Brewer, John D. "Introduction." *The Public Value of the Social Sciences: An Interpretative Essay*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. 1–18. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781472545121.0005>>.

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Introduction

Why write this book?

This book is about the public value of the social sciences in the twenty-first century. I anticipate a groan from some readers already who will not be immediately convinced of the point of discussing public value. The adjective ‘public’, after all, is overused. It is stuck before so many nouns that it is almost tiresome. Michael Burawoy’s Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association in 2004 (printed as Burawoy 2005) did not invent public sociology but he certainly gave us the term, and in the process made the adjective part of the zeitgeist. Most social science disciplines now come in a ‘public’ version. Web blogs abound devoted to the idea of the public – and, of course, creating publics in the very process. We are urged to differentiate ‘publics’, and to recognize that not all will be progressive (Calhoun 2007), to reinvent the idea of the public university (Holmwood 2011a), to become public spirited, to engage with, and be responsive to, the public and so on. The Open University’s Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance in the United Kingdom (UK) has a research project called ‘creating publics’, with a lecture series and a web blog, designed to interrogate what public engagement means and how it might be enhanced (see <http://www8.open.ac.uk/ccig/programmes/publics>). There are countless other examples that I could mention: there are nearly six trillion references to ‘public’ on Google.

Its popularity resonates with the return of another closely related adjective, ‘civil’. The ‘public sphere’ and ‘civil society’ are often run together as terms, and there are good reasons for this. ‘Civil society’ (see Edwards 2004) and ‘the civil sphere’ (see Alexander 2006) are arenas where we encounter publics, do the public engagement, garner and display our public spiritedness and mediate between governments and civil society. Edwards (2004: vi) asked at the turn

of the new millennium if civil society was the 'big idea' whose time had come. Not only does this seriously overlook the antiquity of the term, but it is also, I suggest, the adjective 'public' that is the mantra of late modern society. This is because it is part of its own subject matter, with the term 'public' successfully penetrating people's contemporary consciousness and discourse, and thus also that of social science.

Regardless of any cynicism provoked by the adjective, it is necessary to understand why 'public' has become popular as a term for our time. It is code for a series of normative questions that have emerged in late modernity about the nature of power. These questions are raised locally, nationally and globally by governments, citizens, civil society groups and social scientists, as power competes and fragments across its various sources as a result of what Foucault and others call the domestication or dispersal of power. Use of the adjective 'public' not only implies fundamental questions about accountability, but also poses additional queries about to whom should we as social scientists primarily feel accountable. It also moderates questions about accountability with others about responsibility, shifting focus away from our answerability towards our responsibility, by asking to whom should social scientists primarily feel obligated. It not only defines sets of issues in which we as social scientists should be interested, but asks whose perspectives on these issues we should consider the most important. If not anymore a question of which side social science is on, as Howard Becker (1967) put it in the heady days of the 1960s, since in late modernity there are no stark zero-sum answers, the adjective 'public' nonetheless conjures up deeply normative questions about the purpose and point of social science. My use of the term 'public value' is, therefore, meaningful because I intend to address these normative purposes and restate for the twenty-first century the public value of social science, showing how, in Orlie's (1997) evocative phrase, we can in *our practice as social scientists* live ethically and act politically.

'Value', however, is another term dismissed by cynics. I was once asked about the value of discussing value. I thought it a daft question, but it made me realize that the obvious answer could not be taken for granted. While I will be distinguishing types of value – for just as there are different publics, so there are different notions of value – it is first important to highlight, as it were, the value of public value.

The social sciences are under attack. They are assailed from without and within. Social scientists have always been introspective, but to this is now added genuine insecurity. The British government minister with responsibility for science and the universities, David Willetts confirmed, during a speech at the British Academy on 1 March 2011, that the humanities and social sciences are at the heart of contemporary enquiry. He has said something similar many times. During a speech in November 2011, for example, at the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) Festival of Social Science, which launched its video *Celebrating Social Science*, he was very emphatic, using terms resonant of the ESRC 2011–15 Delivery Plan.

