴ She wanted policies based on evidence which would serve utilitarian principles: the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Her brand of social science was in direct lineage from that of its early founders (Comte, Mill and Spencer), and from the earnest social accounting of the Webbs: a tradition of meticulous social observation, data-collecting and record-making, driven by practical questions, and based on a view of the social world as observable, quantifiable, and composed of facts. Most importantly for Barbara Wootton, social science was an instrument for increasing the democratic tone of a society because its methods of enquiry gave access to the experiences of ordinary people. She did not herself found a school; there was no completely new model of thinking. What she did was build a newly tight analytic framework onto the scaffold of an existing approach. In her framework, the empiricism and the utilitarianism were tied to the morality of socialism and agnosticism. Rationality was the governing principle, and it was rationality that insisted on an instrumental role for social science in gathering the kind of evidence politicians ought to have before instituting any form of governance over our lives.

Although there is no Barbara Wootton school as such, her approach to a systematic social science makes her a founding mother in Britain of a new tradition: that of evidence-informed public policy. In the early 1990s, in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, the idea that systematically gathered and reliable research evidence should feed directly into policy and practice began to spread from health care into domains of social intervention: education, social welfare, crime and justice, transport, and the environment. Impressed by the need for rationality and resource-efficiency in a climate that was rejecting old-style political ideology, governments voiced the need to know what works before making policy changes.³⁵ Academics, particularly those who had worked in health care, found numerous examples of well-intentioned social interventions that did more harm than good.³⁶ This was a message that appeared only once the research evidence had been thoroughly sifted and analysed, an embarrassing process for many social scientists who were used to taking quicker,

more selective and hence potentially misleading journeys through research evidence, exactly of the kind Barbara Wootton had uncovered in her *Social Science and Social Pathology*.

One reason why Barbara Wootton's name has not been linked to the establishment of evidence-informed policy is suggested in McGregor's Foreword to the four posthumous volumes of *Selected Writings*. Barbara was a loner: 'It was in the nature of her self-contained and assured method of work that she attracted admirers but no disciples or collaborators for she had no need for the intellectual support of others'.³⁷ Whether or not she felt the need for such support, its absence is more likely to have been the result of the way her life was lived than a conscious choice. Her social science was not in sympathy with the way the social sciences were developing in Britain. Her kind of pragmatism became increasingly unpopular among British social scientists captivated by 'the apparently grand and heady sociological theory' emanating from the USA and from Europe.³⁸ Barbara regarded theories as only useful if they were based on facts; she wanted factual answers to such questions as: 'How do people live? Are they free to speak their minds? Do they have enough to eat? What sort of houses do they live in? Do they have fun and gaiety in childhood, adventure and opportunity in youth, ease of mind and body in old age?'³⁹ During the latter period of her work particularly, there was a decided turn away from the idea of the social scientist *qua* scientist, observing and experimenting with the social world like true scientists in their laboratories. This model of social science was overcome by a post-modernist rejection of the whole notion of society – not the catchy Thatcherite dismissal, 'there is no such thing as society', but a more thoughtful recitation of the ways in which society is made up of all the societies each of us thinks we live in. The complex implications of this view were hostile to Barbara Wootton's vision of social science. Her contribution to social science was not just on its practical edge, however: her perspectives on economic structures and systems, and on the place of punishment in crime and justice, for example, could never have been worked out without the kind of analytic and severely logical thinking which underlies the best and most resilient theories. Richard Titmuss, her colleague at the University of London in the 1950s, called it 'controlled passion': 'She passionately believes in social justice, yet she argues on the basis of logic,' he said in an interview about her in 1970. 'She takes up statements or hypotheses and looks at them coldly. If the function of the university is the destruction of myth, then Barbara Wootton has done more than her share.'⁴⁰ She tried to shape the form of social science during a period of its own evolution, but her particular mix of the intellectual and the practical was seen by the dominant masculine leadership as old-fashioned, perhaps even too *womanly* – serious academic study meant not muddying your feet with the troubles and puddles of social reform.

