

Marginal to the Revolution: The Curious Relationship between Economics and the Behavioral Sciences Movement in Mid-Twentieth-Century America

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The nature of Economic Theory [is] what, basically, keeps Economics aloof from the Behavioral Sciences. Economic Theory, out of its origins in a certain body of psychological doctrines, the characteristics surrounding its evolution, its formulation of quantitative pretensions, and having got the jump so to speak upon the other social sciences, has built up a kind of self-sufficiency for Economics that has more or less provided the pattern of thought for all economic studies and has rather effectively isolated the entire field from other areas of social investigation.

—Milton S. Heath, “Comments on Economics and the Behavioral Sciences” (1952)

In recent years, economics has permitted an incursion from psychology, one that arguably challenges its core rationality assumption (Sent 2004). The emergence of behavioral economics as a legitimate subfield raises a question: If now, why not then? Why did the discipline of economics stand aloof from the “behavioral sciences” movement in the decade after World War II? The other social sciences all joined this prominent midcentury

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movement with more or less enthusiasm. Economics was the lone hold-out, and this despite sharing with the others a number of postwar goals, notably federal and private funding from powerful new patrons, policy influence, and scientific legitimacy. The social scientists who adopted the behavioral sciences moniker were self-consciously nomothetic, fond of mathematics and statistical analysis, and eager to stand close to the natural sciences. The same was true of leading postwar economists, yet they alone opted out, with only a few exceptions. The much-feted “behavioralists” of recent years—with their best sellers, Nobel Prizes, and *Times* profiles—beg the question: Why did postwar economists not join their fellow social scientists a half-century ago?

To address this question, we examine the early development of the Ford Foundation’s Behavioral Sciences Program (BSP) and the marginal place of economics within it. A number of historical accounts have shown that the BSP, led during its short life (1951–57) by a single director, Bernard Berelson, became one of the largest and most influential patrons of social science in midcentury America.¹ Of special interest here, the BSP was, arguably, the single most important institutional base of what came to be known as the behavioral sciences movement. This movement, however difficult it may be to define precisely, represented an ambitious attempt to bring the social sciences greater funding, “scientific” legitimacy, and intellectual dynamism grounded in interdisciplinary collaboration. Curiously, the historical literatures on the behavioral sciences movement and the discipline of economics have said very little about the relationship between the two.² In fact, it is fair to say that the question has not even been posed, at least not in a direct way. The only exceptions are treatments of those few scholars like Herbert Simon and Kenneth Boulding who tried to bring the two fields’ ideas and methods into fruitful engagement with one another (Crowther-Heyck 2005; Fontaine 2010). But these scholars were the anomalies.

The case study of the BSP presented here helps us understand why there was so little serious engagement between economics and the other social sciences. We describe early efforts to incorporate economics into the BSP in a substantial manner, premised on the belief that economic analysis

1. See, for example, Crowther-Heyck 2005, 149–65, and 2006, 437–40; Lowen 1997, 194–223; Senn 1966; Geiger 1987, 326–39; Seybold 1987; Capshew 1999, 183–85; Robin 2001, 35–37; and Platt 1996, 147–48.

2. Two rich bibliographic overviews of the historiography of postwar social science are Isaac 2007, especially 734–39, and Crowther-Heyck 2006, 422–26.

could be greatly strengthened by the behavioral science orientation, with its emphasis on rigorous empirical study of actual human behavior. Yet these efforts failed, largely because economists, especially those commonly labeled neoclassical, were uninterested, skeptical, and even dismissive of what they took to be an immature and faddish initiative. Our account proceeds in three parts. Part 1 considers the origins of the modern Ford Foundation and the work of its Study Committee in the late 1940s, which established the foundation's commitment to what it came to call the "behavioral sciences," but without settling on a clear role for economics. The second part focuses on the 1949 Study Committee report (Gaither et al. 1949), whose recommendations for separate economics and behavioral sciences programs helped institutionalize the split, although not without significant ambiguity. The third part examines the work of an advisory group, appointed by Berelson soon after the BSP's formation, charged with considering the unresolved question of economics' proper place within the new BSP. The advisory group's work ended up reaffirming the split already apparent in the 1949 report and made concrete in the foundation's new program structure.

From a wider perspective, the story of the divide between economics and the behavioral sciences at the Ford Foundation is the story of the self-segregation of the privileged, with economics eager to leave the social or "behavioral" sciences behind. During the Second World War, economists had produced a stunning parade of wartime triumphs that helped establish close ties to the natural sciences and claims to public policy relevance (Bernstein 2001, 78–91). Although what sometimes looked like a single approach included a number of distinct and even inconsistent threads, economists emerged from the war with a new sense of confidence that owed little to interdisciplinary collaboration. That self-assurance, moreover, had grown up around a model of science—deductivist and reliant on utility-maximizing assumptions—inconsistent with the other social sciences. By and large, and despite some significant exceptions, these other social sciences were less secure, hobbled by internal dissent and skepticism from Congress and many natural scientists. So the nascent behavioral sciences project was a potential drag on economists' ambitions. It might seem baffling, this decision by economics to opt out of the professional networks, intellectual milieu, and funding sources of a sympathetic-seeming movement. But by the early postwar years economists already had their distinct networks, intellectual coordinates, and funders. In our account, the adoption of the "behavioral sciences" terminology in tandem

with the movement's institutional anchoring at the Ford Foundation thus reflected and widened the gap between economists and their counterparts in the other social sciences.

This essay is a contribution to the history of the problematic relations between economists and their social science peers. The existing historiography on American social science, deep as it is, is notably divided along the very same lines as the “real” split, with economics on one side, the remaining social sciences on the other. Our histories are silo-like too, in other words, and in that sense stand as an ironic index of the divide. Together with the other essays in the present volume, we argue that this division deserves much more scrutiny, in part so that we might appreciate its historically contingent character and its long-term consequences.

Origins: Behavioral Sciences and Economics in the Modern Ford Foundation

Our story begins with the transformation in the late 1940s of a modest philanthropic organization into the fabulously wealthy, modern Ford Foundation. Within a short period of time and because of the efforts of a study team led by H. Rowan Gaither, the enormous Ford Foundation identified the social sciences as a main area of interest. At a time when the future of the social sciences seemed so promising and yet so uncertain, Gaither's team struggled to figure out exactly how to conceive of and promote the social sciences, eventually deciding to use the term *behavioral sciences* to designate one of five proposed program areas; one of the other program areas would focus on economics.

Created in 1936 by Henry Ford to avoid new inheritance taxes, the Ford Foundation was at first modest in scale and closely tied to the company's local interests in the Detroit area. But in the late 1940s the foundation, which had been willed 90 percent of the Ford Motor Company's stock, became the richest in the world (Sutton 1987, 42–43). After Henry Ford's death in 1947 and a revival in the fortunes of Ford Motor, the foundation, with the backing and involvement of Henry Ford II, sought to transform itself into a national institution in line with its enormous resources—\$417 million according to a 1951 estimate, dwarfing the Rockefeller Foundation (\$122 million) and the Carnegie Corporation (\$170 million) (52). In the fall of 1948 Ford Foundation trustee Karl Compton suggested that the foundation ask H. Rowan Gaither to organize and direct the foundation's Study Committee, created to advise the board on the mission

and structure of what had become, almost overnight, the nation's largest foundation (46).³

The operating agreement signed by Gaither was unusual for the explicit independence it granted him to conduct the study (Gaither to B. J. Craig, 5 November 1948, 20003/I/2/19).⁴ To carry out his charge, Gaither set up a committee of notable academics, serviced by a small staff. The six committee members each represented a "division": political science, business, social science, education, natural science, and health. Foundation archives do not detail the committee selection process, but it is likely that Gaither's choices resulted from a mix of his own connections, advice from Compton, and perhaps the suggestions of foundation trustee and business leader Donald David.⁵ Most significant to our story is the choice of Donald Marquis to lead the social science division, and Thomas Carroll to lead the business division. Marquis, a psychologist, was suggested by Compton (interview with Donald Marquis, 27 October 1972, FF Oral History Project, 1), and Carroll was Gaither's cousin (Leonard 1989, 9; Cochrane 1979, 50). The other members were Peter Odegard (political science), Charles Lauritsen (natural science), Francis Spaulding (education), and T. Duckett Jones (health).⁶ The fact that every committee member was a PhD-holding academic reflected the striking postwar faith in academic expertise as the key to problem solving.