Quite simply, the social sciences are essential to understanding human behaviour, the wellbeing of citizens and promoting sustainable growth. The UK has an internationally acclaimed social science research community, championed by ESRC. Social science research generates vital knowledge that informs policy, helping us navigate our way through the world as individuals and as a society.

The problem is that few social scientists believe him for his government continues to pare their budgets. Self-protection within the social sciences now reinforces long-established professional separation as public expenditure constraints define the contemporary experience. The social sciences seem to exist not so much in disciplinary silos as in bunkers; feelings of threat envelop us.

This moment, therefore, is precisely the right time to restate the purpose and value of social science. The twenty-first century is a time when the social sciences are needed even more than they were in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to make sense of rapid and profound social change and to proffer analysis, if not also solutions. Society will need to make sense of itself in the whirlwind of crises the twentieth century has stored up for humankind in the twenty-first. However, practising social science ethically and politically, as the 'wicked problems' we face in the twenty-first century suggest we must, requires a different kind of social science.¹ If the future needs social scientists, I argue that it must be a new kind of public social science, more post-disciplinary

¹ The term 'wicked problem' is explained further in later chapters and is not intended to infer a moral judgement about their character but the complexity and danger associated with them. The term is not mine; I overheard it from a member of the audience at a meeting to discuss impact. If I knew who said it I would acknowledge them.

than interdisciplinary, with a new sense of its public value and new attitudes towards some old orthodoxies, like value neutrality and moral relativism. The challenges we face in the future are not only from government policies towards the social sciences and the public university as a place of learning, but also our own practices as social scientists.

The critical stance I take towards my own subject area does not seem to be shared by the humanities scholars who are championing their field, and look at the humanities uncritically as the sole resting place of either ancient scholarship (Collini 2012) or moral virtue (Nussbaum 2010). My view is that social science needs to be engaged with critically. But I differ from them also in my emphasis on the necessity of post-disciplinary collaboration between social science, the humanities and natural and medical sciences. There is nothing quite as grubby in the face of a common threat as arguing for ‘ourselves alone.’² Bunkers are bad places from which to lead forward charges; post-disciplinarity equips universities for the twenty-first century rather than the fifteenth.³

Why an interpretative essay?

My argument is developed in the manner of an interpretative essay, a format I encountered a great deal as a young student when authors wrote with more hesitancy but which seems to have gone out of fashion as certainty and assertiveness get used to stamp a strong authorial voice on the argument; a time when authors pursued a tentative style rather than a dogmatic one, crafting a prolegomenon towards an argument rather than claiming a polished statement.⁴ This describes my ambition here.

² This is a recurring phrase in the text and I use it generically to refer to disciplinary closure, occasionally, as here, in the context of the disciplinarity of the separate subject areas that constitute the ‘three cultures’ in British intellectual life (Kagan 2009), but mostly to tendencies within the separate social science disciplines to privilege themselves above the rest. I am not using it as a pun on the name Sinn Féin, which is sometimes mistranslated from the Irish as ‘ourselves alone’. Sinn Féin more properly translates as ‘ourselves’ or ‘we ourselves’.

³ Of course, universities go further back than this but my own institution, Aberdeen University was founded in 1495 so just qualifies the fifteenth century as a relevant comparison for my stylistic rather than historical purposes here.

⁴ What I have in mind is Fox’s ‘Prolegomenon to the Study of British Kinship’ (1965) and Blau’s prolegomenon towards a theory of bureaucracy (1956). I have used the term before in an early attempt to develop a sociological approach to peace processes (Brewer 2003).

