

The Public Value of the Social Sciences: An Interpretive Essay

By John D. Brewer

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What is the purpose of social science?

How can social science make itself relevant to the intractable problems facing humanity in the twenty-first century?

The social sciences are under threat from two main sources. One is external, reflected in a global university crisis that imposes the marketization of higher education on the ancient practice of scholarship. The other, internal threat is social science's withdrawal from publicly-engaged teaching and research into the protective bunker of disciplinarity.

In articulating a vision for the public role of social science in the twenty-first century, John Brewer argues that these threats also constitute an opportunity for a new public social science to emerge, confident in its public value and fully engaged with the future of humanity in its teaching, research and civic responsibilities, while also remaining committed to science.

The argument is presented in the form of an interpretive essay: thought-provoking, forward-looking, and challenging to intellectual orthodoxy. It should be read and debated by all researchers and teachers in the social science disciplines who are concerned by the future of higher education and the relevance of their subjects to the future of humankind.

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Editorial Review

Review

This is a genuinely useful tool for researchers setting out on their first impact journey (Jacqueline Aldridge, University of Kent, UK *European Political Science* 2014-10-31)

Anyone interested in defending the role of the social sciences should read this book. It is the most sophisticated analysis of their role in contemporary Britain. (Sir Steve Smith, Vice-Chancellor, University of Exeter, UK)

Challenging, important, timely, and critical, *The Public Value of the Social Sciences* is a must read for anyone concerned with the future of humanity (Michael Burawoy, University of California, Berkeley, USA)

An excellent book that I found both important and engaging. (John Scott, Plymouth University, UK)

John Brewer asks the right questions: What is the public value of social science and when does it have the most public value. His approach is neither defensive nor celebratory, nor is this yet another complaint about underfunding. Brewer is appropriately critical and also clear that social science can achieve its full potential only if it changes. His perspective is thoughtful, historically informed, and attentive to the specificities of Britain. Not all will agree, but all should think about the questions. (Craig Calhoun, Director, London School of Economics, UK)

About the Author

John D. Brewer is Professor of Post Conflict Studies in the Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation and Social Justice at Queen's University, Belfast. He was previously Sixth-Century Professor of Sociology at Aberdeen University. He has held visiting appointments at Yale University, St John's College, Oxford, Corpus Christi College Cambridge and the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. He was, until 2012, President of the British Sociological Association and a member of the Governing Council of the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Science.

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Brandon Seymour:

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