Also relevant to our story are Gaither's multiple ties to the RAND Corporation, a new military think tank at the time, in part because RAND had recently organized its social scientists into separate economics and social science divisions (Jardini 1996, 83–86, 99–100; Hounshell 1997, 250–52;

3. Compton was the chair of the military's Research and Development Board, president of MIT, board member of the military-sponsored think tank RAND, and a confidant of the Ford family. (On Compton's roles at Ford and RAND, see Leonard 1989, 3; Cochrane 1979, 21–22; Sutton 1987, 44–46; Lowen 1997, 197–98.) Gaither, who had served as Compton's assistant at the MIT Rad Lab, owed his roles at both RAND and Ford to his Compton connection (Cochrane 1979, 22; Sutton 1987, 46; Hounshell 1997, 242).

4. All archival references, unless noted otherwise, are to the Ford Foundation Archives. References are formatted according to the following format: 20003/I/3/24, which refers, for example, to 20003 (Ford's internal call number system), series I, box 3, folder 24.

5. Gaither seems to have met with Compton and David two days before his formal meeting with Henry Ford II on November 5 (Compton to Gaither, 5 October 1948, 20003/I/2/19), and a summary of a meeting between Gaither and his new staff reports that "David and Compton said that these [proposed Study Committee members] are nationally known in their respective fields" ("Memo: Conference—November 18," 19 November 1948, 20003/I/2/19).

6. A seventh member, Yale's William DeVane, was later named to represent the humanities, in response to public complaints about the committee's exclusion of the humanities (Gaither, "Activity Report for the Period Ending January 31, 1949," 20003/I/2/19, 12).

Kaplan 1991, 69–73). A memorandum summarizing a meeting between Gaither and his new staff records that RAND members Hans Speier, Frank Collbohm, and Robert Loofbourow were already owed payment for consulting work, a month before the Study Committee first convened (“Memo: Conference—November 18,” 19 November 1948, 20003/I/2/19). Throughout his Ford tenure, Gaither solicited the advice of Speier, RAND’s social science division head.⁷ And just months before, Gaither led the process to recharter what had been Project RAND as a nonprofit corporation. He continued to serve as the military think tank’s chair through 1951 (Kaplan 1991, 60–62; Jardini 1996, 72; Smith 1966, 56–60). Although we found no direct evidence linking the Study Committee’s recommendations to the RAND model of separate economics and social science divisions, there is little doubt that the RAND example helped shape the thinking of Gaither and his committee.⁸

From the beginning, the place of economics in the work of the Study Committee was ambiguous. Two organizational flow charts, one from late November and the other from mid-December, explicitly include economics under the Division of Social Science (“Organization of the Study,” 30 November 1948, 20003/I/3/24; “Organization for a Study of Policies,” 17 December 1948, 20003/I/3/24). In the minutes of committee meetings and related documents, economics is often included when social science disciplines are listed. But Carroll’s business division also had a *prima facie* claim to economics, a fact that would prove crucial during often-serpentine committee deliberations.

Although the Study Committee convened for four three-day meetings (in December 1948 and then in January, March, and May 1949), Gaither and his staff found the meetings to be frustrating and ineffectual.⁹ Throughout the summer and fall, as the report was being drafted by his staff,

7. It was Speier, for example, who recommended Berelson to head up Program Area Five (interview with Berelson, 7 July 1972, FF Oral History Project, 1).

8. Berelson later observed: “At RAND they developed a Social Science Division, [Gaither] became relatively close, I think, to Hans Speier, came to have a very great respect for such people—and followed very closely what went on at RAND along this line as a kind of counter to the hardware aspect of RAND” (interview with Berelson, 3–4).

9. In a late April memo to his staff, he asks if the Study Committee will be able to fulfill its charge. “My own opinion is that we *should* be able to. Whether we *will* do so as a result of our present study method is the question” (Gaither, memo to McPeak and Brown, 28 April 1949, 20003/I/3/25). A letter to Carroll, also from late April, refers to the March meeting: “In Syracuse, I confused [*sic*] to you, most confidentially, of course, my great apprehension concerning the program areas almost extemporized by the committee” (Gaither to Carroll, 20 April 1949, 20003/I/2/23).

Gaither deliberately limited communication with committee members, and the committee never reconvened.¹⁰ Gaither and his staff came to regard two committee members—Odegard and Spaulding—as dead weight (Dyke Brown, “Comment on Ford Study to Date,” 10 June 1949, 20003/1/2/20, 2–3). Even Carroll and Marquis came in for occasional criticism.¹¹ It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the committee meetings were unimportant to the study’s outcome.

Early on the committee members made a major decision: they unanimously agreed that social science should be the centerpiece of the foundation’s program. This remarkable decision was a product, in part, of the Cold War context wherein scholars together with leaders at the other large foundations were actively seeking to bring social science expertise to bear on global issues. But this decision to concentrate on the social sciences also reflected their comparatively weak position in the postwar funding landscape. The main advocates for social science in the Study Committee process were Marquis, Carroll, and Gaither’s chief assistant William McPeak. Long after the committee’s report was completed, these three remained deeply involved in Ford social science programming.

A rising star in postwar American psychology, Marquis was well connected to military social and psychological programs and committed to interdisciplinary work marked by scientific rigor and practical efficacy. Before the war, Marquis had been a member of Clark Hull’s neobehaviorist circle at Yale’s Institute of Human Relations, where he coauthored (with Ernest Hilgard) *Conditioning and Learning* (1940) (Morawski 1986, 220). He was named chair of Yale’s psychology department shortly before decamping to Washington to serve as head of the wartime Office of Psychological Personnel. Like so many other scholars, Marquis made numerous contacts during his service and emerged from the war with an offer to chair Michigan’s moribund psychology department. In rebuilding Michigan’s department to prominence, Marquis, along with Rensis Likert, was instrumental in luring Kurt Lewin’s group dynamics team to Michigan in 1948 and later secured an appointment and funding for James Grier Miller and his Mental Health Research Institute in 1955 (see Capshew 1999, 195–98).

In 1947 Marquis received a \$10,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation to produce “a fresh appraisal of the place and functions of the social

10. See Gaither to McPeak, 20 June 1949, 20003/1/2/20.

11. Gaither, for example, complains of Carroll’s “reporting upon programs outside his training and experience” (Gaither to McPeak, 3). On criticism of Marquis, see Gaither to Price, 11 August 1949, 20003/1/2/23.

sciences” (Carnegie Corporation 1947, 32). The same year, he was named chair of the military’s new Human Resources Committee, the social science section of the Research and Development Board (RDB) (Simpson 1994, 57–59; Lanier 1949, 131). Soon thereafter he was elected president of the American Psychological Association (APA). Throughout his Ford service Marquis was an active participant in Cold War psychological warfare research, at the RDB, as a member of Project Troy, and as a consultant to the government’s Psychological Strategy Board (Needell 1993, 401–8; Lucas 1996).

Marquis’s 1948 APA presidential address, “Research Planning at the Frontiers of Science,” served as the blueprint for his Study Committee work under Gaither. The address offered a manifesto for postwar quantitative social science, marked by anticipatory confidence and praise for interdisciplinary group research alongside “verified theory” (435). Marquis also registered the expected windfall from new military funders, counseled social scientists to seize the initiative with an “increased number of large and well planned research programs,” and, borrowing Vannevar Bush’s (1945, 438) famous frontier metaphor, concluded that social scientists can serve their nation’s urgent needs while contributing to the “growing integrated body of scientific knowledge.” In Ford memos and statements Marquis lifted passages from this address word for word (e.g., “Staff-Committee Memorandum No. 4,” 27 December 1948, 20003/I/1/1, 3), and the Study Committee’s final report would bear its verbal stamp (Gaither et al. 1949, 95–96).

Thomas Carroll’s influence in the Study Committee owed less to his intellectual contributions than to his unrelenting persistence and family ties to Gaither. Carroll had received his PhD from the Harvard Business School, where he stayed on as an assistant professor and administrator under the school’s dean (and Ford Foundation trustee) Donald David (Cochrane 1979, 22; Khurana 2007, 240). During the war Carroll directed an officer procurement program for the U.S. Navy (“Background on Personnel,” 20 December 1949, 20003/I/2/19). After his return to Harvard he participated in the school’s ambitious new research initiative led by its Committee on Human Relations, before leaving for the deanship of Syracuse University’s business school (Khurana 2007, 240). Intent on seeing Ford funds leveraged to recast business education in a research mold,¹² Carroll was far and away the most active member of the Study Committee (Sutton

12. See note 13.

1987, 48)—to a fault, in the view of Gaither and his staff. Carroll, the only member to actively contribute to the committee's final report, drafted its crucial section on economics (Cochrane 1979, 50).

