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## Missing All That Matters

Martin Krygier\*

\*University of New South Wales

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# Missing All That Matters

Martin Krygier

## Abstract

Philip Selznick spent a very long life engaged with large questions concerning society, politics, institutions, law and morals. He contributed to numerous disciplines and sub-disciplinary domains, was a major figure in each of the fields he entered, and one of few to have been a participant, let alone eminent, in them all. Among these fields are general sociology, the sociology of organizations and institutions, management theory, political science, industrial sociology, the sociology and philosophy of law, political theory, and social philosophy grounded in what he came to call humanist science.

I have recently completed a book on his thought and ways of thought. Naturally enough, it discusses his contributions to these various subjects and domains. But it is haunted, *I* am haunted, by a remark of his former student and sometime collaborator, Philippe Nonet, that '[t]hose who look to Philip's work for contributions to this or that "field" – "sociology of organization," "industrial sociology," "sociology of law," - will doubtless find something, indeed a great deal, but they will miss all that matters.' The point might be phrased less dramatically; perhaps not *all*, just lots. Still, the observation resonates. My book seeks to vindicate my particular understanding of it, which may or may not be Nonet's. These remarks are an attempt to distil some elements of that understanding.

## Missing all that matters

Martin Krygier\*

Philip Selznick died in 2010, one of the last of a distinguished cohort of writers and intellectuals who began their intellectual formation before World War II, and who continued to be influential for the rest of the century. They included Irving Kristol, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, Seymour Martin Lipset, Irving Howe,<sup>1</sup> and others. Those with whom he disagreed (who over time included many of the above) were also a fine crew.

Selznick spent a very long life engaged with large questions concerning society, politics, institutions, law and morals. He contributed to numerous disciplines and sub-disciplinary domains, was a major figure in each of the fields he entered, and one of few to have been a participant, let alone eminent, in them all. Among these fields are general sociology, the sociology of organizations and institutions, management theory, political science, industrial sociology, the sociology and philosophy of law, political theory, and social philosophy grounded in what he came to call humanist science.

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\* Gordon Samuels Professor of Law and Social Theory, Law School, University of New South Wales, Adjunct Professor, Regulatory Institutions Network (RegNet), Australian National University.

<sup>1</sup> This essay is adapted from parts of that book, *Philip Selznick. Ideals in the World*, forthcoming, Stanford University Press, 2012, all rights reserved.

“field” – “sociology of organization,” “industrial sociology,” “sociology of law,” - will doubtless find something, indeed a great deal, but they will miss all that matters.’<sup>2</sup> The point might be phrased less dramatically; perhaps not *all*, just lots. Still, the observation resonates. My book seeks to vindicate my particular understanding of it, which may or may not be Nonet’s. These remarks are an attempt to distil some elements of that understanding.

I

Selznick’s intellectual development began some years before World War II, with an intense period of activity and debate in that strangely fertile womb of intellectual productivity, the New York Trotskyist movement, its parties and party-lets, factions and fractions. Like many of his closest friends from that time, Selznick was intellectually formed, and formed as an *intellectual*, before and beside the academic disciplines he went on to profess. Their thought was spurred by several dramatic, indeed world-historical and world-shattering, events, specifically the Great Depression, the epochal competitions between liberal democracies and Nazism that culminated in World War II, and with Communism, both before and after that war. These prompted urgent and large questions about public morality, and about the worth of different sorts and arrangements of public institutions. Selznick didn’t forget such questions, even as he wrote about many other things.

Out of that engagement came several writings read by a small number of clever would-be Trotskyist revolutionaries, later to become well-known in American academic and public life, though rarely for that. Out of it, too, came Selznick’s abiding concerns with the

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Technique and Law,’ in Robert Kagan, Martin Krygier, and Kenneth Winston, eds., *Legality and Community. The Legacy of Philip Selznick*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2002, 50.

significance of institutions and the fate of ideals. These concerns animated all his subsequent work.

