

AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY  
A STUDY  
OF  
ITS PROPERTIES, PROBLEMS, AND POSSIBILITIES  
AS REVEALED  
IN  
HISTORY JOURNALS  
by  
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## PREFACE

American intellectual history, the object of increasing attention among historians, has been the subject of both interest and skepticism. It has been marked by great enthusiasm and confusion. The conventional walls of the "old" history were broken through and the freedom was exhilarating. The field was new, big, and challenging. Professional historians and students, especially during the score of years since 1940, have given an ever-increasing share of attention to exploring intellectual development. Thomas Cochran's observation in 1949 that "perhaps the outstanding cumulative achievement of the last decade has been the historian's invasion of the field,"<sup>1</sup> and Charles Barker's comment that social and intellectual history "outdoes all other fields; it attracts young men; it leads to the highest places"<sup>2</sup> point to the interest which the new area has received.

Vast possibilities have been recognized and the interest does not wane. The field flourishes today but "in-

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas C. Cochran, "A Decade of American Histories," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXXIII (April, 1949), 152.

<sup>2</sup>Charles Albro Barker, "Needs and Opportunities in American Social and Intellectual History," Pacific Historical Review, XX (February, 1951), 4.

tellectual history wears a troubled air."<sup>3</sup> There have not been great, noisy quarrels in the field, but polite and leisurely criticism and bickerings have come forth. Aims and methods in the field have never been agreed upon. Perhaps the trouble lies in the early, rather easy acceptance of intellectual history by the profession. If there had been more of a struggle to make it respectable, aims and methods would have been more clearly set forth. One writer has stated as a characteristic of intellectual history its unorganized condition.<sup>4</sup> Whatever its condition, as it stands today, there are differences in point of view among the practitioners.

Despite the sizeable body of work which has been produced, a malaise persists. This "troubled air" should not be taken as an omen but rather as a heartening sign that the field is fresh and viable. Intellectual historians themselves see the need for a clarification of their aims, methods, and scope.

The aim of this thesis is to attempt to synthesize the various views of contributors to history journals on the properties, problems, and possibilities in the field. Many of the basic problems in the writing of intellectual history remain unsolved. Merle Curti has said that in the

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<sup>3</sup>R. Richard Wohl, "Intellectual History: An Historian's View," The Historian, XVI (Autumn, 1953), 62.

<sup>4</sup>Barker, Pacific Historical Review, XX, 2.

solving of these problems too few are doing basic work.<sup>5</sup>  
The purpose of this work is not to presume to solve these problems, but to point out the varying ideas on these problems which have been presented in periodicals and a few related works by intellectual historians and others interested in the field.

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<sup>5</sup>Cited in Cochran, Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXXIII, 153.

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## CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT  
OF INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

The field of American intellectual history is comparatively new. An article written in 1951 stated: "American Intellectual History, as a teaching and training effort within our guild, is less than twenty years old."<sup>1</sup> The break from the "old style" of history which marked the beginning of the new field reaches back about thirty years more.

Scientific developments from their modern beginnings in the sixteenth century and the rationalist ideas of the eighteenth century combined with the restlessness and frustrations of the modern world, have helped to bring forth tempests in historiography which have resulted in the rise of intellectual history. The methods of science were taken over by historians in an effort to impart truth in a completely objective manner. Rationalist ideas were accepted, and men began to look to the act of thinking for the key to the course of historical events. Historical writing was markedly influenced.

Nineteenth century history is described by the word

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<sup>1</sup>Barker, Pacific Historical Review, XX, 2.

"scientific." Historians were impressed, as nearly everyone in the nineteenth century was, with the methods of the natural sciences. Leopold von Ranke adopted the rigid application of the scientific method to history in order that history might describe things as they really happened. Induction was important. Direct appeal to facts would give what really happened. Von Ranke invented the historical seminar in order that first-hand investigation of source materials could be carried on under professional supervision. The investigation took place, and results were recorded. Reigns, terms of office, laws, aggressions, oppressions, surrenders, compromises, and treaties were carefully written down. Simple authenticity was the aim.