William McPeak, Gaither's chief assistant and a former journalist, had served as field staff director in Samuel Stouffer's wartime Army Research Branch and was, as a result, well-connected to a large network of scholars and patrons working on matters of morale and propaganda ("Background on Personnel"; Clausen 1984, 212). From the Study Committee's first days, he promoted the social sciences. Indeed, it was McPeak who wrote the social sciences section of the committee's final report ("BSP [1951–1957]: Report and Appraisal," December 1961, Report No. 003156, 5).

As early as its second January meeting, Gaither's Study Committee agreed to focus on the social sciences. Notes from the meeting state that there is a "strong and virtually universal feeling" that "the place to work is in the social sciences" ("Notes for Discussions with Trustees," 14 January 1949, 20003/I/2/19, 2). Here and throughout the spring, committee members cited the likely exclusion of social science from the National Science Foundation as one justification for the embrace. Despite extensive efforts led by the Social Science Research Council that involved prominent scholars from the major disciplines, and after much controversy about their scientific status and practical value, it was widely expected that the new science agency would focus on funding the natural sciences with no specific mandate to support social science research (Solovey 2004; Klausner 1986). At Marquis's suggestion, Gaither agreed to commission a report to survey the funding landscape ("Staff-Committee Memorandum No. 8," 15 January 1949, 20003/I/1/1, 3). The study, completed by the sociologist John Riley, produced the expected finding that the social sciences were badly underfunded (see McPeak, "Presentation of Program Five," 13 February 1950, 20046/V/7/74, 14). Sensitive to the social sciences' shaky national reputation and the popular association of social science with socialism, the Study Committee members also began to deploy terminological stand-ins, including "human relations" and "social relations." During the spring, committee members and staff engaged in a kind of rhetorical dance, floating prospective labels only to replace these with new candidates. After the meetings concluded, McPeak and Gaither settled on the unwieldy "individual behavior and humans relations" formulation. For reasons that are unclear, an early motion to combine the political science, social science, and business divisions failed—a sign, perhaps, of the divide to come. But Marquis, Carroll, and Odegard (the political science chair)

did agree to coordinate their work and consider filing a jointly written report (“Outline for H. R. Gaither,” 14 January 1949, 20003/I/3/24, 1–2).

Economics, on the rare occasion when it surfaced at all, was treated ambiguously, as a social science but one primed for cross-disciplinary incursion. Consider this comment by Marquis, recorded in the minutes: “Marquis gave an example of [the new interdisciplinarity] when he said that the problem of the business cycle was once subject to study only by [*sic*] the economists. Now according to preliminary work, there is indication that understanding of the problems depends heavily upon the psychologists” (“Staff-Committee Memorandum No. 4,” 8). Notes prepared for a mid-January meeting including Gaither, Compton, David, and Henry Ford II also indicate that Marquis, Odegard, and Carroll agreed to consider the option of recruiting an economist for the “coordination of evidence” (“Outline for H. R. Gaither”). But there is no record of such a consultation taking place.

At the January meeting, committee members were instructed to step up their interviews, and—in a bid to force members to record their priorities in writing—to prepare mock drafts of the final report, including recommended “program areas” (Gaither, “Activity Report for the Period Ending January 31, 1949,” 20003/I/2/19, 8). Little progress was made by the March meeting, and the gathering failed to bring order to committee members’ competing and unwieldy proposals, despite the broad social science consensus (see “Activity Report No. 2,” 30 March 1949, 20003/I/2/20, 5). After the March meetings Carroll, Marquis, and Odegard finally followed through on their promised collaboration. In reality, however, only Carroll and Marquis coordinated their contribution. Odegard’s draft sections were never incorporated into the larger draft and seem to have been immediately dismissed (“Suggested Program Area: Social (Human) Relations,” April 1949, 20004/I/3/26, 10). Odegard’s empurpled-prose style and his avowed internationalism (including a proposal for a “world school of law”) were plainly out of sync with his colleagues’ Cold War temper (*Report of Political Science Division*, 1 November 1949, 24).

The Marquis-Carroll proposal, in keeping with the search for a terminological substitute for social science, refers throughout to the field of “social (human) relations.” This was a compromise document, one that merged Marquis’s three “basic areas” of interest, human motivation, human values, and communications, with Carroll’s own preoccupation, human organization and adaptation. Aside from a brief, integrative introduction drafted by Carroll, the proposal’s sections were written separately: three

short memos by Marquis and a protracted write-up from Carroll (“Suggested Program Area,” April 1949, 20004/1/3/26; Marquis, three memos, 26 April 1949, 20004/1/3/35). The four areas appear in list form in the document’s introduction and were incorporated verbatim into Gaither’s end-of-March “Activity Report” to the foundation’s trustees (“Activity Report No. 2”).

Marquis’s memos are dominated by that familiar mix of unqualified scientism and applied Cold War urgency. He refers, for example, to the “promise of a genuine science of communication—a systematic attempt to formulate in rigorous fashion the principles by which information is transmitted and opinions and attitudes formed” (“Communication,” 26 April 1949, 20004/1/3/35, 1). Later he addresses a more practical rationale: “It is the general aim of scientists in this area to develop the concepts and techniques most fruitful in bringing about relatively permanent changes in human behavior in the direction of social desirability in the broadest sense.” At other points Cold War exigencies take over: “Such slowness in the acquisition of new information in this area and slowness in application of what is known is tolerable in stable times. It could be disastrous in the present unstable ones. The deliberate modification of some aspects of the behavior of large segments of the population of the world may be the best answer to some of the threatening aspects of the world situation.” Ford support is crucial, Marquis concludes, because of military emphasis on short-term results, but also because “government agencies are peculiarly vulnerable to charges of promoting propaganda” (“Modification of Behavior through Education and Training,” 26 April 1949, 20004/1/3/35, 1).

While Gaither was frustrated by the Marquis-Carroll proposal’s vast breadth and tried to force committee members to prioritize among what remained a long list of proposed “program areas,” he did take a still-nebulous “human relations” mandate to the trustees in late May. A summary of his oral report indicates that he pitched “human relations and social organization” as the “central problem of our times” (“Memo to the Trustees,” 23 May 1949, 20003/1/2/20, 2). There is no evidence that the trustees objected to the social science focus, and memos exchanged between Gaither and his staff in mid-June still indicated a social science–dominated report, with explicit references to the inclusion of economics (Dyke Brown, “Comment on Ford Study to Date,” 2). The actual report drafting, largely delegated to McPeak and Paul Bixler, an Antioch College literary critic hired as a staff writer, began in earnest soon after.

Yet in place of the broad-based human relations program recommended by the committee, the report developed by Gaither and his staff by the early fall called for a five-part program area breakdown: Area One (“The Establishment of Peace”), Area Two (“The Strengthening of Democracy”), Area Three (“The Strengthening of the Economy”), Area Four (“Education in a Democratic Society”), and Area Five (“Individual Behavior and Human Relations”). Most significant for our purposes here, economics is assigned its own division, Program Area Three, while the other social sciences are separately placed in Program Area Five.

Although it is difficult to reconstruct the decision making involved in the staff’s write-up, we know that at some point in the early summer, Gaither’s staff circulated a “Table to Rank Program Areas” to each of the committee members, and the table’s layout offers some clues about the final report’s evolution. The table is broken down into three programs, and the first of these has three subareas: “1a. ‘The Prevention of War and the Establishment of Enduring Peace’”; “1b. ‘The Conservation, Strengthening and Continuing Adaptation of Democratic Institutions’”; and “1c. ‘The Improvement of the Economy of a Democratic Society.’” The second and third programs are listed as “2. ‘Education in a Democratic Society’” and “3. ‘Individual Behavioral and Human Relations.’” The first three subareas evolved into Program Areas One, Two, and Three, while the second and third became Program Areas Four and Five. By the time someone, presumably Gaither, had tallied up the committee members’ rankings, the decision to reorganize along the report’s final lines had been made (“Table to Rank Program Areas,” n.d., 20004/1/3/25).

The expansion of the report’s coverage to include economic, political, educational, and international issues outside the original social science context was probably prompted by the revelation that the foundation would possess far greater resources than Gaither or the Study Committee originally assumed (cf. Sutton 1987, 47, 52–53). Perhaps the trustees pushed for a more explicit focus on substantive issues. Or the demands of transforming the committee’s disjointed recommendations may have led Bixler, McPeak, or Gaither to rethink the structure of the report. They certainly felt no allegiance to the committee per se and indeed were scheming throughout the summer and fall to limit committee members’ input. At the same time, however, the five-areas model arguably reflected the committee’s “human relations” mandate, in that the social science emphasis had always been linked in the committee’s deliberations to large-scale

social issues. This is consistent with the fact that the final report explicitly positions Area Five to service the other four areas.