In his early political essays, and in *TVA and the Grass Roots*,<sup>3</sup> his first and classic contribution to organizational and institutional theory, he explored ways in which immanent organizational tendencies tend to undermine even the finest ideals, unless deliberately countered and mastered. He next explored what mastery might require. *The Organizational Weapon*<sup>4</sup> examined communist organizational strategy, designed to transform 'recruits into deployable agents,' and often very effective in doing so. *Leadership in Administration*<sup>5</sup> sought to generalize and systematize lessons learnt, among other sources, from these first two works. The examination involved empirical research and sociological explanation, but it also displayed a growing normative ambitiousness. In that work and thereafter, Selznick reflected upon large questions of normative social and political theory, among them the nature of politics and statesmanship, to an extent uncommon in works of this kind. He also wrote, with Leonard Broom, a major introduction to sociology<sup>6</sup> which, in 7 editions over 30 years, was for a long time the leading sociology text in the United States. These early works had a great influence, and probably remain the ones for which he is most widely known.

For thereafter he moved to less populated domains and developed less fashionable preoccupations and commitments. In his second branch of work, beginning in the early/mid 1950s, Selznick became one of the first, and one of very few, mainstream American sociologists to engage with the study of law, and still fewer with jurisprudence. He published

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<sup>3</sup> University of California Press, 1949; reissued in paperback with a significant new preface by Harper & Row in 1966, and republished in paper and electronically, with a fine foreword by Jonathan Simon, by Quid Pro Quo, LLC, in 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Rand Corporation, 1952. With a new preface Free Press, Glencoe Ill., 1960.

<sup>5</sup> Harper & Row, New York, 1957; with new preface, University of California Press, 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Broom and Philip Selznick, *Sociology. A Text with Adapted Readings*, Harper & Row, New York, 1955; 7<sup>th</sup> edition 1981

several important essays (particularly 'Sociology and Natural Law,'<sup>7</sup> and books: *Law, Society and Industrial Justice*;<sup>8</sup> *Law and Society in Transition*.<sup>9</sup> These works were notable for their explicit and pervasive interweaving of descriptive, analytic, normative, and policy-oriented concerns. Selznick sought to identify the particular character and basic ideals of legal ordering; their range of variation; and the conditions that might allow them to be secured and, beyond that, to flourish.

His third group of writings, from the 1980s, coincided with his formal but nominal retirement. These works were more reflective than investigative, more wide-ranging in scale and scope than much of his earlier work, and explicitly concerned to communicate a large sociologico-philosophical vision. Their centerpiece is his magisterial *The Moral Commonwealth*,<sup>10</sup> a work of expansive range, ambition, erudition and richness. Its overarching concern is with challenges to and sources of 'moral well-being' – of persons, institutions, and communities - in modern times; on the way there are few themes or thinkers left untouched. This was followed by two short books: *The Communitarian Persuasion*,<sup>11</sup> which extended the (liberal-) communitarian directions charted in *The Moral Commonwealth*, and his last work, *A Humanist Science*,<sup>12</sup> published two years before his death at 91. This last work, written in the most challenging circumstances, sought to distill the methodological ecumenism and substantive humanism that had long underlain his thought, and make them available within but also beyond the academy.

## II

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<sup>7</sup> (1961) 6 *Natural Law Forum* 84-108.

<sup>8</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1969.

<sup>9</sup> Harper Torch Books, New York, 1978; new edition with introduction by Robert A. Kagan, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> University of California Press, 1992.

<sup>11</sup> Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, 2002.

<sup>12</sup> Stanford University Press, 2008.

Pursued through this large and various range of subjects, disciplines, and subdisciplines, Selznick's core themes are quick to state, though they have been approached from many directions, and there has been considerable evolution in his ways of answering them. There are two: one is substantive, and another, slower to evolve but also of long standing, has to do with the appropriate way to study the questions with which he has been concerned.

I start with substance. Selznick begins his *magnum opus*, *The Moral Commonwealth*, by recalling that in his 'late teens and early 20s [he] went through an intense, fruitful and in some ways extraordinary experience,' as an active and prominent young Trotskyist. At the same time he was 'an eager student' of sociology and philosophy at City College of New York, and then Columbia University. He comments that 'the two parts of my life did not fit very well.'<sup>13</sup> That might be how it felt at the time, but it's not how it looks in retrospect. For Selznick already had a particular range of concerns recognizable throughout his varied life's works. As he recalled, 'my youthful encounter with revolutionary socialism established a theme that influenced my work over many years ... the fate of ideals in the course of social practice. Most of my specialized writings in the sociology of organizations and sociology of law have been preoccupied with the conditions and processes that frustrate ideals or, instead, give them life and hope.'<sup>14</sup> That was his theme in 1992, but it was also his theme in the 1940s. He has had a lot to say about it in the times in between and since. The fate of values and ideals in the world is his central theme.