By an interpretative essay, I also mean a genre that involves new interpretations of evidence rather than new facts, in which personal opinion and perspective are permitted, but which deliberately seeks to confront orthodoxy and to critique taken-for-granted interpretations. It is very much a personal argument, but it is intended to throw out a challenge to contemporary ways of thinking about an issue. It, thus, speaks from a personal standpoint to a wider audience in the hope it raises ideas they had not to this point anticipated or expected. I see my audience as comprising practitioners in the social sciences, politicians, policy makers in higher education and members of the public. This is a powerful alliteration that requires me to write in a popular style. It is written with the nervousness of knowing the arguments are likely to be unpopular, but also with a confidence that derives from believing the challenge to be necessary. This genre of writing, after all, is concerned more to provoke debate than derive agreement and is oriented to change rather than consensus.

The public value of the social sciences is currently misconceived both by the majority of practitioners in the separate social sciences and the government managers of social science education and research in the United Kingdom.⁵ I seek to challenge social scientists as much as education managers; those eager to throw up the barricades to protect the social sciences against government attacks, as much as the policy makers and planners who are potentially driving them into the ground; a challenge to government policies on the universities generally and to the very nature of social science itself. I hope also to rally the public, whom I want to convince about the value of social sciences enough that they see them as relevant to the twenty-first century and therefore worth defending.

A succinct summary of my argument is worthwhile. I apologize in advance for the repetition since this précis outlines ideas, terms and examples elaborated throughout the later text, but I think it is important that a short digest is given for those readers who first appreciate an overview and abridgement.

⁵ By government managers, I mean the politicians who decide education policy, in the universities and beyond, and the managers in the various bodies that operationalize and implement it, such as the Economic and Social Research Council, the Higher Education Funding Councils and the institutions of higher and further education themselves, whose autonomy has been dramatically eroded for reasons that form a central tenet of my argument about the need to restate the public value of the social sciences for the twenty-first century.

What is the public value of the social sciences?

Public value is integral to the very nature of the social sciences, since they emerged as separate disciplines out of moral philosophy in the eighteenth century precisely in order to better diagnose and improve the social condition. Engagement with social and human progress, improvement and betterment marks social science as a public good. Two threats exist to social science, however. The first is the global university crisis and its local form in Britain, epitomized by the audit culture and marketization in higher education (this crisis is captured in three edited collections, Bailey and Freedman 2011; Holmwood 2011b; Molesworth et al. 2010). Yet this threat is simultaneously an opportunity to empower the social sciences in a new form of ‘public social science’. Public social science has both a research and teaching agenda, and involves a commitment to promote the public good through civic engagement.

The second threat is the impact agenda, which is linked to the first but has developed dynamics of its own in Britain. Paradoxically, the new public social science permits engagement with the impact agenda since the process of impact is easy to demonstrate for the social sciences. However, impact is a deeply flawed approach to assess the public value of social science research. There are diverse views on its meaning, it is very difficult to measure, even within the policy evaluation tradition for which the idea of impact slips easily off the pen, and the hostility generated by the impact agenda, associated as it negatively is with the audit culture, has turned the debate gangrenous and ruled out the possibility of reasoned argument. This volume argues that the debate needs to move on from the public impact of social science to its public value. Impact is about effects, value about worth; effects are instrumental and shifting, worth is inbuilt and unchanging. Public value is a vocabulary around which it is easier to develop a common conversation in order to conduct reasoned debate. The idea of public value, however, needs to be deconstructed in order to outline its various types and the different ways in which the public value of the social sciences can be articulated.

However, at this point it is all too predictable to anticipate three complaints: that the argument is UK-centric; that I am gullible, even naïve, about the impact

agenda; and that I am following a government agenda. Before the summary argument proceeds further, therefore, it is essential to clear some ground.