The inclusion of a program area devoted to economic issues is itself unsurprising. Throughout the spring meetings committee members listed problems like business cycle fluctuations, unemployment, labor relations, and inflation as potential targets of foundation activity (e.g., “Staff-Committee Memorandum No. 4,” 4–8). In the Cold War context, the felt need to demonstrate the American economy’s strength vis-à-vis its Soviet rival, together with the potential of a revived war economy, ensured that economic policy was a widely discussed national security issue. The Area Three write-up, like the other program area narratives, leads off with a list of activities that the “Foundation should support.” The first item, for example, calls on Ford to encourage “a growing economy characterized by high output, the highest possible level of constructive employment, and a minimum of destructive instability” (Gaither et al. 1949, 70).

What is striking about the Area Three write-up, however, is that the narrative that follows does not address any of these substantive issues; this narrative is, instead, focused mainly on describing plans for a program of basic economic research. By contrast, for each of the other four areas the lead-off list corresponds to its write-up. The Area Two narrative, for example, is devoted to the strengthening of democracy; neither political science nor indeed any program of research appears in the text.

Furthermore, by the report’s internal logic, the segregation of economics from the other social sciences is puzzling. Area Five is described, in effect, as the basic research arm of the other four areas, as the source of core scientific advances that should in turn inform the substantive goals of Areas One through Four. The report’s mandate for Area Five is sweeping and inclusive of all scientific study of “man.” Only two sorts of research are excluded: applied work related to the specific initiatives of the other four areas and “polemical, speculative, and pre-scientific” strands of social science, the invocation of which, here as elsewhere, provided a defining contrast to the resolutely scientific approach that Area Five planned to support (Gaither et al. 1949, 95). Yet economics is unambiguously claimed by Area Three. The report contains, then, a fundamental ambiguity as to what counts as the “study of man”: although Area Five claims all scientific approaches, one of these, economics, has already been ceded to Area Three.

A highly relevant irony is that Program Areas Three and Five advance nearly identical arguments on behalf of their respective sciences. Economic

theory that does not face the “acid test of verification”—“test hypotheses with bodies of evidence and thereby develop useful general propositions”—is deemed “speculative” and criticized by the Area Three narrative (Gaither et al. 1949, 72–73; see also Leonard 1989, 4–5). In addition, this narrative deploys the same interdisciplinary rhetoric found in its Area Five counterpart: there is a “growing recognition that man’s economic behavior . . . cannot be abstracted and studied in isolation.” Fields like psychology and sociology, with their “new methods and approaches,” should be applied to the study of economic life, the write-up argues (Gaither et al. 1949, 72). Notably, the Area Three summary includes an aggressive dismissal of neoclassical economics: “Dominant ‘schools’ of economic thought have from time to time constructed overall ‘systems’ through the use of convenient but unrealistic abstractions, such as ‘other things being equal’ or the fiction of the ‘economic man,’ and these systems have subsequently been adopted uncritically and consequently misapplied by economists and the lay public” (71). Because of its denunciation of neoclassical theory, the Area Three account is often misinterpreted as a brief on behalf of institutional economics. But this account was written by a noneconomist (Carroll) and seems inspired by the same empiricist social science convictions that inform the Area Five write-up.

The sequence of steps that led to the anomalous Area Three narrative remains unclear. What we know is that McPeak wrote the Program Area Five narrative and that its contents reflect the full-throttled empiricist-scientific sentiments that had dominated the committee’s deliberations. We also know that Carroll drafted the Program Area Three section and that its contours reflect his particular interest in bringing social science research to business schools. Carroll was no economist, but in the absence of an economics division he had a claim to the discipline. Economic research had been treated in Carroll’s committee proposals far more extensively than in the memos Marquis circulated, an imbalance that became relevant in the decision to devise a separate program area devoted to economic issues.

Whatever the reason, we surmise that the energetic Carroll learned of the new program areas framework and maneuvered his way into the Area Three writing slot. It is possible that Carroll jumped at the opportunity to draft the Area Three narrative as a beachhead to support his interest in transforming business education along research lines. He would, indeed, join the foundation’s staff as Area Three director in 1953

and lead its successful program to overhaul business schools as centers of cross-disciplinary research.¹³

It is also possible, although unlikely, that economics was pushed out of Program Area Five plans by Marquis and McPeak. McPeak had drafted a spirited defense of the Study Committee's human relations orientation in preparation for Gaither's May appearance before the trustees, and he later wrote and delivered the Area Five pitch to the trustees in February 1950 ("Memo for Rowan Gaither, Subject: Strategy of Program Area Presentation," 20 May 1949, 20004/I/3/25, 2; "Presentation of Program Five," 13 February 1950, 20046/V/7/74). The February script, tellingly, states that "we are very much interested in the sociologists, the anthropologists and the psychologists, particularly the more scientific ones." This three-discipline formulation informed a statement explaining why the Study Committee opted against the broader "social science" term, "which means different things" in "different circles." Economics and political science are listed among the "various interpretations" of "social science" that McPeak cites as evidence of the term's overly broad connotations ("Presentation of Program Five," 7–8). The 1949 final report's Area Five write-up also

13. Carroll, along with other members of the Study Committee, had joined the foundation staff after Gaither replaced Hoffman as Ford president in early 1953. As the supervising officer of Area Three (by then renamed the Program in Economic Development and Administration), Carroll went on to direct the foundation's ambitious and successful initiative to recast business education in a research mold. (There is a large secondary literature on Ford's business school program: see, e.g., Khurana 2007, 233–88; Schlossman, Sedlak, and Wechsler 1998; Leonard 1989, 7–15; Sutton 1987, 77–83; and Bottom 2009; see also James Howell, "The Ford Foundation and the Revolution in Business Education: A Case Study in Philanthropy," September 1966, Report No. 006353). From 1954 until the initiative wound down in the early 1960s, Carroll succeeded in establishing, as already outlined in Study Committee documents, a research-based model of business education explicitly grounded in the behavioral sciences (including economics). He was, in 1949, already praising Herbert Simon's work on organizations and administrative behavior (Carroll, "Suggested Program Area: Social (Human) Relations," April 1949, 20004/I/3/26, C2) and by the early 1950s began citing Carnegie Tech's new Graduate School of Industrial Administration, established by the economist Lee Bach with first-hire Simon (Carroll 1952, 555; and "Technical Development of the Behavioral Sciences under Ford Foundation Auspices," n.d. 1952, Report No. 010586, 7; Khurana 2007, 248–56; Crowther-Heyck 2005, 145–70). From 1954 on, the foundation spent over \$35 million on the Carroll-Bach-Simon vision of mathematically rigorous, cross-disciplinary behavioral sciences training and research—best remembered for the widely influential Ford-sponsored 1959 treatise *Higher Education for Business* by Robert Gordon and James Howell. One irony is that the Carroll-Bach-Simon initiative's explicit focus on cross-disciplinary behavioral sciences research gradually gave way, from the early 1960s on, to business school research cultures dominated by economists alone (Khurana 2007, 265, 283–88).

explicitly lists anthropology, sociology, and psychology, with no mention of political science or economics (Gaither et al. 1949, 92). In his social science division report, Marquis had described economics with respect but in terms that placed the discipline outside the other social sciences' verificationist worldview. "Modeled in part after philosophy," he wrote, "economic theory has been characterized by logical rigor and great generality. The next step of verification has, however, presented unusual difficulties because the concepts are not such as can be directly measured by observation" (*Report of Social Science Division*, 1 January 1950, 16). Perhaps the Area Five write-up's emphasis on empirically tested generalization made economics an awkward fit—although for Carroll this issue posed no problem in his Area Three narrative.