Over time, his views about how one should go about exploring these questions also evolved. His earliest academic works largely conform to the disciplinary patterns of

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*Ibid.*, x.

sociology of that era. However, he became restless over time, seeking a more encompassing, 'ecumenical' in his term, way of doing social science. The terms he gave the mode of study to which he aspired have varied: normative theory,<sup>15</sup> normative science, and the term on which he finally settled, humanist science. The key to humanist science (which many humanists and social scientists might consider a contradiction in terms, but Selznick regards as inescapable complements) stems from his substantive conviction that essential for social understanding is an appreciation of the role and play of values and ideals in the world: what they are, what they do, what they are worth, what threatens them, what protects and sustains them, what enables them to flourish. These need to be acknowledged as proper objects of study, rather than mere epiphenomena of whatever is thought really to matter. It also requires identification of the values at stake in particular social processes, practices, and institutions; clarification of their nature; understanding what threatens them; exploration of the conditions in which they might thrive.

Given this centrality of values, a social scientist should be informed by traditions of philosophical thought less chary of dealing with them than is typical of some of the more positivistic conceptions of behavioral (and legal) sciences. Moral philosophy is key here. On the other hand, since so much that is important about the play of values in the world is subject to variation and refracted through particular contexts, philosophical speculation needs anchoring in these matters of fact, contingency and variety. And so social sciences. And since Selznick's concern is not with values applied to just anything, but always ultimately as they affect human persons, the learning with which a normative theorist needs

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<sup>15</sup> See particularly Gertrude Jaeger and Philip Selznick, 'A Normative Theory of Culture,' (1964) 29 *American Sociological Review*, 653-69, and David Lieberman's insightful discussion in this symposium.

to be familiar - in aid of 'genuine understanding of human frailty, suffering, and potentiality'<sup>16</sup> – will be informed by and contribute to traditions of humanism broadly conceived. The distinctive aim of humanist science, blending insights from these various sources so often separated, is 'analytical and empirical study of ideals, understood as at once latent in and threatened by the vagaries of social life.'<sup>17</sup>

These expansive ambitions are exemplified in the work. Selznick brings to whatever he writes, in whatever field, a distinctive combination of explanatory theory, empirical research, philosophical awareness, and normative engagement. Even the most fine-grained empirical analysis is not done merely for its own sake but to answer large questions of explanation and evaluation, and his normative reflection has always been anchored in sociologically derived observation and theory about the ways of the world.

### III

Apart from his particular subjects and what he had to say about them, his informing discipline(s) and what he contributed to it or them, Selznick is interesting – I would say even more interesting - for distinctive aspects of his ways of thought, his moral-intellectual character and his sensibility. Among these aspects the following are pervasive.

Aside from his sociology text, each of Selznick's books before *The Moral Commonwealth* had a specific institution or class of institutions as its subject, and became famous and influential specifically for their interpretation of that subject. Thus, the TVA was the eponymous subject of his first book, Communist organizational strategy of his second, administrative leadership of his third, regulation of labor relations of his fourth,

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<sup>16</sup> *A Humanist Science*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

transformations in modern law of his fifth. Even *The Moral Commonwealth*, with its wide scope, erudition and ambition was a contribution to a specific, if large, theme: the challenges to and sources of moral competence of persons, institutions and communities. *The Communitarian Persuasion* was a continuation of that theme. *A Humanist Science* sought specifically to defend his version of sociological ecumenism. Of course, one learns a lot about these specific subjects from these works. And yet, as Nonet stressed and many have felt, something else was always going on. And so it was.

One source of this overflow was what he later came to describe as his 'generalizing impulse.' *TVA* was never just about the TVA, *The Organizational Weapon* not just about communists, *Leadership in Administration* not just about how to get ahead in business, *Law, Society and Industrial Justice* not – spectacularly not - just about industry and employment, and so on. This lent depth, richness and complexity to each of his works, as it does to the whole. In his case especially, it is a mistake to take the title of any particular work as a summation of its significance or implications. There is always more than one might expect inside: more themes, more arguments, and also more than themes and arguments.