The processes affecting UK higher education policy are international. The contemporary conjuncture for higher education is marked by worldwide assaults on the idea of the public university, arising from neoliberal attacks on 'Big Government', global economic privations and public expenditure cuts, the marketization of higher education, the growth of the audit culture, the emphasis on accountability in public funding and increased regulation of higher education. Many of these processes are contradictory: the withdrawal of government funding for the social sciences and humanities by ending the block grant and replacing it by fees, which amounts to the wholesale privatization of public education, occurs simultaneously with increased government regulation of universities. However, while this conjuncture is international and the opportunities and threats it offers social science global, the British university system has been subject to marketization further and faster than anywhere else. My argument will place emphasis on the United Kingdom in order to critique its impact agenda and British social sciences' ambivalent response to it. It is British higher education policy after all that has forced the social sciences into restating their value and purpose (and raised the interest of publishers in their defence). This also gives my argument a tighter focus, since broad international coverage of social science research globally risks an over-ambitious book.

We are at a moment of near total degradation of the public university in the United Kingdom and social scientists are rightly critical of the public attack on social sciences, the ending of public provision for social science university education and the policy emphasis on their impact and value. By writing on the public value of social science, I might, therefore, be portrayed as reproducing the logic of this degradation and contributing to their ruin. However, I seek to respond to the disservice being done to British social science when social scientists react to the crisis facing them by refusing to engage with the impact agenda. In my view, we have no choice. Rather than 'doing the government's job for them', or 'prostituting social science to the powerful', allegations that have attached themselves to me for nudging the BSA into a constructive engagement with the impact debate, I will argue that critical engagement facilitates the

renewal of the social sciences. Ours is an occasion of empowerment for the social sciences as much as defeat, a moment for stating the case for ‘public social science’.⁶

It is for this reason also that I refute any suggestion that I am responding to the British government’s crude neoliberal economism by writing about value in a way that tries to please everybody. I suspect I will please no one. More to the point, while the government’s neoliberal agenda has, indeed, occasioned my reflections on public value, my primary purpose is to initiate debate among social scientists about their craft as we enter the twenty-first century and have to deal with ‘wicked problems’ that have never been encountered before in such complexity and severity. Marketization may have provoked interest in redefining our public value, but it is the essential worth of social science, which is encapsulated by its normative public value, that is the real driver of change, for this notion of our value requires us to be relevant to diagnosing, analysing, understanding and ameliorating the conditions of culture, the market and the state in the twenty-first century.

Inaugurating the ‘new public social science’ is the kernel of this interpretative essay. A brief explanation of the idea is, thus, necessary. First, it implies a critique of the limits of social science as traditionally conceived. Secondly, it involves a declaration of principle that posits a new form of social science appropriate for the dramatically changed landscape of higher education in the aftermath of the global university crisis – a social science for the twenty-first century.

What might be called ‘old’ or ‘traditional’ social science involved governments suspicious of, and often critical of, social science research, rarely using it to inform policy despite the mantra of ‘evidence-led policy’, and often disagreeing with its findings or ignoring critical ones. On the part of social science, there was a position of mostly principled distance from and critique of government under the ethos of academic freedom, intellectual autonomy and research independence. The social sciences practised disciplinary closure and mostly competed with one another from separate silos. Public universities were *sui generis* as largely unregulated ivory towers, with the principles of

⁶ Christensen and Eyring (2011) make a similar point with respect to universities as institutions generally in the United States, where they claim that they are ripe for destruction but also for innovation from within, facing threats and danger as well as evincing reasons for hope.

academic freedom and autonomy used to support professional-driven, single-disciplinary social science. On the part of government, this gave us ‘negative impact’, social science research that governments disliked and ignored because it showed policy to be wrong and ill-founded. On the part of social science, disciplinary closure and academic autonomy were often disguises for disconnected and disengaged research, removed from community concerns, and people’s ‘private troubles’ and public issues, as Charles Wright Mills once put it, and written in a style that the public could not comprehend. Traditional social science often wrote only for the like-minded and was impenetrable to the public and policy makers alike. Policy-oriented social science was done aplenty but it was marginalized and ridiculed within mainstream social science, and, deeply ironical, mostly ignored by policy makers and government. ‘Disguised impact’ is, thus, real, comprising that social science research that has public benefits but of which policy makers, governments and the media are wholly ignorant. Disguised impact fills the black hole that often exists between a research input and its eventual outcome.