Interestingly, the one social scientist who has long respected her for her intellectual prowess and for her method, philosophy and commitment is A.H. Halsey, himself an advocate and practitioner of a rationalist and empirical social science.⁴¹

It might have been different had she lived and worked in the USA. American sociology had a definite positivist, scientific bent from the start: its founding fathers saw the social world much as Barbara Wootton did, as the laboratory for social science. Social science was *the* method for social reform: and at the heart of it was the need to quantify and to test experimentally different approaches to reform. In the 1930s, when President Roosevelt's New Deal programmes arrived on the policy scene, social science was waiting with the tools to establish their impact.⁴² Social scientists in the USA, much more than those in Britain, embraced the vision of *Testament for Social Science* – of social science's capacity to achieve scientific rigour. One of the puzzles of Barbara Wootton's approach to social science and public policy is why she did not make more use of these American examples. She did write papers about the New Deal, but these focused on the Roosevelt Government's drive to unionization and Industrial Recovery programme, rather than 'the welter of experiments' which broke new ground in the interface between evaluation research and policy.⁴³ There are few references in her writings to American social science. Her *Social Science and Social Pathology* could, for instance, be seen as a direct amplification of a famous challenge by the American social scientist C. Wright Mills in a 1943 paper on 'The Professional Ideology of Social Pathologists'.⁴⁴ Wright Mills, like Barbara Wootton (or should it be 'Barbara Wootton, like Wright Mills'), was concerned to remove the value-laden assumptions that masqueraded as knowledge in professional utterances. But if Barbara had read Wright Mills, she does not say so. Her neglect of the American sociological tradition is even more striking in the light of another feature of her own social science: the emphasis she placed on controlled observation of the results of different interventions, and the systematic recording of the results of past experience.⁴⁵

The review of research on the causes of young people's anti-social behaviour contained in *Social Science and Social Pathology* shadowed a developing tradition of systematic research reviews of social topics which avoid the potential biases and gaps of unsystematic ones. Barbara Wootton's advocacy of controlled experiments, especially in the field of penal policy, would have been very much in tune with the disposition of fellow social scientists across the Atlantic. A decade after she published *Social Science and Social Pathology*, and around the time she was arguing that the new invention of Community Service Orders should be tested in controlled experiments, the American behavioural scientist Donald Campbell put forward the idea that all efforts at social reform should be subjected to systematic evaluation before being adopted.⁴⁶ In 2000, Campbell's name was remembered in the founding of the Campbell Collaboration,

an international organization of people committed to the kind of systematic reviews of the evidence obtainable from well-done studies that Barbara tried her hand at in *Social Science and Social Pathology*. The fifty-eight systematic reviews in the areas of crime and justice, education and social welfare held in the Campbell Collaboration's online library in October 2010,⁴⁷ are just the kind of evidence that she argued for in her lifetime, in her roles both as magistrate and social scientist.

Aside from the British rejection of empirical 'positivist' social science, three other features of Barbara Wootton's life and work counted against any enduring recognition of her work. First, she was a polymath: she had 'a remarkable capacity for entry into many worlds'.⁴⁸ A character in Barbara's short story 'The Morning After' acts as spokesperson here: 'There are two many octaves on your keyboard,' says Geoffrey to Nora, aka Barbara. 'So you must play complicated tunes, and inharmonious ones, because life has no music for instruments like yours.'⁴⁹ The social sciences, declared Barbara, non-fictionally, give one a licence to trespass,⁵⁰ and trespass she certainly did. She walked all over the fields of economics and social policy, and sociology and psychiatry, and medicine and criminology, and environmental policy. She not only walked there, but she left a considerable trail of footprints: hers was 'the most powerful mind' in all these fields of endeavour.⁵¹ It has certainly been a challenge for this biographer, to follow her to all these places. Congenital trespassers continually tug at the boundaries of the way we organize our understanding of how knowledge is created, and, with the post-war sharpening of disciplinary boundaries, this mode of travel has become an increasing problem.⁵² Barbara Wootton herself realized that, had her activities sprawled over fewer worlds, they might have been more effective; but, for her, the sacrifice of wide-ranging interests was temperamentally impossible.⁵³ Closely allied to her wandering habit was the facility she had for writing in many different kinds of journals and newspapers. She wrote what was readable, not what was academically acceptable and (like this book) full of footnotes. Peter Townsend remembers reading her *Freedom Under Planning* – a scantily footnoted book 'too readable to attract attention' but nevertheless one which did and does put an extremely well-argued case against the free market.⁵⁴ It was Townsend who noted that the particular combination of distinguished social scientist and politician manqué has a disruptive effect on reputation: the academic and Labour Party adviser Brian Abel-Smith, like Barbara Wootton a 'creative genius of post-war social policy', also suffered from it.⁵⁵