Connecting the various elements of his work was his underlying and linking problematic, the fate and conditions for realization of values in the world. We are invited to treat these as central problems and to learn to be alert--scientifically alert--to 'recurrent sources of vitality and decay.' Where such matters arise in standard-issue social science, by contrast, they too often have done so coyly, *sotto voce*, even clandestinely. Selznick's work is refreshing for its absence of apology about these matters, as well as for the reflexive and sustained thoughtfulness that he brings to them.

Now if one is interested in the play of values in the world, this leads to a certain paradox of the modern academy. Philosophers, particularly moral philosophers, say a lot about values, and much of it is very clever. But what do philosophers know? They live in the world, it's true, talk about it often enough, and the modern analytical kind are skilled in carving up – occasionally filleting to perfection – what other philosophers and even ordinary folk say about it. But actually to *study* it? That, many of them proudly say and display, is not their business.

Sociologists by contrast are paid to study it, and one thing social science could bring to the study of values in the world is acknowledgment of fact, contingency and variation. Such acknowledgment is to Selznick a hallmark of social science, but again sociologists are not likely to bestow it too closely on phenomena such as values, that as he once put it, they commonly tend to 'handle gingerly and view with alarm.' Even if this coyness is overcome, mainstream sociology is not a good source of principled reflectiveness on the evaluation of values, which is where philosophy has something to say. Yet some social phenomena are in lousy shape, some in good, some in excellent. Which are what and how would we know? Many social scientists have thought this is just a matter of opinion – or worse, philosophy – and has nothing much to do with them.

Selznick disagreed. Like Roger Cotterrell calling for a renewed sociology of morality,<sup>18</sup> which he would have welcomed, Selznick wished to redirect or augment the attentions of sociology to the values at stake in social processes. More than that, he believed that this

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<sup>18</sup> See his editor's introduction to *Emile Durkheim on Justice, Morals and Politics*, Ashgate, Farnham, 2010, xiii: 'The *sociology of morality* is a term that, in relatively modern times, has seemed somewhat obsolescent. It has designated an absence – an intellectual space that, since the work of some nineteenth century pioneers, few have thought it appropriate to try to fill. ... But at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the vacant space marked out for a sociology of morals is being seen increasingly as a place of loss – a void that needs to be filled.'

engagement should draw upon an uncommon range, variety and richness of intellectual resources, from the social sciences, humanities, particularly philosophy and history and, where apt, from world religions.

The integrations Selznick favors reflect the spaciousness of his concerns, and the breadth of what he finds useful and interesting. They also connect with a central feature of his academic temper – a combination of distinguished disciplinary pedagogy and institution-building with skepticism about the point and worth of disciplinary apartheid, or purity, for its own sake.

In *A Humanist Science* he recalled that the sharp disciplinary distinctions that mean so much in the modern academy had no hold on its greatest ancestors, discussion of whom enriches that book, and more profoundly *The Moral Commonwealth*. Though he respected the disciplines, the training and skills they generated and the results they reached, and clear though it is that he is by formation and intellectual character a sociologist, he lamented what he called the ‘rampant multiculturalism in academic life.’<sup>19</sup>

The disciplines to which many of us have devoted our lives, into which we have socialized our students, have unfortunately become intellectual islands. These islands have their own jargon, their own culture, their own paradigms, their own ways of thinking. These self-reproducing disciplines have often stood in the way of serious engagement with major issues.

He favored following where the problem led, rather than where the discipline dictated. I return to this point below.

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<sup>19</sup> See “Tribute to Amitai Etzioni by Philip Selznick;” 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting on Socio-Economics, Madison Wisconsin, July 9, 1999, [http://www.sase.org/index.php?option=com\\_wrapper&Itemid=53](http://www.sase.org/index.php?option=com_wrapper&Itemid=53).