We consider it more likely, however, that the narrower anthropology-sociology-psychology formulation was a post hoc rationalization, prompted by Carroll's Area Three claim to economics. The reasons are many: throughout the committee's deliberations economics was always included under the human relations umbrella; Marquis retained the Chicago economist Ted Schultz as one of three members of an informal advisory panel created early in the process; in his social science division report, Marquis listed a number of economists among the social scientists whom he consulted (*Report of Social Science Division*, 1, 4); and at an August conference jointly sponsored by Marquis's division and the Social Science Research Council, four of ten participants were economists (6–7). If Marquis and McPeak were planning to exclude economists, it seems unlikely that so many of them would have been involved throughout the process. Thus Carroll's Area Three write-up, with its strong claim for economics, seems to have encouraged McPeak and Marquis to exclude the discipline.¹⁴

Still, such a split was conceivable only in the context of the preexisting gulf between economics and the other social sciences. Long-standing professional and intellectual cleavages were already in place (Swedberg 1990, esp. 13–15; Young 2009, 104–11). Within economics the neoclas-

14. Berelson, in his 1957 postmortem on the BSP, also suggested that turf disputes were responsible for the narrow, three-field definition. He observed that the "behavioral sciences" term was chosen over "social science" because other foundation program areas had jurisdiction over key social science fields: "The familiar term 'social sciences' includes at least three major disciplines—economics, political science, and history—that were not typically included in the 'behavioral sciences,' if for no other reason simply because they were dealt with elsewhere in the Foundation" ("BSP Final Report, 1951–1957," September 1957, Report No. 010548, 3).

sicists had already asserted their discipline's autonomy from the other social sciences and had begun to gain the upper hand over their institutional rivals who were more favorably inclined toward cross-disciplinary collaboration (Yonay 1998, 184–95; Backhouse 1998). At the RAND Corporation, the split between economics and the other social sciences was already institutionalized in separate divisions. Elsewhere in the greatly expanded military science establishment economists were much better funded and working more closely with higher-status mathematicians and physicists (see Leonard 1991). Harvard's social relations department (comprising anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists) was also a likely influence on the narrower, three-field formulation presented in Program Area Five.

Without such conditions, to assign economics its own place would have been preposterous. That it did *not* strike Study Committee figures as such is testimony to the already deep fissures between economics and the other social sciences. Still, it was only at the end of a convoluted process of study that such a separation was formalized in the 1949 final report's program area breakdown.

The 1949 Report

The Study Committee final report—formally, *The Report of the Study for the Ford Foundation on Policy and Program*, better known as the Gaither Report—was finished in October 1949, two years after Henry Ford II agreed to commission the study.¹⁵ The Gaither Report strikes a fascinating balance between stated commitments to peace and universal welfare, on the one hand, and the escalating Cold War challenges, on the other. It is laced with references to the Soviet threat, with “democracy” standing in for the “Free West” (Gaither et al. 1949, 47). Within this context, the Gaither Report recommends the five program areas, each one tied to the overall mission of “advancing human welfare.” The trustees soon adopted the report's mission and its five-part structure in nearly all their particulars, and arranged to have the report published. For years to come, the Gaither Report commanded unusual reverence among foundation officers, as they treated it as a Constitution-like founding document (Sutton 1987, 48).

15. Although the published Study Committee report lists November 1949 as the publication date on its title page, the report was not fully endorsed by the Ford board until September 1950 and published the following month (Sutton 1987, 87 n. 12).

The behavioral sciences label appears just twice in the published report (Gaither et al. 1949, 94). The label quickly became the Area Five term of choice, however, at least from the time McPeak pitched the program to the trustees in February 1950. In his presentation, McPeak observed that “social science,” as “we would like to use it, appears to be loosely constructed.” He noted that in addition to the five major academic social science disciplines, the term often refers to a broad range of professionals, including lawyers, accountants, public relations counselors, “or many other things.” But since Area Five emphasis is on the knowledge of “human behavior,” the Study Committee is “not concerned with all of these groups to the same extent.” Rather than refer to “social scientists,” McPeak concluded, “we would like to use the term behavioral scientists” (“Presentation of Program Five,” 7–9).

McPeak’s argument that “social science” was dropped because it was too “loosely constructed,” with its dubious citation of lawyers and others, is somewhat convoluted and misleading. It is well documented that McPeak, Gaither, and Marquis abandoned the term, at least partly (and perhaps largely), because of its recurrent conflation with socialism, a major problem for the social sciences then under attack from anti–New Dealers and McCarthyites in Congress.¹⁶ The *behavioral sciences* term was also chosen, as Marquis and others later explained, to signal a break with the speculative, unscientific legacy that allegedly remained a drag on social scientific progress. In this sense, *behavioral sciences* was intended as a synonym for truly rigorous science, as modeled best by the more mature natural sciences. Hence McPeak’s text is filled with references to “verified knowledge” that is “scientific and systematic.” It declares that the behavioral sciences aim to establish “laws of human nature” corresponding to the laws of nature confirmed by natural scientists and claims that behavioral researchers have already “borrowed many techniques” from natural scientists (4, 9–10, 12).

Hints at a narrower definition for the new term also appear in McPeak’s script, contributing to confusion about the scope of the field. Certain passages indicate a particular interest in sociology, anthropology, and

16. From Marquis’s 1972 oral history interview (7): “In this connection you might be interested in knowing where they got that word, behavioral science . . . at that period, when the Cold War was at its height, the word social we thought would be confused with socialism and so for. [sic] and tried to come up with something else.” See also Tyler 1964, 28; Miller 1955, 523; Marquis, *Report of Social Science Division*, 1 January 1950, 20–21; and Berelson et al., “Proposed Plan for the Development of the BSP,” December 1951, Report No. 002072, 14.

psychology.¹⁷ Later documents associated with Area Five try to resolve the discrepancy—between the definition referring to science-oriented social science writ large and the other definition referring to just three disciplines—by designating anthropology, sociology, and psychology as the “core” behavioral sciences (e.g., Carroll, report of the Advisory Group on Economics and the Behavioral Sciences, 18 February 1953, Report No. 0101822, 2–3; Berelson, “The Ford Foundation Behavioral Sciences Program Final Report, 1951–1957,” September 1957, Report No. 010548, 4). Nevertheless, the definitional ambiguity continued to plague the program throughout its existence.¹⁸ The fact that political scientists would acquire a far larger proportion of Area Five grants than anthropologists added to this confusion (see Berelson, “The Ford Foundation BSP Final Report,” A1–A12).

The confusion was not unique to the foundation, although here we can only gesture at the term’s fascinating history. The existing historiography traces the term back to the psychologist James Grier Miller’s Committee on the Behavioral Sciences (1949 to 1955) at the University of Chicago (Senn 1966, 113; Berelson 1968, 43; Crowther-Heyck 2005, 154; Hammond and Wilby 2006, 431). Although Miller was in close contact with Marquis and thus almost certainly an important influence at the Ford Foundation, the term was already in limited circulation by the mid-1930s. In this earlier period we find at least three distinct uses, all of which share the view that social science might match the rigor and objectivity of the natural and especially physical sciences. The philosopher of science Charles Morris (1938, 1946) used the label in his synthesis of pragmatism and logical empiricism. The philosopher and political scientist Arthur Bentley referred to the “behavioral sciences” in his own philosophy of science work, developed in part as a challenge to Morris’s approach (e.g., Bentley 1935, pt. 3; see Ward 1981). For our purposes, the most relevant source is Clark L. Hull (1940, 12, 305; 1943, v, 400), the neobehaviorist psychologist at the center of Yale’s Institute of Human Relations, who used the term in relation to his ill-fated attempt to generate a general theory of behavior. Along with many other psychologists who would achieve

17. For example: “We are very much interested in the sociologists, the anthropologists and the psychologists, particularly the more scientific ones” (8).

18. Included among a list of remaining tasks for the summer of 1951—as the BSP plan was being developed—is: “Try to secure memo from Marquis defining behavioral science” (Hans Speier, Marquis, Dyke Brown to Gaither, 12 June 1951, 20046/V/7/75). There is no evidence that Marquis ever furnished a definition.

postwar prominence, Marquis was a member of Hull's circle at Yale. It is very likely that Marquis carried the term with him to the Study Committee, even if Area Five's use was intended to be more ecumenical than Hull's. Regardless, none of these prewar uses had made their way into the broader social scientific language. As a result, the *behavioral sciences* term was, in effect, a neologism brought into use by McPeak and Marquis.

Although the foundation awarded a few exploratory Area Five grants in the fall of 1950, the behavioral sciences agenda developed only after the foundation's new president, Paul Hoffman, established the foundation's headquarters in Pasadena in early 1951. Gaither, who agreed to stay on as assistant director overseeing Area Five, hired Marquis and Hans Speier as consultants. Both had been working on the State Department's Project Troy, and their emerging plans for Area Five were notable for their Cold War inflection (Needell 1993, 401). In the summer Gaither hired Berelson, a library scientist and prominent public opinion researcher, to direct the new program. Berelson together with Speier, Marquis, and Gaither spent the fall of 1951 drafting a plan for what they now called the Behavioral Sciences Program (Berelson et al., "Proposed Plan for the Development of the Behavioral Sciences Program," December 1951, Report No. 002072).