This type of factual, "scientific" history reached America through her scholars who studied in German universities. Some of them took courses under Von Ranke himself. Seminars in the United States were fashioned after the German antecedent and the work produced was of the same style. Ideals of stark objectivity were clung to. The power of ideas in history was looked upon with suspicion. Historians lacked interpretive methods and thus, as John Higham states in the American Historical Review, they "were inclined to ignore the problem of intellectual influences and the whole field of intellectual studies as well. Instead, they concentrated on the general tendency of patriots to celebrate America's political heritage above all else."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>John Higham, "The Rise of American Intellectual History," American Historical Review, LVI (April, 1951), 457.

Not only did they ignore intellectual history, but they distrusted it as a pit of subjectivity. They shunned history which needed interpretation. A chronology of external events was safer to them than entrance into streams of thought.

As early as 1855, Walt Whitman is said to have issued a Declaration of Independence for the traditional American political historian. It was in that year that his first edition of Leaves of Grass appeared. In the preface he asked that the genius of America send forth those who would proclaim the spirit of America. The country was unique and needed a different type of interpretation.<sup>3</sup> This call was to be answered in the "new history."

Several Americans blazed the trail of intellectual history in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Their themes were European as was nearly all of the American output until the First World War. John W. Draper was the first and the most speculative. His work, History of the Intellectual Development of Europe (1876), proved the interest of the public in such history. Robinson pointed out that the work "enjoyed a reputation far exceeding its merits."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Cited in Roy Nichols, "A Political Historian Looks at Social History," Approaches to American Social History, ed. William Lingelbach (New York: Appleton Century, 1937), pp. 17-18.

<sup>4</sup>James Harvey Robinson, "Some Reflections on Intellectual History," The New History: Essays Illustrating the Modern Historical Outlook (New York: Macmillan Co., 1912), p. 101.

In his article, "The Rise of American Intellectual History," John Higham traces some of the early developments in the field of intellectual history in America. Draper was followed by Andrew D. White, who surveyed the clash of theology and science in A History of the Warfare of Science and Theology in Christendom (1896), and Henry C. Lea, who treated church institutions and ideas.<sup>5</sup> These men did not succeed in stirring further interest in intellectual history, nor did they turn to the study of American thought.

The American past seemed unable to inspire historians of ideas. Its intellectual achievement seemed insignificant compared with political, social, and economic interests. Henry Osborn Taylor made the observation "that American civilization was too practical and unlovely to warrant attention."<sup>6</sup> So it seemed for a few years to come.

Moses Coit Tyler and Edward Eggleston came the closest to writing American intellectual history in the nineteenth century. Tyler was disturbed over conditions which threatened American society during the Gilded Age. Guided by the conviction "that by studying America's mind and spirit he could illuminate its whole historical development,"<sup>7</sup> and "driven by a sense of patriotic dedication and upheld by confidence in the significance of ideas," Tyler launched out

<sup>5</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI, 454.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 455.

<sup>7</sup>This and the other quotations in this sentence are taken from the article by John Higham, ibid., 456.

in his work "to reassert the force of national ideals." The work was largely biographical and centered on the life and work of literary figures. Early American writings were chosen to show the conditions and conceptions typical of their time. He omitted the usual literary criticism and attempted to point out the influence of ideas in American history. Yet his work is literary rather than intellectual history. He succeeded in providing a useful and at the same time scholarly recapitulation of phases of American intellectual development but did not achieve his aim of revealing the mind and spirit of the American people.

Edward Eggleston touched on American ideas through another avenue. He was a pioneer social historian. In his last book in 1901, he stressed popular beliefs in colonial times.<sup>8</sup>

Both Tyler and Eggleston were self-trained scholars. Neither was a historian, but both regarded American thought as something worth writing about and having historical significance. They lived at a time when history had passed into hands of professionals with very different ideas of what was significant and their work was not highly influential.<sup>9</sup>

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America were periods of revolutionary changes in many

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 457.

<sup>9</sup>These are the views of John Higham.

ways. Van Wyck Brooks observed that it was an age of "news."<sup>10</sup> There were "news" in thought and action. There was the "new psychology," the "new education," the "new philosophy," the "new economics," and the "new jurisprudence." History, too, had its "new."

The prominent ideas of the day, evolution and pragmatism, played their part in the rise of the "new history." Society became looked upon as apart from and directing the state. Thus the political view of history lost rank. The pragmatic idea to use history to shape a more perfect society grew. The presuppositions of the scientific historians were challenged both in Europe and America. James Harvey Robinson led the way in America.