Apart from matters of themes and approach, I have claimed, Selznick's writings reflect and express a characteristic intellectual and moral sensibility – above all, scrupulous and nuanced; judicious and thoughtful. These may not always be virtues; one might be *too* balanced to recognize shakiness and edginess in the world, too concerned to reconcile what might at times be irreconcilable. And such judiciousness cannot guarantee excitement. However, there are worse ways to be. Selznick's sensibility has many manifestations. I will mention three.

First is what might be called his Hobbesian idealism. He was interested both in what would secure basic conditions for the existence and survival of values and ideals, and in what might count as, and be necessary for, their flourishing. His early writings exposed recurrent obstacles to the attainment of ideals, particularly institutional obstacles that could be counted on to recur, and what might be needed to overcome them. His later work explored conditions in which values, once secure, might flourish and be encouraged to flourish. His commitment to honor both realism and idealism, threat and promise, was thoroughgoing. It is also rare, since for both intellectual and temperamental reasons, it is more common to be Hobbesian *or* idealist, to feel the pull of one or the other range of concerns, to be moved by a sensibility of skepticism or hope, than it is to seek to register the force of them both. Hobbesians are often suspicious of idealists, and the reverse is also true. That attempt to blend realism and idealism, to recognize their frequent tensions but also seek to respect the demands of them both and at once, has become nevertheless one of the central characteristics of Selznick's thought.

This is an example of a second and broader aspect of his sensibility, the 'high tolerance for ambiguity' that, as he once reflected, his late-life 'liberal communitarianism' required but that also characterized his thinking more generally. He warned that it 'has not

been easy to come by,<sup>20</sup> and that is also true. Aligned with that tolerance was his almost allergic response to shrill rhetorical heightening of the dramatic, the tragic, the contradictory, in social life. Apart from anything else, it wasn't his style. Tolerance for ambiguity allows that social life will be full of tensions and ambiguities. These might not be resolved any time soon, or perhaps any time at all, but that doesn't necessarily make them inexorable, unsustainable contradictions. We often just need to work out how to live with them, not feel we must ditch one option simply because there's another.

Of course this tendency might make it hard to recognize real zero-sum encounters where they occur. At times, though he always allows for such things in principle, he seems to sideline them in practice. And given his determination to assist social 'reconstruction,' that might have become a systematic bias. Still, the opposite bias is very common, and Selznick's sensibility is a typically, if uncommonly, wise and measured corrective.

A person of Selznickian sensibility will be sensitive to empirical variation and crucial distinctions; alert to the significance of qualifying adjectives as much as reifying nouns; be aware that very little that matters in social life is 'nothing but ...', or apt to be successfully resolved by a choice between all and nothing; avoid the pseudo-drama of so many ideological confrontations; be suspicious of a quick fix; avoid intellectual habits that dim one's vision, even if they might quicken one's pulse.

Virtues, we learn to recognize, are typically mixed with corrupting vices; vices often have redeeming virtues. It is rare that we can soar over life's predicaments as the crow flies, but that doesn't mean we're stranded; we should endeavour to navigate as best we can. If some aspects of modernity give us reason for 'hopeful sadness,' as he once put it to me,

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<sup>20</sup> *The Moral Commonwealth*, 371.

both the adjective and the noun matter. There are sources of hope as well as of sadness; sometimes they're the same; sometimes one generates the other. Neither should be thought *a priori* to cancel the grounds of the other.

Sensibility too is evident in his treatment of other thinkers. He disagreed with many, often strongly but rarely polemically or even harshly. *The Moral Commonwealth* is a large and intricate mosaic of refined appreciations of thinker after thinker, from each of whom he sought to extract something valuable as he gently distinguished their views from his own. This exemplifies more than a style, unless in the sense that 'le style c'est l'homme même.'

Of course this rich stream of reflection did not all happen at once. It is a long story, which a couple of Selznick's own concepts might illuminate. One is 'development,' the other 'integrity.'

Selznick had long believed that persons, institutions, social orders, harbor dispositions to development, which is not merely change. It is more, since there is *direction*, at least potentially and often only evident retrospectively, to that change. Part of understanding is to seek the particular character of those dispositions, to try to uncover their direction and, recognizing that little is inevitable in social life, to reveal their implicit dynamics, the 'incipient', 'emerging', even if 'inchoate' seeds of what might come from what already is; whether it be post-bureaucratic forms in bureaucracy, responsive law in autonomous law, institutions in what begin as mere organizations. However plausible this might be of institutions, it applies well to his own thought, and that of other strong thinkers. They are often usefully read backwards, as it were, so that one finds fully-formed meanings of and developments from much that went before in germ, the tendency of which might not have been apparent when they first appeared, even to their author.