The current conjuncture threatens to reinforce traditional social science. Seemingly opposite pressures actually pull in the same direction to solidify traditional notions of social science. The marketization of social scientific knowledge, via ideas of ‘impact’, ‘use’, ‘knowledge transfer’ and ‘benefit’, combines with the privatization of public university education through the withdrawal of public funding for humanities and social science, and enhanced state regulation of universities through the audit culture, to reinforce mutual suspicion and contempt between government and social science, making government approaches to social science ideological. This is the horn of a dilemma on which the development of social science is caught. Social science research risks being rendered by the government and proponents of the audit culture as impactful only when carried out on behalf of narrow government policy objectives, like the Big Society, while social science researchers who try to engage with impact are negatively stereotyped by social science critics of the impact agenda for conducting narrow, ‘professional’ policy research and of ‘prostituting social science to the powerful’.

However, the present conjuncture can be turned to the advantage of social science and current exigencies used as a form of empowerment. My argument is intended to make the case for the new public social science that

can emerge from the current university crisis. What is the new public social science? Devising strategies for improving governments' receptivity to social science is part of the new social science as much as improving social science's attitude towards political and public engagement and the pursuit of publicly relevant research – mostly done in participatory forms in conjunction with communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society and the people directly involved in or affected by it. Public social science has porous borders and requires enhanced collaboration between the social science disciplines; it transcends national borders to engage with global society; and it moves from traditional disciplinary agendas, many rooted in narrow twentieth-century notions of professionalism within the separate social science disciplines, to engage with public issues affecting the future of humankind. This affects the teaching agenda of the new social sciences as much as their research concerns.

Social science has necessarily always been transgressive and its critical edge is what makes it distinctive. The new public social science retains its identity as a form of critique by continuing its transgressiveness. There are at least three borders it transgresses – disciplinary, national and political – and it transcends at least one divide – that between teaching and research. It is post- or interdisciplinary and global. Disciplines like sociology, politics, economics, social psychology, anthropology, international relations, social policy, human geography, demography, law and criminology offer perspectives better in combination than separately. Post-disciplinarity is finding expression in hived-off new subject areas, like gender and sexuality studies, cultural studies, auto/biography and narrative studies, peace studies, transitional justice studies, development studies, security studies and memory studies among others. However, I suggest its home is better found in the idea of public social science itself.

But it is the political boundaries that make public social science most challenging. Because it is the responsibility of us all to deal with the complex issues facing humankind in the twenty-first century, the new public social science has to engage with those considered by us up to now as 'strangers' – natural scientists, governments, international agencies like the European Union, United Nations and international NGOs. If we take climate change as an instance, there has to be useful engagement between sociologists, environmentalists, transport policy makers, oceanographers and the like.

Governments are the strangest of all our ‘dragons,’⁷ but the new social science needs to engage with them as much as civil society and organic community groups.

There is an imperative here that also affects social science teaching. Alongside the core areas of traditional social science disciplines, the new public social science also needs to teach courses that deal with some of the public issues that affect the future of humankind. Teaching courses on sustainability, oceans, well-being and happiness, East-West, North-South, humans and other animals, climate, organized violence and peace, for example, make social science inherently post-disciplinary and help transcend the social/natural science divide. International NGOs and civil society groups can be brought into the classroom so that, in our teaching, students see what it means to think globally and act locally. Public social science is a practice for the classroom and the real world, and one that tries to narrow the gulf between the two.