A second aspect of Barbara Wootton's life which is woven into her invisibility as an important public figure is that she was a woman. The influence of her gender was both obvious and subtle. Her life was spattered with many absurdities of sexual inequality and discrimination, and many 'firsts' as a woman. She enjoyed telling these personal stories, but they were stories of triumph, not suffering: she got the starred first at Cambridge

but could not claim a degree; there she was, a Justice of the Peace before as a woman she could vote; how ridiculous that the American authorities suspected her of nits and George of venereal disease, and only him of earning money, when it was the other way round financially. She could not count the number of times in her life when she had been graciously informed that she had a 'masculine brain'.⁵⁶ 'We get awfully tired,' she observed in the debating chamber of the House of Lords, 'of seeing all the pictures of important people signing treaties, conducting debates, forming commissions and all the rest of it, almost always entirely masculine, and certainly with a vast over-representation of the minority sex.'⁵⁷ Her personal experiences told her that women were discriminated against, but she also knew this intellectually: it was a matter of evidence. She wrote a chapter in her autobiography called 'Woman' in which she details this pattern of inequality: 'If we have come a long way, we still have far to go'.⁵⁸ Barbara herself spoke in the House of Lords on several topics of particular concern to women: the aggregation of their incomes with those of their husbands for tax purposes;⁵⁹ the invidious 'cohabitation rule', an issue that much enraged feminists in the 1970s, whereby a woman lost her right to supplementary benefit if she was found to be living with a man;⁶⁰ and the ridiculous practice of requiring a husband's consent for a wife's sterilization, but not vice versa.⁶¹ She played a considerable role in debates relating to the Bill which eventually became the 1975 Sex Discrimination Act. She understood – and she was one of the first to do so – that women, a statistical majority, are nevertheless, like non-white men, a cultural minority group. When their noble Lords made speeches about women, she pointed out that they would never dare say that about coloured people.⁶² In 1971 she inquired, not very naïvely, why only 14 out of 150 directors of Social Services were women, when most social workers were women, receiving a not very satisfactory answer.⁶³ 'One reason why women seldom reach senior positions,' she had already concluded in a letter to *The Times*, 'is the curious, but widespread, pretence that they do not exist.'⁶⁴ Reviewing a book on *Women in Top Jobs* in 1981, she observed that women had broken down many professional doors, but the stairs inside continued to present a formidable obstacle, which is why most of the women never got further than the ground floor.⁶⁵ Equality was a *moral* issue for Barbara Wootton. Equality between men and women involved a simple judgement that women should not be discriminated against.⁶⁶ That was the beginning and the end of it. Alone of all the topics with which she tangled during her long life, it is remarkable that what is now called 'gender' was never subjected to her critical analytical gaze. Her analysis of the class system was piercing and unrelenting, but gender as a parallel axis of stratification escaped her attention. Despite arguing that women should not be a special case, they remained a special case to her.

The greater part of her life and work happened before there was public recognition in Britain of gender equality as a moral right and a political goal. Frank Field said that

'a confident Establishment' would have appointed Barbara Wootton as Lord Chief Justice, despite the fact that she was not a barrister and not a man.⁶⁷ The problem is that confident establishments tend to be masculine and therefore unfriendly to such reversals of convention. Barbara's attitude towards the politics of feminism was curiously ambivalent. She did not see herself as campaigning for women's causes, although early in her life she had headed a young suffragists' organization.⁶⁸ The difference between suffragists who used peaceable means to claim the vote, and the suffragettes who used other means, mattered a good deal to her, as it had to her mother. Many years later, she was asked to join a women's protest against Britain joining the European Economic Community: 'I would never do it as a woman. I would do it as a political person'. Having had ample experience of being a statutory woman, she was totally opposed to this practice, and to any policy of positive discrimination: women should achieve as people, not as women.⁶⁹ Rejecting the label 'feminist',⁷⁰ she decisively dissociated herself from what she saw as the manifestations of feminism in the 1970s.⁷¹ She abhorred the stridency of Greer's *The Female Eunuch*, although she did enjoy Kate Millett's more intellectual analysis of *Sexual Politics*.⁷² The biological differences between the sexes mattered to her. In a speech she gave to the National Council of Women in Cambridge in 1962, she put forward the view that women in their jobs as 'professors, bus conductors, research chemists, or what have you' want to be treated exactly like their opposite numbers, but 'Ladies and gentlemen, when we go home we don't want to be treated like that, we want to be women, and we hope that we may be able to retain our essential femininity'.⁷³