The amount of development in his work is one of the things that raises it as an achievement from simple coherence to integrity, a concept he had long used and theorized. For if his preoccupations, immediate aims, subjects, and, indeed, sensibility, have impressive continuities they are also various and subject to change. In his earliest writings, influenced greatly by Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy,' he stressed the obstacles to achievement of ideals, particularly the tendencies of power to be sucked to the top of any organization. When he began *TVA*, that is what he expected to find, notwithstanding the democratic protestations of the TVA's leaders. Instead, he discovered the opposite: the organization's leaders were so keen to 'co-opt' local sources of influence and power, that they had lost control of the store. In *The Organizational Weapon*, he asked how it was that the opposite was true of communist organizations, which seemed at the time so successful in converting recruits into 'deployable agents,' and holding onto them. *Leadership in Administration* sought to generalize the findings of these two books, but also to move beyond them: from recognizing obstacles to wondering how they might be countered. This positive accent animated all his later works, and led him long distances from his earlier engagements.

Selznick had begun as a master unmasker, ready to reveal the underside of the finest plans. He had, to be sure, always insisted that realism and idealism should be understood as complementary rather than zero-sum alternatives, but his distinctive contribution had been to the realist corner. Show him what appeared to be the case, tell him what should be, and he would typically respond by revealing what, notwithstanding appearances, in the face of the best intentions, really and often stubbornly was. Already in *Leadership in Administration*, and with increasing explicitness thereafter, he sought to move beyond his early and influential work: from exposing obstacles to exploring how they might be

countered and what further might be achieved once they were. This positive accent animated all his later works, and led him long distances from his earlier engagements. There was something deeply characterful in the move, and in the ways he sustained, elaborated and developed it in a range of different contexts.

The coherence of his thought is complex, then, not that of someone with just one thing to say. After all, the thoughts of someone who keeps repeating himself might be called coherent. They are - it is! - certainly consistent, but that would not necessarily be praiseworthy – unless it was a very *big* thing being repeated. Nor is simple consistency always a virtue. Trivial consistencies are commonplace, and consistent folly is also not rare. Selznick's coherence was not of those sorts.

Integrity might well spur a change of mind or heart. It might indeed be a *mark* of integrity to be open to change, even of some of one's deepest convictions. This, presumably, is what Keynes had in mind in his famous response to an accusation of inconsistency: 'When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?'

In this, Selznick was with Keynes. He kept returning to a number of related and large themes, to do with the fate of ideals in the world, especially in the modern world, and particularly to do with the workings of large institutions, among them bureaucracies and law. But he also kept thinking and rethinking his views, refining them, elaborating them, exploring them in different contexts. The scope of his interests, the focus of his passions, his particular judgments and his public mood and posture, changed considerably over the years. For what was constant in his work was not a particular set of conclusions, but the integrity with which he approached a significant range of problems.

Integrity, of course, is a significant term of art in Selznick's thought, applied to institutions, persons, and communities. It is also an aspect of his intellectual character. At one point in *The Moral Commonwealth*, he quotes a passage from Bernard Williams about personal integrity. Integrity on this understanding presumes that:

the person in question has, as seriously as possible, tried to think about the standards or the fundamental projects which are sustaining him or her. If he has done that and if, in the light of the thought he has displayed there, he comes out and does say, this is what I do most fundamentally believe in, and this is what I am going to do, then that person is displaying integrity, even though you do not agree with whatever it is that is sustaining him.<sup>21</sup>

That gets it just about right.

#### IV

These I take to be some of the pervasive features of Selznick's ways of thought which are also quite distinctive of it. This leads to a question, which might also be construed as a lament. If there are any distinctive virtues in Selznick's style of thinking, how likely are they to be fostered, indeed found, in the contemporary academy?<sup>22</sup>

I mentioned earlier that Selznick, like many leading thinkers of his generation was intellectually formed without as well as within academic disciplines. This partly accounts for the nature and range of the questions he thought important to ask, what he thought useful in answering them, and the answers he came to give. Even within the academy, he wrote as

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<sup>21</sup> 'The Uses of Philosophy: An Interview with Bernard Williams,' (November 1983) *The Center Magazine*, 49, quoted in *The Moral Commonwealth*, 213.