In the early to late 1950s leading social scientists, top universities, the Social Science Research Council, and military social science programs began to embrace the term, such that it became useful to speak of a behavioral sciences "movement." The question of whether economists would be included in this movement could not be decided alone by the Ford Foundation, but surely the foundation's take on this matter would be influential. The Study Committee's efforts, the program area structure presented in the Gaither Report, and then the foundation's creation of two separate program areas all pointed to a significant divide between economics and the behavioral sciences. The label's newness and its link to the gigantic foundation's well-funded initiative generated much suspicion and resistance as well.¹⁹ Yet there had also been notable ambiguities and expressions of interest in cultivating fruitful interactions. The place of economics within Berelson's program soon became the focus of detailed deliberations.

19. Berelson, in his 1957 final report for the just-shuttered BSP, observes, "The phrase itself was not particularly felicitous and since it was not only unfamiliar but associated with a center of power, it disturbed a number of people and undoubtedly made a certain amount of trouble for the Program both in and out of the Foundation" ("BSP Final Report, 1951–1957," 3).

The Advisory Group on Economics and the Behavioral Sciences

In the spring of 1952 the BSP launched an initiative to widen its mandate to include economics. The idea was to cut through the “sharp” and “arbitrary” line that set off the discipline from the other social sciences (Berelson, summary of second meeting, 11 July 1952, HSC, 6). The BSP’s effort to incorporate economics, or at least its “behavioral aspects,” was carried out by an Advisory Group on Economics and the Behavioral Sciences appointed by Berelson. In 1952 the group met periodically, circulated a proposal for comments, and convened three conferences to solicit input from economists. The effort failed, and the main reason was opposition from economists. Two major BSP documents, the “Proposed Plan” from December 1951 and the division report from June 1953, can be read as bookends on the initiative (Berelson et al., “Proposed Plan”; Berelson, “Behavioral Sciences Division Report,” June 1953, Report No. 002750). The 1951 plan lists as one of its eight substantive areas “Behavioral Aspects of the Economic System,” described as the investigation of “social and psychological factors” in “economics” (22–23). Yet this area receives no mention in the 1953 report, wherein economics is flatly portrayed as “fall[ing] within Program Three of the Foundation” (12).

As described below, the advisory group’s reports, minutes, and correspondence offer a chronicle of diminished ambition. The group, composed of scholars opposed to the growing neoclassical orthodoxy, occupied what was fast becoming the discipline’s heterodox margins: a mix of institutionalists, business school affiliates, and PhDs from outside the discipline. The group’s initial statements were filled with muscular denunciations of the divide between economics and its social science peers, together with attacks on economists’ rationality assumption and their deductivist neglect of empirical studies of behavior. Indeed, the group’s early statements are strikingly reminiscent of the Gaither Report’s Area Three write-up, with its promise to initiate an overhaul of the discipline. The group’s unorthodox agenda was correctly inferred by mainstream economists who presented a formidable and ultimately effective critique.

The idea to incorporate the “behavioral aspects” of economics seems to have been hatched in the fall of 1951, when Berelson, Marquis, and Speier were drafting and revising the BSP’s “Proposed Plan.” In early September the trio commissioned a series of “memos” on “various phases of the program” to be written by leading social scientists, including Robert Merton

(“values”), Samuel Stouffer (“methods”), and Herbert Simon (“organizational analysis”). Many of these memos covered topics outside the narrow three “core” behavioral sciences, including three on “political behavior” by Paul Lazarsfeld, David Truman, and Ithiel de Sola Pool, and one on “economics and statistics” by Allen Wallis (Gaither, “Program Five Activities,” 19 December 1951, Report No. 002922, 1). At least two economists, Wallis and Bert Hoselitz, participated in a November meeting convened to solicit advice on the “Proposed Plan” draft. Although no economists attended a second meeting held a few days later, economics was a major topic of conversation among the participants, including Merton, Lazarsfeld, Talcott Parsons, Stouffer, Nathan Lienes, and Harold Lasswell. At the meeting, Lazarsfeld and Parsons traced economists’ standoffishness back to the relative immaturity of interwar sociology and psychology, although Parsons could not resist a potshot at his former discipline, claiming that “in certain senses” economics was “a more frustrated science despite its ‘maturity’” (Carroll, typed notes from NYC conference, 29 November 1951, 20046/V/7/75).

The “Proposed Plan,” finalized in December, included the “Behavioral Aspects of the Economic System” as a substantive area. The section’s write-up starts with a charged epigraph from the Gaither Report’s Area Three narrative, stating that “economic choices . . . are simply one part of the entire range of human choices and decisions subject as much to non-logical factors as any other human conduct” (22). Here, as elsewhere in the postwar social scientific landscape, the divide hinges on the assumption of rationality in human behavior and its proper place in social scientific analysis. Berelson and his coauthors made it clear that they were not prepared to leave the analysis of economics to the abstractions of neoclassical economists. The “Proposed Plan” argues that work on the behavioral aspects of economics is worthwhile not only for its “direct contributions but also as an aid to integrating the behavioral sciences” (22).

Although this write-up mimics the Gaither Report’s brief for an economics discipline remade in the image of the behavioral sciences, the “Proposed Plan” does not call for a wholesale incorporation of economics into the BSP program. The report nods to the jurisdiction of Program Area Three, albeit awkwardly given the Area Three narrative’s behavioral inflection (23). Additionally, in this write-up the *behavioral sciences* term specifically includes anthropology, psychology, and sociology, while political science and economics are typically placed outside the construct (19). But, like so many other BSP documents, the “Proposed Plan” is ambiguous and even contradictory on just this point. In a number of places,

the plan explicitly calls for the participation of economists and political scientists (see 11, 19, 28). At one point, it describes and praises economics as “the only one” among “fields and disciplines concerned with behavioral knowledge . . . in which the state of propositional theory has been reached to any large extent” (11).

Most remarkably, the foundation even considered a complete transfer of economics into the BSP. A mid-October memo from Speier, Marquis, and Berelson states at one point that the BSP will probably “require the addition of two more professional staff members,” based on the assumption that “research in economics will be handled in Program III.” However, the memo then mentions the possibility that the BSP would “take responsibility for it [economics],” in which case “another staff member will be required (and budget adjustment will be necessary)” (Speier, Marquis, and Berelson, “Proposed Development of Program V,” 15 October 1951, 20046/V/7/75, 2). Since Hoffman had not yet appointed an officer to start program Area Three, this was a feasible option.

In a curious twist, Hoffman’s choice to head Area Three, the MIT economist Richard Bissell, provided an even greater opening for a BSP takeover.²⁰ Bissell joined the foundation in January 1952, just before Berelson presented the “Proposed Plan” to the trustees. Bissell had been Hoffman’s first hire at the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA)—the Marshall Plan coordinating body that Hoffman had directed—and was very close to the Ford president. An especially zealous Cold Warrior, Bissell almost immediately soured on the prospects for Area Three. In a pessimism-drenched February memo, he admits that he had “become more rather than less skeptical of the possibility of devising a program in this area that will be worth its costs” (“Proposed Work on the Development of an Area III Program,” 15 February 1952, 20020/I/1/4, 2). Bissell, almost grudgingly, proceeds to outline a plan for Area Three designed to shift U.S. economic policy to meet the Soviet threat, through a program of unabashed idea laundering. Bissell’s proposal called for the “mildly coercive” leveraging of foundation funds to establish a third-party “machinery of public education,” to be coordinated with a foundation-backed “group of wise men” who could “cloak these propositions with their authority” (5, 9, 12). Bissell is skeptical that his plan would work, but argues that it is the only one worth trying. His memo is openly dismissive of any initiative to fund basic economic research: such research “already crowd[s] the nation’s

20. On the fascinating story of Bissell and the Ford Foundation, see Cochrane 1979, 30–50, and Bissell, Lewis, and Pudlo 1996, 74–78.

files and book shelves” and will not have a “prompt and powerful influence on important public and private decisions” (1–2). Bissell, who was based in Washington and consulting on a range of national security initiatives unrelated to his Ford work, soon found his Ford duties unsatisfying and too detached from Cold War needs. By the fall of 1952 he was consulting for the CIA and soon left to join the agency full-time (Bissell, Lewis, and Pudlo 1996, 74–78). Largely because of Bissell’s hesitancy, the foundation’s plans for program Area Three were discussed and delayed for a full year, providing Berelson’s advisory group a window to complete its work (Cochrane 1979, 33–50).