She said women had to choose between a career and motherhood,⁷⁴ but she had not chosen. Like much of her life, not having children was as much of an accident as, in different circumstances, having them could have been. Motherhood was the most complex area of Barbara Wootton's life. It was associated not only with a sense of blocked fulfilment, but with her own mother's perceived vicarious ambitions for her children, ambitions which were divided between the surviving son who was unquestionably distinguished, and the daughter who only might have been. She carried Adela's hurtful remark – 'My daughter, who might have been distinguished' – with her throughout life.⁷⁵ Barbara Wootton's hostility towards her mother never dimmed, and it was accompanied by a reluctance to recognize, not only Adela's own achievements as a scholar and teacher and defender of women's rights, but the difficulties she must have surmounted when widowed on a small income with three children. Perhaps, because she never experienced it herself, motherhood retained for Barbara the conventional aura of romanticism it has for many women before the reality hits home. Her defence of children over her many years as a magistrate and a peer was based on a practical knowledge of their problems, but it also reflected to

some extent a distanced and unrealistic view; according to one of her friends, it may have been this attitude that helped to explain her very radical proposal that erring children should not be treated in the criminal justice system at all.⁷⁶

A third factor contributing to the disappearance of Barbara Wootton's reputation is her marginality in the academic world. Women have rarely prospered in that world, which retains a marked ability to treat them differently.⁷⁷ A.H. Halsey, one of the few sociologists to take Barbara Wootton's work seriously, sees her as one of the four most important intellectual figures in British sociology during the first half of the twentieth century; the others – Hobhouse, Ginsberg and Marshall – were all LSE men. Strikingly, though, in his 2001 survey of sociology professors' views about the shapers of their subject in the twentieth century, not one mentioned Barbara Wootton. All their significant figures were male, and most were European or American theorists.⁷⁸ Although Barbara Wootton moved in and out of academic institutions, she never, unlike male theorists, felt at home in them; she did not particularly cultivate the attention of academics, and she did not devote herself to pedagogy or to fostering post-graduate work. Academia responded by denying her access to many of its opportunity-structures, and by refusing to reward her presence through the usual mechanism of creating groups or departments around her work. Had the situation at Bedford College in the late 1940s and early 1950s been more receptive to Barbara and her programme of social science research, she might have established a stream of work and scholar-researchers who advanced her kind of empirically-based social science. However, the College was hostile, and by the time her *tour de force*, *Social Science and Social Pathology*, was published, she had given up the academic world as a lost cause.

Barbara Wootton took a straightforward view of the relationship between research and policy: you should not have one without the other, and it is dangerous not to rest policy on a secure research base. Yet social facts uncovered by social scientists are rarely used in any direct way to formulate policy, for all sorts of reasons. Towards the end of her life, Barbara was beginning to acknowledge this. For example, of all the hours of her life she had devoted to the work of Royal Commissions and similar organs of enquiry, few produced results, and these were often small in proportion to the hours consumed; legislation rarely followed and, even where it did, government departments tended to do the Commission's work all over again before the relevant Bill was introduced. The best that could be said was that a Commission Report and its assembled evidence 'is one of the factors in the lengthy and mysterious process of modifying the mental climate'.⁷⁹ Much of the influence of social science research on policy, especially in Britain, was, and is, achieved through social networking.⁸⁰ Barbara was not very interested in this; she was not particularly disposed to take a strategic line towards power structures and relationships in trying to get