<sup>22</sup> In a way and not coincidentally, Kim Lane Scheppelle asks a similar question in 'The Passing of a Generation,' (Spring 2010) 20, 2 *Law & Courts*, 5-11 . My thought about this issue was partly sparked by her piece and our correspondence about it.

an intellectual, informed by and responsive to what he was studying, but not only that. He felt free to draw upon the full palette of resources available to that type, not merely those licensed to disciplined professionals. Indeed in a revealing interview with sociology graduate students at Berkeley, he explained that one reason he entered sociology was the idea that it 'was a house that had and would have many mansions, that it would be possible to be a rather free roving intellectual and follow one's own bent without being too constrained by the necessities of the more tightly organized disciplines.'<sup>23</sup>

The house he entered has been remodeled and vastly expanded. An enormous number of rooms have been added, and occupancy has soared. However, expectations of proper behavior have changed. Unlike Selznick's generation, the professional formation for those who have entered it in recent years is more commonly the primary, often the only, intellectual formation available. This has consequences. Most contemporary social scientists command a more limited span; indeed, more commonly it is not theirs to command. The discipline dictates the range, and these disciplinary dictates are not becoming more ecumenical, to use Selznick's word, over time. For such a mind, 'humanist science' can only be a contradiction, not a goal.

Of course such expansiveness as he pursued exacts a fee. It is increasingly hard to accomplish successfully, which might be why it is not often tried. As scholarship burgeons and becomes ever more technically driven and accomplished, the more one tries to keep up with, the harder it is not to be left behind. Amateurishness beckons. Even if it is avoided the effort is not always welcomed, both because the range of professionally acceptable questions gets narrower, ways of investigating them more subject to professional dictate,

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<sup>23</sup>

<http://sociology.berkeley.edu/publicsociology/facultyvideos/oldseries/selznick/play.php>

and acceptable ways of answering them too are ever more disciplined, with all the Foucaultian resonances of that term. Apart from intrinsic intellectual pressures in this direction, institutional and competitive demands in the contemporary 'education sector' also encourage a narrowing of focus, and forms of self-protection like those called, in another profession under pressure, 'defensive medicine.' Like so many clichés, that about knowing ever more about ever less reflects real developments.

We admire for good reason the power of modern specializations, the skill involved, and the intellectual rewards to be gained. But, as some will acknowledge, all this cleverness frequently comes at a price in terms of, among other things, intellectual and moral spaciousness, and largeness and significance of concern. Not every stride made by specialization and expertise can sensibly be regarded as progress. Their rigors are not always as attractive as they can be impressive. Questions posed diminish in significance, while ways of answering them become ever more sophisticated; we are cleverer about how to explore, less interesting about what.

Apart from what people come to do, there is a eugenic aspect to this: what intellectual categories and talents come to be bred in and out of an increasingly specialized and technicized world is a question deserving scientific scrutiny itself. Perhaps this is what Max Weber had in mind when he foreshadowed for the 'last man' of our cultural development, the potential triumph of 'specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.'<sup>24</sup> Perhaps too it explains his alleged retort to complaints that he ventured beyond his field: 'I am not a donkey, and I don't have a field.'

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<sup>24</sup> *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London, Unwin, 1971, 182.

Perhaps these trends are unavoidable, perhaps they should be applauded, but they also have a price. Whatever the limits of Selznick's enterprise and the inadequacies of my account of it, I hope they might at least remind readers of some of the virtues of such determined and sober spaciousness, reach and integrity as he displayed; also of what might be lost when they are systematically, even proudly, reduced, and when methods replace problems as agenda-setters. Perhaps 'remind' is too optimistic a word here. Social scientists under a certain age may have rarely encountered such virtues, let alone imagined that a card-carrying initiate might hazard to exhibit them, still less believe that they are central to his and their common vocation. Selznick's work is rich evidence for just such a quaint belief.