Robinson spent his lifetime battling against conventional history. Trained both in the United States and in Germany in the methods of nineteenth century historiography, he was dissatisfied with the exclusive emphasis on political, constitutional, and military history. In an essay, "The New History," printed in 1900 and contained in his previously mentioned collection of essays, Robinson stated that historians in selecting material for history "appear to be the victims of tradition in dealing with the past"; that historians showed little appreciation of the vast resources from which they could draw, and followed

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<sup>10</sup>Quoted in Morton G. White, Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism (New York: The Viking Press, 1952), p. 47.

generally "an established routine" in their selections.<sup>11</sup>

He continued:

When we consider the vast range of human interests, our histories furnish us with a sadly inadequate and misleading review of the past, and it might almost seem as if historians had joined in a conspiracy to foster a narrow and relatively unedifying conception of the true scope and intent of historical study.<sup>12</sup>

He vaguely pointed out what could be done:

The title of this little volume [The New History] has been chosen with the view of emphasizing the fact that history should not be regarded as a stationary subject which can only progress by refining its methods and accumulating, criticizing, and assimilating new material, but that it is bound to alter its ideals and aims. . . and that it should ultimately play an infinitely more important role in our intellectual life than it has hitherto done.<sup>13</sup>

Robinson was not the first to speak out in criticism of the old and in formulating the new, but he was the spokesman for a group. In classes, in lectures, and through the press he spread his ideas. In an article in the American Historical Review, John Higham says that Robinson "did more than anyone else in history to promote the study of intellectual history."<sup>14</sup>

In 1904 Robinson began teaching at Columbia University the famous course, "The History of the Intellectual Class in

<sup>11</sup>Robinson, "The New History," The New History, p. 2. Portions of this essay appeared in the periodical International Monthly for July, 1900.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 2-3

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>14</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI, 458.

Europe."<sup>15</sup> This course was instrumental in inspiring some of his students to set out on a study of intellectual history. An article in the Journal of Modern History states that Lynn Thorndike, Carlton J. Hayes, and J. Salwyn Schapiro were among the scholars who studied under him.<sup>16</sup> James T. Shotwell and Preserved Smith can be added to this list.

Not only was his influence diffused through his classes but also through his widely used texts. His high school and college texts stressed the intellectual and social trends of an age and had more popular appeal than the old style political chronicles.

His publication of essays, The New History (1912), is a source of his ideas. His preface stated that the essays "all illustrate, each in its particular way, the conception of 'the new history.'"<sup>17</sup>

His crusade for a new history led him to recruit allies among his colleagues. Charles A. Beard collaborated with him in the writing of the text, The Development of Modern Europe (1907-1908). Their aim was to pay more attention to recent history, "to enable the reader to catch up with his own times; to read intelligently the

<sup>15</sup>The syllabus for this course was published in 1919 under the title "An Outline of the History of the European Mind."

<sup>16</sup>Franklin Baumer, "Intellectual History and Its Problems," Journal of Modern History, XXI (September, 1949), 191.

<sup>17</sup>Robinson, The New History, p. v.

foreign news in the morning paper . . ."18 They also stated that they "ventured to devote much less space to purely political and military events"19 and treated generously economic matters, internal reforms, and even the general advance of science.

Interest was stirred, but results were not rapidly forthcoming. Social and economic studies were more prominent and were, perhaps, a necessary preliminary to studies in the realm of ideas. Such studies have their intellectual aspects. These fields were exciting and were paying off well. Intellectual history itself remained in abeyance for some time.

Perhaps the reason for the slow start in the field was that few professional historians had the skills needed to deal with it. They were so imbued with "scientific" training and its attention on concrete facts that their ability to handle ideas, opinions, or values was undeveloped.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, a few scholars from the fields of literature and philosophy, fields in which judgments of values are necessary, plunged into intellectual history and helped to point out its potentialities.

Among the more noteworthy attempts of this kind were

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<sup>18</sup>The Development of Modern Europe: Preface, quoted Fritz Stern (ed.), The Varieties of History from Voltaire to the Present (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1956), p. 257.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 258.

<sup>20</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI, 459.

Main Currents in American Thought (1927, 1930) by Vernon L. Parrington, a professor of English; America and French Culture (1927) by the literary scholar Howard Mumford Jones; and The Puritan Mind (1930) by Herbert Schneider, a philosopher. Each had its deficiencies and limitations, but such gropings along with the cultural consciousness of the 1920's were important incentives.