policy-makers to use what she regarded as the right sort of evidence. For much of the time when she was active in the social science and policy world, Barbara Wootton was perceived as too challenging to the establishment. She once joked that the main Committee Room in the Home Office was 'the cell in which she served a life sentence',⁸¹ but, without her reputation for radicalism, the sentence might have been a good deal longer. The statistician and criminologist Leslie Wilkins remembers in his *Unofficial Aspects of a Life in Policy Research*, how, when he was a Home Office civil servant in the 1960s, a circular came round asking for suggestions for people to be recommended to the Minister as members of a proposed Royal Commission on law reform. Wilkins nominated Barbara, but her name was removed almost immediately by his superior who complained that her radicalism made her a liability.⁸² She was a liability, and she knew she was. When she talked about academic freedom in South Africa in 1969, Barbara expressed a concern about the funding of research by governments. She feared especially the fate of social science research, given that it is 'prone to uncover social evils which governments prefer to brush under the carpet or to elicit facts which reveal either the failure of well-intentioned governmental policies or the sinister quality of the ill-intentioned'.⁸³

Barbara Wootton did not much favour the examination of deep psychological motives – indeed her distrust of social workers and of psychiatrists for indulging in this habit is spelt out in much of her writing – so she looks over my shoulder as I speculate now about what might have lain behind her extraordinary achievements. It is the line of that Housman poem that comes before 'In a world I never made' in his *Last Poems* which holds the clue: 'I, a stranger and afraid'. Again, Barbara's fiction speaks for her: 'In your heart you're afraid ... You're afraid of all the things you think you want. You're afraid ever to let go of anything you've ever had your hands on ... But most of all, of course, it's yourself you're afraid of.'⁸⁴ The stiff upper lip, the turning one's back on tragedy and just carrying on – a characteristic of her class and generation – came at a price. Strong emotions – love, sexual passion, despair, anger, hatred, frustration – could not easily be felt or named. The intellect was the instrument of control. Barbara revered the power of human intelligence above everything. 'In this astonishing age,' she said, 'we have learnt to fly above the earth and to voyage beneath the deeps of the ocean. Our stockings are made from coal and air, our spectacle frames from milk. We make love without conceiving and have our teeth removed without pain. And all this has been accomplished ... by the unfettered exercise of the human intelligence.'⁸⁵ Her respect for intelligence stemmed not just from what it could do to transform human society but from its role in providing the steer for her own life. She knew what she had, and what she did not have. 'If I were to be granted the realization of one wish on behalf of the human race,' she wrote

movingly in her autobiography, 'that wish would be that the love of two people for one another should always begin and end at the same moment in each case.'⁸⁶

In the 1920s and 30s, and also later, she suffered from 'prolonged periods of great emotional disturbance'.⁸⁷ She did not call it depression – the depression which her father and her brother Neil had endured – and one imagines a certain stubborn resistance on her part to any kind of labelling or official diagnosis. But she did admit in a letter to William Haley, written around the time *In a World I Never Made* was published, that she had been 'kept going' for nearly a year 'by some of the modern specific anti-depressant drugs'.⁸⁸ Some years later, she confided in a letter to Peter Townsend that, 'I sometimes think my values are all wrong and that I fritter endless time away in trivialities (and unsuccessful activities) when it would be better to give to personal than to public obligations.'⁸⁹ Not many people thought of Barbara Wootton as afraid of anything,⁹⁰ but there was an intense vulnerability about her, a neediness. Sociologist Jean Floud recalled an occasion when Barbara gave a seminar at Nuffield College, Oxford – a prestigious event on the subject of sociological jurisprudence. It was very well attended, although Jean was the only other woman there apart from Barbara. Some of the men, especially the American academics, gave Barbara a hard time; there was much learned disagreement conducted in the confrontational style of debate usual in Oxbridge circles. As Jean Floud remembers: 'The awful thing was at the break I took her to the, what do you call it, the powder room, and she burst into tears and said, "I can't bear this. They just grill one", and I tried to say, "but it's the sign of the greatest respect here. They take you terribly seriously." She couldn't bear it ... she said, "these beastly Oxbridge people".'⁹¹ Barbara's own style of debate was very different: she was good at stimulating discussion, and clear about what she herself thought, but she never put people down.⁹²