In all these ways, public social science returns to its eighteenth-century roots as a diagnosis of the social condition, with a moral vision committed to social and human improvement and betterment. I cannot emphasize this point more strongly so as to avoid any suggestion I am claiming originality. There are a few other formulations than my own that are struggling with making social science relevant to the twenty-first century, but I wish to stress that mine returns us to the eighteenth century, and to the eighteenth-century Scottish moralists in particular; to an era when the separate social sciences emerged out of moral philosophy precisely in order to engage with the various dimensions of culture, the market and the state; to a time when my view of public value was taken for granted by the way in which social science was designed to diagnose and improve the human condition.⁸ This sense of public value was lost – with some notable individual exceptions – as the social sciences subsequently professionalized and became more esoteric and technical in their knowledge production, forcing them to be inward looking rather than publicly engaged, and to separate from each other and become specialized rather than combine

⁷ Intended as a phrase to invoke the practice of medieval map makers who always referred to areas of the globe unknown to them as ‘here be dragons.’ I return to this metaphor in Chapter 5.

⁸ For readers who wish to trace the historical development of moral philosophy into the separate social sciences in eighteenth-century Scotland and afterwards, I suggest they consult with the work of Gladys Bryson (1932a, 1945) or Brewer (1989). To deal with it here would be overly disruptive to my narrative about public value.

and be generic. My argument is that we should rekindle the sense of public value that specialization and professionalization destroyed. In reclaiming this form of social worth, I am arguing that the new public social science in and of itself is a public good.

This is not an argument in support of the narrow impact agenda that is currently dominating social science and government education managers. I advance four claims with respect to impact: (a) the new form of public social science is well equipped and readily capable of demonstrating the impact of social science research; (b) impact, however, is a deeply flawed way of approaching the public value of social science since the term is difficult to define and measure, as even the policy evaluation tradition demonstrates; (c) it is necessary to shift the terms of the debate away from the public impact of social science to its public value; and (d) value can be deconstructed into several types which show the diverse ways in which the social sciences have value.

Public social science requires broadening our understanding of the idea of value. It is proposed that shifting the terms of the debate from the public impact of social science to the public value of social science brings four advantages: it better constitutes a vocabulary that permits common conversations to develop; it involves rhetoric that is consensual not divisive, thus helping to move social scientists on from the unfortunate tone into which the impact debate has sunk; it transcends the localized form of the debate about impact, which is perceived to be peculiarly British, to link with an international discourse about public value; and it offers the best prospect of restating for the twenty-first century the principles on which social science can justify itself against the neoliberal push towards using economic impact as their sole measure of effectiveness.

It is possible to develop a definition of public value that speaks to the inherent principle and purpose of social science as a public good. This involves deconstruction of the term 'value'. There are at least three different meanings to the term: value as usefulness and utility; value as quality and worth; value as judgement and evaluation. The first we might rename *use value*, the second *price value*, the third *normative value*.⁹ They prompt further deconstruction. Use value can be direct or indirect, price value intrinsic or added (giving us

⁹ I explain in Chapter 4, where I develop these ideas, why I do not use the popular term of exchange value instead of price value.

the phrase ‘value added’) and normative value private or public. Direct use value describes the level of usefulness of an item unmediated by other things, indirect is the utility accorded when used in combination with other things. Use value does not necessarily diminish when it is indirect. A single chair has direct use value but its indirect use value can be enhanced when set in relation to other chairs and a table. Intrinsic price value is the worth of the item inherent unto itself, such as the cost of the raw materials and labour power to make a single chair or set of chairs and table. Added price value describes the worth of things when put to use indirectly, such as the price value attributed to a meal in a restaurant that utilizes chairs and tables. Private normative value refers to the quality attributed to an item by an individual in terms of the status to them derived from possessing it, public normative value to the quality attributed to it more widely, such as its social status and cultural significance. Personal sentiment can attach immense normative value to an item which is of little meaning and status to other individuals or collectively, and vice versa.