It is possible that Bissell’s disinterest (already evident in the February memo) helped embolden Berelson’s plan for the economics advisory group. In March Berelson met with Joseph McDaniel, the foundation’s secretary who had recently been given provisional oversight of its still-inchoate Area Three plans. In a late-March memo to Gaither, Berelson and McDaniel proposed a committee to explore “research potentialities in the border zone between economics and the behavioral sciences” (quoted in Cochrane 1979, 52). An advisory group was soon named. Its five members were Simon (Carnegie Institute Graduate School of Industrial Administration), Carroll Daugherty (Northwestern University School of Business), James Duesenberry (Harvard’s Department of Economics), Joseph Spengler (Duke’s Department of Economics), and Fritz Roethlisberger (Harvard Business School). By early July Berelson had appointed Carroll, the Study Committee member who had drafted its Area Three narrative, to coordinate the group (Carroll to Simon, 11 July 1952, HSC, 1). Carroll, then dean of the University of North Carolina School of Business Administration, probably played the key role in selecting the members of the advisory group; most had business school affiliations and other ties to Carroll.

The group’s members are notable for their dissent from neoclassicism. Simon, the future Nobel winner in economics (although trained as a political scientist), was already working on his concept of “bounded rationality” (Crowther-Heyck 2005, 26–27). His work on administrative behavior, along with the research-based business school model he set up with Lee Bach at Carnegie’s Graduate School of Industrial Administration (GSIA), were major influences on Carroll.²¹ Spengler, although a prominent economist and future American Economic Association (AEA) president, had

21. See note 13.

institutionalist sympathies and a major interest in the history of economics. He had already authored a lengthy memo for the Social Science Research Council on bringing the other social sciences to bear on economic questions (Spengler to SSRC Committee on Problems and Policy, 2 January 1952, HSC). Daugherty was a labor economist with definite institutionalist leanings (Boyer and Smith 2001, 203; Daugherty 1945, 253). Roethlisberger worked with Carroll to set up Harvard Business School's "Development of Plans for Research in the Field of Human Relations" (1948). Duesenberry, although housed in a mainstream department, had begun to coteach a course, *The Sociological Analysis of Economic Behavior*, with the sociologist Francis X. Sutton (Swedberg 1990, 15); Sutton would soon become an assistant at Berelson's BSP (McPeak, "BSP (1951–1957): Report and Appraisal," 4). Duesenberry's influential 1949 work on peer-group comparisons in consumption behavior and his "relative income hypothesis" was inspired by the institutionalist Thorstein Veblen; indeed, Duesenberry's model fell out of favor largely because it was not built on the model of a rational, utility-maximizing consumer (see Green 1979). The advisory group was, in short, primed to produce a proposal critical of neoclassical theory.

After the advisory group first met in early May, Berelson observed that there was "unanimous agreement that cooperation between economics and the behavioral sciences was highly desirable" ("Report of First Meeting," 13 May 1952, HSC, 2). His summary records an ambitious program of integrated theory-building, research support, and cross-disciplinary graduate training. Still, his reference (4) to a "border zone" between the behavioral sciences and economics is in keeping with the "Proposed Plan" from December 1951, with its call to incorporate only the "behavioral aspects" of economics into the BSP. "Economic behavior" appears throughout his summary and signals the group's focus on empirical research into actual behavior, in explicit contrast with neoclassical economists' assumption of rationality.

Berelson's summary, in some tension with its stated interest in just a "border zone," declares the entire divide between economics and the other social sciences to be an arbitrary product of history:

The present situation is due to an historical separation between the disciplines. A group of specialists began to work on a set of "economic problems" which were defined in limited terms for purposes of simplicity and manageability. They invented their own psychology and sociology, as needed. This form of intellectual organization became

institutionalized through university departments, and then became traditional. As time went on, the intellectual claims and achievements of economics relative to the behavioral sciences promoted a kind of academic “pecking order” within the social sciences, with economics at the top, and this made cooperation all the more difficult. (2–3)

This historical account, its thinly veiled criticism of neoclassical model building, and its reference to a “pecking order” led by economists: all of these would prove offensive to even sympathetic economists. Spengler, for instance, objected to the passage in a follow-up letter to Berelson (13 May 1952, HSC, 1).

After a second meeting in late May, Berelson expanded the initial summary such that it was even bolder than the initial write-up (summary of second meeting, HSC). Moving beyond the call for stimulating a “border zone,” the first of the summary’s list of “next steps” proposes that the foundation “let it be known that it regards the sharp line now existing between economics and the behavioral sciences as arbitrary, and that it is interested in knowing about projects aimed at cutting across the line” (6). In a list of proposed criteria for foundation support, Berelson writes that preference should be given to projects “which propose to study actual behavior of persons in economic situations, as opposed to the end products of behavior (e.g., ‘dollar’ behavior)” (5). At the suggestion of Simon, who more than anyone else shaped the advisory group’s intellectual agenda, the references to theory were also strengthened.²² “Collaboration,” reads the summary, “means that behavioral science should not only be ‘applied’ to economic problems wherever feasible, but should also include economic phenomena as one area out of which a general theory of behavior must be developed” (2).

This document was circulated to over sixty economists and other social scientists, from a list generated at the second meeting (Carroll to Simon). The distribution list is dominated by economists and business scholars known to be sympathetic to cross-disciplinary collaboration, including Allen Wallis, Kenneth Boulding, Walt Rostow, Clark Kerr, John Nef, Wight Bakke, and George Katona. Yet a significant minority represents various strands of postwar neoclassicism, including Paul Samuelson, Milton Friedman, Ted Schultz, Franco Modigliani, and Armen Alchian. There was, too, a separate, much shorter list of “behavioral scientists”

22. See Simon to Berelson, 24 May 1952, HSC, 1–2. On Simon’s overall influence on Berelson and the BSP, see Crowther-Heyck 2005, 152–56.

including Merton, Daniel Lerner, and Robert Dahl. In all, nearly sixty scholars replied to the request for comments (Berelson, summary of second meeting, 7–8).²³

A narrative “Digest of Replies” records general support for the idea of a Ford-sponsored “behavioral aspects” initiative, although with significant reservations and a series of specific complaints about the Berelson summary (Milton Heath, “Digest of Replies to Letter Concerning Report of Advisory Group on Economics and the Behavioral Sciences,” n.d. 1952, HSC; see also “List of Repliers,” n.d. 1952, HSC).²⁴ About ten scholars raised serious objections, nearly all economists: “Dissent and qualification came chiefly, although not solely, from the economists” (“Digest of Replies,” 2).

Some of the resistance from economists was plainly tied to confusion about the behavioral sciences neologism. A number of econometricians, including Harold Hotelling, insisted that economics already *is* a behavioral science (3). “Quite a number” of economists were “deeply concerned” about the idea of a “general theory of behavior”; Ted Schultz suggested that the advisory group take two or three pages to spell out what it means (7). The incendiary historical passage was “the most generally criticized,” with about twenty replies registering an objection; one labeled it “fashionable foundationese” (6–7).²⁵

23. Samuelson was not among the respondents.

24. On Milton Heath’s authorship, see Carroll, report of the Advisory Group on Economics and the Behavioral Sciences, 18 February 1953, Report No. 0101822, 1. Heath, an economist colleague of Carroll’s at the University of North Carolina, had earlier prepared a memo for Berelson that attacks the “citadel of Economic Theory” in scathing terms (“Comments on Economics and the Behavioral Sciences,” May 1952, HSC, 1). Some of the memo’s language found its way into Berelson’s summary of the group’s second meeting (e.g., 5). An anonymous reviewer observed that the “Digest,” as well as the conference summary (authored by Carroll) that we draw on below, are the views of economists *filtered* through the documents’ Ford-affiliated authors’ perspective and interests. It is true that these two summary documents offer an inescapably partial picture of economists’ reaction to the behavioral sciences overture. Still, the documents’ heavy reliance on direct quotation, alongside their authors’ arguable interest in *downplaying* economists’ opposition, justifies our qualified dependence on their accounts.

25. “Serious reservations were voiced repeatedly as to the historical accuracy, in whole or in part, of the paragraph; some felt that it gave support to a ‘much over-worked notion’ which had misconstrued what actually took place, and was largely meaningless anyhow; others cited the interdisciplinary interest of nearly everyone of the leading economists from Adam Smith to John Maynard Keynes; and quite a number came vigorously to the defense of traditional Economics, seemingly feeling that the statement was disparaging of the high historic accomplishments of the science” (6).