A sign of a painful inner insecurity was that she much disliked being alone. 'Often she would say to me, do you get lonely, or are you often lonely? ... she always wanted someone beside her.' Every week when Barbara went to preside over the Chelsea Juvenile Court, she insisted that Vera go with her. Vera had no official role there, but they gave her a chair and a small table. 'When the Court was about to begin, the three Justices would enter, led by Barbara, who would look immediately at where I would be and give a little bow (which I returned).'⁹³ In her later years, Barbara's increasing difficulty with walking gave her an excuse to hang off men's arms.⁹⁴ Sometimes people who have a reputation for appearing cold, abrupt, caustic, contemptuous of other people's weaknesses – all descriptions offered at various times of Barbara Wootton – are inhibited by shyness from expressing warmth and compassion. Barbara could be warm and compassionate in private, and she is remembered for this by many of her friends. She was 'quite amazingly open to any sort of conversation.

She was both interesting and interested.⁹⁵ 'She was also very tactile. She would put her arm round you and cuddle you and make you feel wanted.'⁹⁶ She had a developed 'sense of fun and of the ridiculous'; 'she loved a good flirt'.⁹⁷

But, in her public persona, the veneer of unemotional super-rationality was all-important. Almost everything Barbara Wootton said or wrote was considered very carefully and uttered very precisely; hesitation, uncertainty and self-criticism were not conditions with which she engaged. These traits and behaviours did not make her likeable. 'In public places she could be mistaken for one of those able, independent women who are as tough as old boots.'⁹⁸ She was 'an intellectual giant' who ate most men alive.⁹⁹ Her likeability decreased as she got older, a fact of which she was well aware. Ageing, she declared, brings a diminution of the will or the power to maintain 'the inhibitions, the poses and the protective masks by which many of us have struggled to present a respectable face to the world'.¹⁰⁰ She was often cantankerous and bad-tempered. In his speech at her funeral, Campbell Adamson recalled how irritating Barbara had been on a holiday five of them had taken on the canals of Burgundy a few years earlier. The anecdote involved Barbara's major pastime, Scrabble. She insisted that Campbell should play it with her every evening, and was determined 'with a seriousness which was almost frightening' to win. Thus, he succeeded on winning on very few occasions, but, when he did, it took more than the usual round of drinks to get rid of her grumpiness for the rest of the evening.¹⁰¹ She had a reputation for writing to newspapers with sternly worded reprimands about mistakes they had made in reporting her views; she took a hard line with interviewers who put words into her mouth or generalized about her, or used the word 'always' too much; and she got steadily crosser over the years about people's misspellings of her name. One of her latter furies was vented on the author and journalist Angela Neustatter, who inadvertently gave the 'Lady Wooton' in Oscar Wilde's *A Picture of Dorian Gray* an extra 't', thereby suggesting that the unflattering remark about the fictional character's wardrobe being 'designed in a rage and put on in a tempest' applied to the real Lady Wootton. Neustatter was forced to apologize.¹⁰²

She would be irate at the continuance of this tradition today. The digitalized version of Hansard has her as 'Ms Barbara Wooton', an error which goes back to the Lord Chamberlain's omission of the second 'T' in the Parliamentary Papers announcing her peerage in 1958.¹⁰³ She appears as Wootten, Wooten, and Wooton in various books and library catalogues – when she appears at all. It is hard not to see as a conspiracy Barbara Wootton's very obvious omission from the websites of so many endeavours with which she was connected: the British Humanist Association, the British Sociological Association, the list of Members of the Order of the Companions of Honour, the exclusive London Lunchtime Comment Club;

and her absence from political dictionaries and dictionaries about women, from histories of the British Left, and economic planning, and sociological thought and method and economics and its methodology; and from accounts of public policy development.¹⁰⁴ Barbara Wootton has largely faded from our assembled narratives about people who shaped the world of social problems and social policy.