Elements of use, price and normative value are run together in current debates, where ‘impact’ is often narrowly reduced to use-value and where arguments about the defining purposes of subjects is often related exclusively to their public normative value. By developing an appropriate sense of the purpose of the social sciences, it is possible to establish a definition of their value that broadens it from economic usefulness.

This conceptual vocabulary means that we have to assess the value of the social sciences across different dimensions of value, and that the assessment of their worth varies accordingly. For example, this conceptual deconstruction allows us to argue that the value of the social sciences is not to be found solely in direct use value (say, economic usefulness), as if this can be assessed in isolation from indirect use value (say, their economic usefulness when assessed in relation to other things, such as the economic usefulness of social science graduates across their working lives, or the indirect use value of social science research in combination with other scientific research, in the form of medical-social science research, biological and social sciences research, climate change science and the sociology of climate change and so on).

We can further argue that the price value of the social sciences (their cost to the public exchequer set against what they realize by their direct use value) is a very poor measure of value. If the focus is on price value, we should properly

calculate both the indirect use value of the social sciences and their 'value added' price value – the price value of the social sciences when measured by what they add to the use, price and normative value of other things. The price value of the social sciences, for example, should be set in the context of what they add to the price value derived from, say, student exchanges, intellectual tourism and social and cultural events, or the impact of social science research on transport policy, housing, the welfare state, 'race' relations, better hospital care for the dying, crime rates and so on, and what added price value accrues from having people educated in the social sciences (in terms of, say, socially informed citizenry, workforces, communities and the like). The social sciences as a rule do not have direct links with industry and the market, and knowledge transfer in the social sciences does not tend to reflect in spin-off companies and the like. But social science research on intercultural and interethnic relations, ageing and population demographics, sport, heritage and so on can be stressed as part of their added price value.

This multidimensional view of value also means that the normative value of the social sciences is an important dimension equal to their use and price value. This is not just meant in the narrow sense of what they add to the quality of life and status of individuals educated in the social sciences or to the lives of people affected by social science research, important as these are as a measure of private normative value; it is that the value of the social sciences can be assessed by their contribution to the social values they help garner and disseminate in culture, the market and the state deriving from people's awareness of themselves as forming a society, whether local, national or global.¹⁰ The public normative value of the social sciences, therefore, gives the social sciences two qualities against which their status should be evaluated: they not only generate information about society, they are a medium for society's reproduction. They are the way in which society can find out about itself and in so doing generate the idea of society itself. If it is thought that this sort of value is incalculable, it is no more so than the proper enumeration of the use and price value of the social sciences. However, the language of 'public value', as distinct from 'public impact', is challenging precisely because it is not

¹⁰ I explain in the next chapter why I refer to culture, the market and the state as synonymous with 'society' in its inclusive sense and why I emphasize local, national and global spaces.

reducible to monetary calculation in the same way price and use value are, which is why establishing the public value of social science is so important for rescuing the debate from the marketeers who reduce everything to use and price value.

The argument in this interpretative essay is, thus, simple and clear cut: making people aware of themselves as comprising a society helps in the development and dissemination of key social values that render society possible – cultural values like trust, empathy, altruism, tolerance, compromise, social solidarity and sense of belonging – and assists in society's ongoing betterment and improvement. The social sciences help us understand the conditions which both promote and undermine these values and identify the sorts of public policies, behaviours and relationships that are needed in culture, the market and the state to ameliorate their absence and restore and repair them. It is for these reasons that social science is a public good and has inherent worth.

The public normative value of the social sciences lies, therefore, in their direct engagement with the DNA of society – individuals, groups, social relations, civil society, culture, law, legal governance, the market and the state. They are modes for understanding the mechanisms through which we live socially and as such are essential for making social life possible. The medical analogy is worth emphasizing, especially since an organic analogy was so important to the public understanding of the social sciences at their inception. DNA is not only important to helping us understand biological life, knowing how DNA works helps improve the *quality* of biological life. Social sciences dissect the DNA of society and the information this discloses helps them improve the quality of social life. As such, the social sciences exist within a moral and ethical framework, and simultaneously help to consolidate it as the framework within which everyone exists as social beings.