The first important contribution in the field by a historian was Carl Becker's Declaration of Independence; A Study in the History of Political Ideas which made its appearance in 1922.

An article in the American Mercury in 1925 written by Harry Barnes pointed to the opening of fields in the new history. He stated: "A systematic move to break with the old and develop a new more vital and realistic history is underway."<sup>21</sup> The author prophesied that an enormous revolution would come in subject matter and in the teaching and writing of history.

Charles Barker, in an article in the Pacific Historical Review, said that the field of "social and intellectual history of the United States was occupied as a field for teaching and field-conscious investigation and writing as early as the 1920's."<sup>22</sup> The courses given at Columbia by Robinson and his colleagues, as well as Schlesinger's

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<sup>21</sup>Harry Elmer Barnes, "New History," American Mercury V (May, 1925), 68.

<sup>22</sup>Barker, Pacific Historical Review, XX, 2.

Harvard course in social and intellectual history, released much energy in the new direction.

A significant factor in the field was the 1926 meeting of the American Historical Association. The first session on intellectual history was held during this meeting.<sup>23</sup>

The year 1927 is considered a milestone date as far as published work in intellectual history is concerned. According to John Higham's article which was just referred to, in this year were published Charles and Mary Beard's Rise of American Civilization with its suggestive chapters on phases of social and intellectual history and the first four volumes of The History of American Life series edited by Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox, both students of James Harvey Robinson at Columbia. These were starts by professional historians. They were really examples of a broadened social history. Intellectual development was woven into the work but was treated yet in a separate way from the rest of the story.

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<sup>23</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI, 463. It is interesting to note that in the 1926 issue of the American Historical Review which reported this meeting and in which the presidential address of Charles M. Andrews was published dealing with the mental attitudes and convictions largely responsible for the American Revolution, an address which can be considered intellectual history, a book review appeared of The New History and the Social Studies (1925) by Harry Elmer Barnes. Frederick J. Teggart, the reviewer, said: "His [Dr. H. E. Barnes] writings have been marked throughout by disapprobation of the accepted forms of procedure in the field. It may, therefore, be of interest to examine the present volume with a view to determining the source of the anti-historical polemic of one of the younger generation of college teachers."

By the middle 1930's the profession in general was apparently proceeding on the theory that interpretation, synthesis, and application were legitimate functions of the historian so long as he adhered to the relevant requirements of the scientific method in arriving at his conclusions and generalizations.<sup>24</sup>

This blended the old scientific history and the new history. The adjustment was not yet complete nor universally accepted. Practice and experience were needed.

There was some agitation for more research in the fields of social and intellectual history. Their interdependence was noted, but there was a demand for separate inquiry into intellectual history. There was some rather polite scoffing among the traditionals, but the movement was making progress.<sup>25</sup>

Franklin Baumer, in an article in the Journal of Modern History, considers 1940 another milestone date.<sup>26</sup> In this year the Journal of the History of Ideas was founded. Its purpose was stated in one of the early issues:

to foster studies which will emphasize the interrelations of several fields of historical study--the history of philosophy, of literature and arts, of the natural and social sciences, of religion, and of political and social movements; to afford a medium for the publication of researches which are likely to be of common interest to students in different fields; to bring them together periodically or make available such studies; and to promote greater collaboration among scholars

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<sup>24</sup>William C. Binkley, "Two World Wars and American Historical Scholarship," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXII (June, 1946), 12.

<sup>25</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI, 464.

<sup>26</sup>Baumer, Journal of Modern History, 191.

in all the provinces of intellectual history.<sup>27</sup>

The entire decade of the 1940's yielded an encouraging group of works in intellectual history. Some were by historians. The works of non-historians continued. Thomas Cochran's observation is worth repeating.

Perhaps the outstanding cumulative work of the last decade [1939-1949] has been the historian's invasion of the field of American intellectual history, heretofore inadequately exploited by philosophers and professional men.<sup>28</sup>

Leading the way were Merle Curti and Ralph Gabriel. Curti's Growth of American Thought (1943) was the first broad approach. It was an "effort to synthesize the whole range of printed ideas and their sociological setting."<sup>29</sup> Curti's approach was centered on the stream of thought less than upon the individual. A broad use of sources from dime novels to metaphysics gave a broad scope to the work.<sup>30</sup> It is the most comprehensive intellectual history yet written.