A telling set of warnings issued by economists spoke to the high costs of interdisciplinarity within the discipline. Milton Friedman, the only respondent to express out-and-out opposition, suggested that the “interdisciplinary fad” could divert economists from the specialization necessary for the discipline to become a “cumulative science” (“Digest of Replies,” 2). A proposal for cross-disciplinary graduate training met lukewarm support at best, according to the “Digest”: “The lack of experience in interdisciplinary training apparently makes economists cautious on the subject” (28). Max Millikan, for example, pointed to the “long time required to become a competent economist” as his reason for resisting cross-field graduate training (16). A “large number” of economists stressed the price young economists would pay for venturing outside the discipline. Boulding called it the “demand problem” (12). Richard Heflebower cautioned that the “‘reward system’ in economics is unfavorable to those who challenge its methods or isolation from other sciences,” which in his view is the “fundamental problem to the program proposed” (12). Kuznets, in a similar vein, advised that the foundation must make cross-disciplinary research “attractive enough to an important group of economists to divert them from the strong present pressure in other directions,” referring solemnly to “those economists who are spiritually ready for crossing boundaries” (16).

Also striking in the “Digest” are the quoted comments from economists who fully supported the advisory group initiative, and sometimes took direct aim at neoclassical theory. In a favorable tone Walter Weiskopf called the search for a general theory of behavior “the crux of the entire matter,” citing close integration with psychology, anthropology, and sociology (11). Clark Kerr complained about his discipline’s fixation on a “single type of motivation—the responsiveness to pecuniary costs and rewards”—and observed that “even economists have come to feel the necessity of drawing upon non-pecuniary ones” (10). Wight Bakke separated “economic behavior” from “behavior of the ‘economic man,’ that is, the behavior postulated in theories of rationality,” and then called for “extensive further development” of its study (5). The economists in the advisory group along with their heterodox supporters recorded in the “Digest” invoked the other social sciences as ammunition in their battle with the neoclassical mainstream—in much the same way that interwar institutional economists had appealed to psychology and sociology in *their* version of the dispute (see Yonay 1994, 54–58).

The mixed response to the advisory group summary foreshadowed the emergence of stronger opposition in the three conferences chaired

by Carroll in the late fall, held in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York (Carroll, "Report of Three One-Day Conferences," December 1952, HSC). Here, concern about the relationship between Program Areas Three and Five surfaced for the first time and seems to have dominated the three gatherings. So prominent was the economists' concern over Area Three's dormancy that the first four paragraphs of Carroll's conference summary recount what he called a "major 'stumbling block'" (2). "Hope was strongly expressed," he wrote, "that provision will be made in Program III for support of fundamental economic research" (2). There is "some real and apparently widespread apprehension" that Area Three would only support applied policy work and public education campaigns, which may "crowd out desirable support of efforts specifically directed toward the creation of new economic theory and knowledge" (2). The advisory group's focus on the "behavioral aspects" border zone comes off here as a sideshow irritant to economists awakened to Area Three's threatened potential:

Attention was called to the "danger" of diverting economists to activities "they are not well-equipped to do" if they are under the impression that "new knowledge" is supported only through Program Area V. The New York group proceeded on the stated assumption that the framework of the Study Committee Report for Program Area III will continue to be Foundation policy and that "theoretical research in economics" will be supported. The Chicago group requested that they be recorded as favoring "fundamental theory support in Program III" soon and as substantially as possible. (2)

The "theory" in concern of course is not the cross-disciplinary "general theory of behavior" previously touted in the advisory group's proposal.

On the core question of interdisciplinarity—a key concern for the behavioral science-orientation taking shape—economists offered some support, but this was qualified by doubts and warnings. "There was," writes Carroll, "a feeling that interdisciplinary activity should not be supported *as such*, but rather that problem-oriented activities which are inherently interdisciplinary in character should be supported" (2–3). Attendees referred repeatedly to disciplinary punishment for wayward economists who dabbled in other fields. In contrast to some of the "Digest" replies that indicated support for interdisciplinary efforts should be *strengthened*, economists at these meetings generally recommended against an explicit focus on interdisciplinary graduate training. According to Carroll, it was the "general opinion that 'improvement of training will follow when there

is something to study,’”; the economist attendees favored research, “with training as a by-product” (4).

The overall impression from Carroll’s summary document is that conference participants were largely indifferent to the advisory group’s proposals. Expect other economists to be dismissive or even hostile to the “economic behavior” program, the attendees warn throughout. “It was brought out several times that many economists are ‘prejudiced against this sort of thing,’” records Carroll (5). New York attendees urged the foundation to select a “broadminded economist” to direct Area Three, not somebody “who is ‘against’ involvement in activities such as are encompassed in Program Area V” (3). The economists’ main preoccupation throughout is with Area Three, and their recommendations for the advisory group focus on preventing relations with the BSP from distorting Area Three activities.²⁶ According to the summary, there was a clear push to limit the BSP director’s independent authority to mete out grants and other awards (see 10–11). Participants suggested the creation of an advisory group that would include representatives from the AEA, SSRC, and other bodies, with the foundation officers left to name a minority of the membership “in their own way” (10–11).

The advisory group convened for the last time in late December to discuss their report to Berelson. Drafted by Carroll and endorsed by the other group members, the report submitted in February 1953 urges support for what it awkwardly calls the “‘borderline’ of economics and the so-called ‘core behavioral sciences’” (Advisory Group on Economics and the Behavioral Sciences, 18 February 1953, Report No. 0101822, 2). Much of its language echoes Berelson’s earlier summary. It retains the recommendation for cross-field graduate training and basic empirical research in support of a “general theory of behavior” (3). In other respects, however, it is a very different document from that earlier summary. The historical account is missing. So is the reference to the “arbitrary” division of economics from its social science peers. Carroll’s conference summary and the “Digest of Replies” were included as appendixes, and the report bears their definite mark. Its third substantive paragraph states that the group holds “the strong belief that the foundation should give substantial support as soon as possible of its Program Area III (with particular emphasis on basic economic

26. For example: “Should the Foundation consciously support work in Program Area V as the so-called ‘core’ relates to Economics as well as ‘take what we get as an extra dividend from work in Program Area III’? The answer was generally affirmative” (3).

research ‘not oriented to policy needs as such’)” (2–3). The report reiterates other comments drawn from the conferences, including expressions of worry over the “danger of presenting ‘phony’ projects” in this area (3).

By the time the BSP issued its division report in June, the “Behavioral Aspects of the Economic System” was not even listed as a substantive area (Berelson, “Behavioral Sciences Division Report”). The division report does refer to the advisory group in a single paragraph, but concludes that its “recommendations will be progressively considered for implementation as the general economic program of the Foundation is developed” (49). The “border zone” had been ceded to Area Three.

In the end, both Carroll and the economists got what they wanted. The bold initiative of the advisory group had been beaten back by economists, who clamored instead for program Area Three to commence its support for economic research. In light of economists’ opposition, the advisory group scaled back the recommendations it returned to Berelson in early 1953. Soon after, the BSP dropped any claim to jurisdiction over economics. Just weeks after the advisory group delivered its report to Berelson, Gaither assumed the Ford Foundation presidency (Sutton 1987, 76). By July he had recruited Carroll to take the helm of Area Three, renamed by Carroll—in an intentional echo of Hoffman’s ECA—the Program in Economic Development and Administration (EDA) (Sutton 1987, 81; “Program in EDA,” 20025/II/6/68, A9). Carroll’s mission to overhaul business education and support for basic economic research became the EDA’s two main initiatives.²⁷

Before closing in the mid-1960s, the EDA spent close to \$80 million, thus outliving and outspending its BSP counterpart (“Program in EDA,” 1). Despite loud protests from Berelson and McPeak—who had returned to the foundation in 1953 as the BSP’s supervising officer—trustee wariness about McCarthyite political exposure and doubts about the value of the BSP’s academic orientation led to its demise in 1957, although a round of terminal grants extended BSP support for a few years (see McPeak, “BSP [1951–1957]: Report and Appraisal,” 5–7; Berelson, “BSP Final Report, 1951–1957,” 8–9; interview with Berelson, 7 July 1972, FF Oral History Project, 19–27). Over its brief life, the BSP managed to disburse nearly \$42 million, to support research by anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, psychologists, and even a number of economists (see McPeak, “BSP [1951–1957]: Report and Appraisal,” 14).

27. See note 13.

Placed in a wider historical perspective, the advisory group's failed effort should be read as a skirmish in the larger battle over the direction of postwar economics, a battle that neoclassical economists were already winning (Blaug 1999). The struggle over the group's proposal is an index of a much broader set of forces reshaping the discipline. Economists' critical reply to the BSP overture reflected and reinforced the growing postwar hegemony of the neoclassical approach, in all of its interrelated aspects: the distinct epistemology, the private mathematical argot, the de facto segregation from other social sciences, and the spirit of go-it-alone superiority. The debate over the advisory group's proposal affirmed the wider pattern even in its ultimate outcome, with economics set off from its peers in program Area Three.

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