The public value of social science research is enhanced by the way the social sciences compress time and space and thus make society aware both of the global dimensions to local issues and the catalogue of dangerous issues stacking up for humankind in the future. Use and price values are located in the immediate here-and-now of current time and place; public normative value is attentive to the humanitarian future. The vocabulary involved in debating the public value of the social sciences can make reference to social science engagement with the 'big issues' of future industrial, scientific and economic

change – sustainability, labour migration, climate change, peace processes, the link between demographic shifts and welfare demands to name a few. If the traditional standards by which we judged the purpose of social sciences research have been replaced by economic utility, then the new public value narrative should not ignore this but stress that scientific, economic, political, industrial, climatic and social changes in the future will be mediated by the capacity of the social sciences to enable culture, the market and the state to make sense of them.

Users of this value narrative need to recognize that the notion of public value into which it fits is multidimensional. ‘Economic benefits’ have to form part of the value narrative and use and price value are part of the debate about the public value of the social sciences. This means articulating that the social and cultural relevance of social science research on quality of life issues, well-being, climate change or intercultural understandings, for example, has economic utility in addition to its other benefits. My argument, however, is not restricted to economic utility and broadens the debate. Current notions of impact value are seriously distorted by their narrowness.

The notion of value explicit in the volume demonstrates, however, the extent of the challenge facing the social sciences, not only in the sense of undergoing change in order to make themselves relevant to the difficult issues facing the future of humankind, but also to their own modes of practice. We need more than interdisciplinarity if we are to deal with the impending crises affecting the future of humankind; we need to be post-disciplinary: not just linking across the disciplinary boundaries within social science but to the humanities and the natural sciences, looking to connect with civil society and government, being theoretically astute, evidenced based and policy engaged. We need to be able to let the problem define the disciplinary perspectives needed, not the other way round. The new public social science will challenge our orthodox commitments to value freedom and moral relativism, two principles of the old social science. The new public social science is value-committed, undertaking ethical-based research and teaching, done for the purpose of promoting the public good broadly conceived, in which values matter and notions like ‘good’, ‘sustainability’, ‘social justice’, ‘equality of opportunity’, ‘fairness’, ‘wrong-doing’, ‘evil’, ‘human betterment’ and the like are objective rather than relative categories. The new public social science sees the end of value neutrality and

moral relativism. But normative social science has to remain still as science, and living with tensions between civic engagement and detachment and normative and scientific practice mark some of the challenges of public social science in the twenty-first century. This signals my argument as highly controversial and provocative; qualities eminently suitable to the genre of an interpretative essay.

What is the organization of this essay?

I have given this digest of the argument at this early point because it will be a long time before we discuss public value again (in Chapter 4). I wish to present the essay in a way that I think will be more attractive to popular readers. I do not wish to start with a declaration and substantiation of the public value of the social sciences and then work slowly backwards to show how this is premised on my definition of the generic nature of social science. Establishing the public value of social science, after all, is not the culmination of the essay; my endpoint is identifying the new form of public social science that emerges from the inherent worth of social science. I wish to proceed in a more logical fashion by moving forwards not backwards, building each additional layer of the argument on carefully laid foundations. In Chapter 1, I define social science, and in Chapter 2, I outline its scale and assess its quality and strength in the United Kingdom. In Chapter 3, I establish the nature of the threat it faces and to which my account, in Chapter 4, of its public value is a defence. In Chapter 5, I outline the new public social science that follows on from this sense of public value. In the Conclusion, I discuss the broader implications of this view for making social science relevant to the twenty-first century. My discourse on public value, in other words, is merely the medium through which a wider discussion about the nature and content of social science in the future is possible.