Less all-embracing was the synthesis of Ralph Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought: An Intellectual History Since 1815 (1940). According to Edward Saveth, just noted, Ralph Gabriel was more intent on

<sup>27</sup>Journal of the History of Ideas, I (April, 1940), Title Page.

<sup>28</sup>Thomas C. Cochran, Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXXIII, 152.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Edward N. Saveth, Understanding the American Past: American History and Its Interpretation (Boston; Little, Brown and Company, 1954), p. 51.

centering on specific aspects of our intellectual history which he held to be central to the development of the American democratic faith.

Other notable works of the decade were Puritanism and Democracy (1944) and Characteristically American (1949) by the philosopher, Ralph Barton Perry; and the works of his colleagues, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (1939) by Perry Miller, History of American Philosophy (1946) by Herbert Schneider, and Social Thought in America: The Revolt Against Formalism (1948) by Morton G. White. Another noteworthy work was Art and Life in America (1949) by Oliver Larkin. The literary scholars, Spiller, Thorp, Johnson, and Canby published a Literary History of the United States (1948) and Francis O. Matthiessen The American Renaissance (1941). The economist, Joseph Dorfman's The Economic Mind in American Civilization (1946-1949) is also a contribution to the field.

In addition there were specialized works inspired by contact with the leaders of intellectual history. Examples of these were Richard Hofstadter's Social Darwinism in American Thought (1945) and other Columbia University Studies, Arthur Ekirch's The Idea of Progress (1944), and Clement Eaton's Freedom of Thought in the Old South (1940). These are a few of the more important works of the decade.

Merle Curti summed up the efforts in a note to Thomas Cochran: "There has, in brief, been much stirring and productivity, but the basic methodological problems remain largely to be solved, and on these, I think, too few are

doing basic work."<sup>31</sup> Cochran continued:

The work of the last decade [1939-1949] represents, let us hope, what will someday be regarded simply as the pioneer or groping stage of American intellectual history.<sup>32</sup>

Another article stated: "In 1950, intellectual history was still seeking coherence, still eluding confinement."<sup>33</sup>

Since 1950 the field has drawn more and more scholars. A few of the more recent works in the field are The American Mind (1950) by Henry Steele Commager; Rendezvous with Destiny (1953) by Eric F. Goldman; The Age of Reform; from Bryan to F. D. R. (1955) by Richard Hofstadter; American Minds: A History of Ideas (1958) by Stow Persons.

Perhaps the greatest outlet at present, which is likewise a spur to research activity in the field, are periodicals which have opened themselves up as channels for publication of scholarly studies in intellectual history.<sup>34</sup> Some historical journals publish such articles today. Journals of other subjects also cut across departmental lines and include studies in intellectual history.

As will be pointed out in a later chapter, more intellectual history courses are being offered in colleges and universities. These classes have been growing during the years. Lists of doctoral dissertations show big hopes.

<sup>31</sup>Cochran, Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXXIII, 153.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI, 453.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 464.

The field of history may be passing into new hands--the hands of those who see the challenge and opportunities in what may still be called the "new history."

CHAPTER II  
THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF  
INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

Articles and lectures on the nature of intellectual history suggest an interesting but not conclusive effect on readers and listeners. Usually sprinkled somewhere in the periodical articles studied come expressions which create interest because the field is new, suspicion because it is different, challenge because it is difficult, confusion because it is so vague. A few such passages will indicate the point. "Intellectual history, of course, is a vastly complicated subject."<sup>1</sup> Intellectual history "outdoes all other fields . . .; it leads to the highest places."<sup>2</sup> "The basic methodological problems remain largely to be solved."<sup>3</sup> "In 1950, intellectual history was still seeking coherence, still eluding confinement."<sup>4</sup> "Intellectual history is marked by "the blessings of effervescence

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<sup>1</sup>Louis B. Wright, "Intellectual History and the Colonial South," William and Mary Quarterly, XVI (April, 1959), 215.

<sup>2</sup>Barker, Pacific Historical Review, XX, 4.

<sup>3</sup>Cochran, Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXXIII, 153.