This is sad in itself, but also because much of what she said and wrote is still, or newly, relevant today. She had an unnerving capacity to be 'ten steps ahead of anybody else'.¹⁰⁵ Many of the views with which Barbara Wootton shocked conventional opinion at the time have now been woven into the culture: her scepticism about social work; her disappointment in economics; her acceptance of changing sexual relationships and behaviour; her mistrust of the legal system's ability to deliver ethical, effective and equal justice; and her understanding of poverty as a problem of material resources, not of inadequate biology. Her criticisms, in 1984, of the Thatcherite policy of curbing investment and production to promote economic recovery referred to the very different strategy used successfully in the 1930s to boost demand without creating inflation;¹⁰⁶ similar issues confront the British economy in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Social economists would find her *Lament* well worth citing for its incisive critique of the neoclassical theory that is still expounded and practised today.¹⁰⁷ Peter Townsend noted how much her arguments about incomes and about inequality still apply – and how that image of the elephant earning its unfair whack in Whipsnade Zoo compared with hers in Regent's Park retains its capacity to capture the imagination.¹⁰⁸ *The Social Foundations of Wage Policy* is regularly quoted in discussions about the ethics and economics of the wage structure and income distribution, and nobody has seriously disproved Barbara Wootton's contention that the wage structure is simply a socially engineered restrictive practice for better-off members of the community.¹⁰⁹ In the domain of penal policy, the transformation of Community Service Orders into a punitive scheme would incur one of her famous appeals to the (lack of) evidence. Barbara Wootton's famous remark – if men behaved like women, the criminal justice system would be deprived of most of its work – is still true; and explanations for the gender discrepancy in crime have become more elaborate, but not very much more precise, since her trespassing on the criminological literature in the 1950s.¹¹⁰ Cars and the deaths they cause, another of her signal themes, now constitute 'a major public health crisis', accounting for more than a million deaths and around 50 million injuries every year – some three per cent of the global disease burden – but the war on the roads is almost as neglected now as it was in her lifetime.¹¹¹

Barbara Wootton's other most-quoted work, *Social Science and Social Pathology*, retains its resonance for many contemporary issues.¹¹² In social work, she

anticipated many of the themes at the heart of modern debates on social work practice, and she was often the first to propose questions that have still to be resolved, especially about the social worker-client relationship.¹¹³ Her book provided a rebuttal of eugenic theories of the 'underclass' some thirty years before they were advanced by Charles Murray and others.¹¹⁴ The essentially pragmatic view she put forward, that deviance is what people define as deviance, ante-dated the sociological literature of the late 1960s in which 'numerous writers in varying degrees of tortuous prolixity' said basically the same thing.¹¹⁵

The modesty and pessimism of old age made Barbara answer 'No' to the question, whether she considered herself a successful person. She realized she had acquired a certain public reputation, but what mattered more to her was that the world was about as nasty or even nastier than it had been when she started. 'I set out to make a little dent in it. Well, I have made tiny little dents here and there.'¹¹⁶ The size of the dents belies Barbara Wootton's own belief in accurate social observation. She had a profound influence on the intellectual and political world, and her reluctance to take ownership of this fact reflects as much the world's treatment of her efforts as the constraints imposed on these by character and circumstance. Future historians are likely to re-evaluate her role as 'the intellectual midwife of a new kind of society'.¹¹⁷

McGregor summed up the relationship between her politics and her intellect: she was a revolutionary in ideas, but a democrat in politics.¹¹⁸ The last paragraph of *In a World I Never Made* is one of Barbara Wootton's most quoted texts. It is about politics not being what it is often said to be, the art of the possible. It was not that to her. 'The limits of the possible constantly shift, and those who ignore them are apt to win in the end. Again and again I have had the satisfaction of seeing the laughable idealism of one generation evolve into the accepted commonplace of the next. But it is from the champions of the impossible rather than the slaves of the possible that evolution draws its creative force.'¹¹⁹

Barbara Wootton's life saw many shifts in the boundaries of political and other kinds of possibility. It was habit and insatiable curiosity – about the future of the world, about Britain and its politics – that kept her going. In her optimistic moments, she was amazed at the social progress that had been accomplished in her lifetime, and comforted when she found younger energetic socialists who shared her ideas.¹²⁰ Her reputation for being a critical woman was well-deserved. She was a critical woman because criticism and reform go hand in hand. While not all critics are reformers, criticism is the engine of reform. Far from being an abstract, solipsistic activity, it is what causes us to look around at this world we did not make for places, sometimes entire landscapes, where our individual efforts can make a difference.