<sup>4</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI, 453.

and the curse of confusion."<sup>5</sup> Lectures, with their tendency toward informality, produce other such side remarks. These remarks and the products of intellectual history point to the interest in the field but also to the need for clarification.

History journals point out that intellectual history differs from other kinds of history just because it has its own distinctive subject matter. It deals with the activities of man's mind. It is concerned with thought. The subject matter of the field is the one point upon which those who call themselves "intellectual historians" agree.

Articles show that there are a few widely varying concepts of what intellectual history is. This is due to the very wide or narrow interpretations which the term "intellectual history" may have. In its widest form one writer said:

History of this sort obviously deals with the thoughts and emotions of men--with reasoned argument and with passionate outburst alike. The whole range of human expression--as revealed in writing, speech, practice, and tradition--falls within its orbit. Indeed every declaration of mankind more explicit than abestial cry may in some sense be considered the subject matter of intellectual history.<sup>6</sup>

This possibility of vastness is responsible for most of the variation in the field which comes from vagueness con-

<sup>5</sup>John Higham, "Intellectual History and Its Neighbors," Journal of the History of Ideas, XV (June, 1954), 339.

<sup>6</sup>H. Stuart Hughes, Consciousness and Society (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 3.

cerning the aim and scope. This trouble is indicated in an article which quotes an instructor as saying: "Those teaching intellectual history should decide whether their chief interest should be 'the history of the intellectuals' or 'the history of the popular mass mind,' and whether they should study the relationship between the two, if any."<sup>7</sup> This statement points out two of the more extreme views of intellectual history and the problem of relation of ideas.

One approach, which writers call by different names, may be said to be the inner approach, or as some prefer to put it, the intellectual approach or the "aristocratic school." The aim is, primarily, to trace the development of ideas, to relate thought to thought, to show the inner affinities and the structure of ideas. Arthur O. Lovejoy, in the Journal of the History of Ideas, states this idea when he says intellectual history is an "analytical and critical inquiry into the nature, genesis, development, diffusion, interplay and effects of ideas which the generation of men have cherished, quarreled over, and apparently been moved by."<sup>8</sup> It is pointed out by John Higham, another contributor to this Journal, that this tendency is directed away from relating ideas to a context of events by noting their manifestations or results toward studying ideas for

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<sup>7</sup>Henry L. Swint, "Trends in the Teaching of Social and Intellectual History," Social Studies, XLVI (November, 1955), 246.

<sup>8</sup>Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Reflections on the History of Ideas," Journal of the History of Ideas, I (January, 1940), 8.

the sake of ideas--an attempt to "systematize the context of ideas."<sup>9</sup> Such an approach seems, perhaps, to merit the title history of philosophy rather than intellectual history. It varies from a history of philosophy in that it does not give a full and round picture of the various philosophers or ideas, but rather traces, by selecting relevant points, the development of ideas. Their main energies are often directed toward "tracing the genealogy of individual ideas (or idea-complexes); their common resort is to take one of the traditional 'big words' like nature or evolution and to track down its shiftings and connotations through time."<sup>10</sup> This type of approach is usually designated by the term history of ideas, but the title intellectual history is used interchangeably in many of the articles dealing with this type of work.

The other extreme approach is that which has been expounded by Crane Brinton in a rather lengthy introduction to his book Ideas and Men.<sup>11</sup> John Higham points this school out as having an external approach.<sup>12</sup> R. Wohl terms it the "plebeian school."<sup>13</sup> Professor Brinton says that the job of the intellectual historian is interest "in ideas

<sup>9</sup>John Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 341.

<sup>10</sup>R. Richard Wohl, "Intellectual History: An Historian's View," The Historian, XVI (Autumn, 1953), 63-64.

<sup>11</sup>Crane Brinton, Ideas and Men: The Story of Western Thought (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1950), pp. 3-28.

<sup>12</sup>Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 341.

<sup>13</sup>Wohl, The Historian, XVI, 64.

wherever he finds them, in wild ideas as well as sensible ideas, in refined speculation and in common prejudices."<sup>14</sup> He will not deal only with abstract ideas but will treat abstract ideas as they "filter into the heads and hearts of ordinary men and women."<sup>15</sup> Brinton's interest is in the masses--"in what they believed to be right and wrong, in what they hoped for in this world and the next,"<sup>16</sup>--their answers to the "Big Questions." He believes that many social historians are "in a sense, intellectual historians, focusing on what went on in the heart and head of the man in the street."<sup>17</sup>

Tending toward the same extreme is a statement by John Higham: "Intellectual history is unlimited in scope . . . It deals with all sorts of thought."<sup>18</sup> He continues with the idea that intellectual history may consider the attitudes of simple people as well as systematized knowledge. It can include Little Orphan Annie and Adam Smith. This doesn't mean being absorbed in the trivial, but the writer feels that in studying the bold contours, ideas, whether from comics or philosophers, may be studied.<sup>19</sup>

Two other approaches which are modifications of the more extreme views have a common bond of agreement but then

<sup>14</sup>Brinton, Ideas and Men, 7.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 340.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 340-341.

branch off, one to the "aristocratic school" and the other to the "plebeian school." These concern themselves with the intellectual climate or the trend of fundamental concepts and attitudes that pervade the country during a particular era. This is sometimes expressed by the German term Weltanschauung, which, taken literally, means a world-view or, more widely, a philosophy explaining the purpose of the world as a whole. The fundamental concepts which form the basis for this study are generally those things which make up a philosophy of life, the view toward God, nature and man--his nature, his purpose and his end. The concern is not of particular philosophies, ideologies, or theories but the general patterns--"the general conceptions of nature which informed men's thinking . . . in a given era."<sup>20</sup> Society takes the shape of these ideas and gears itself toward those things which will conform to the general thought patterns of the age. During various periods of years these patterns change as does society in its efforts to realize them. The task of the intellectual historian as viewed by advocates of this approach is to delineate the intellectual climate through a study of the predominant views of a period, to integrate this with the characteristic factors in society during the period, and to explain the changes that take place in the thought patterns.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>John C. Greene, "Objectives and Methods in Intellectual History," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIV (June, 1957), 60.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 59; 67.

Where those who uphold the above idea about intellectual history disagree is on the point of what to study to ascertain the intellectual climate. Several men who represent the two different viewpoints are here quoted.

Franklin Baumer tends toward the "plebeian" approach. He says that discovery of this climate is not easy.

If it were merely a question of pegging the thought of a few great thinkers, the task would be fairly simple. But intellectual history is the history of the whole intellectual class . . .<sup>22</sup>

In a footnote he explains what he considers the intellectual class to be. He says they are:

those persons who do not merely feel or will or act but who pause to think and reflect about the problems of the world they live in. More often than not, an intellectual is simply a person who holds informed and intelligent opinions and who has had some, though not necessarily a great deal of, mental training. By this definition the "intellectual class" would include not only the professional and original thinkers, not only the professional philosophers, scientists, theologians, and scholars in general, but also creative men and artists, the popularizers, and the intelligent reading public.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, he feels that the intellectual climate cannot be delineated by studying the great books, but the intellectual historian must delve into "'tracts for the times' (pamphlets, manifestoes, speeches, and sermons), novels (both good and bad), essays, letters, private reflections, etc."<sup>24</sup> It embraces "popular literature of all sorts."<sup>25</sup> Baumer does not go to the extreme

<sup>22</sup>Baumer, Journal of Modern History, XXI, 192.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 191.

interest in the "masses" but has stretched the scope by widening a definition of the intellectual class.

Supporting this view is Merle Curti's idea that "American intellectual history must go beyond a study of the ideas of the intelligentsia. . . . This concept has led him to search . . . fresh types of source material like dime novels and obscure sermons and Fourth of July orations."<sup>26</sup>

The other approach which is concerned with the intellectual climate tends toward the aristocratic school. The study is of what R. Wohl, writing in The Historian, calls the "accredited intellectuals" whom he describes as follows:

. . . men of education and training who pursued their reflections within a tradition of formal discourse, often in clearly discernible styles; and who were regarded, by contemporaries or posterity, as serious thinkers.<sup>27</sup>

Preserved Smith says that the "mentality of a given epoch"<sup>28</sup> is partly conditioned "by the climate of the intellectual atmosphere in which it lives. This intellectual atmosphere is the world-view held by the dominant classes."<sup>29</sup> He believes the intellectual historian must study the thought

<sup>26</sup>James Harvey Young, Review of Probing Our Past by Merle Curti, The Journal of Southern History, XXI (August, 1955), 390-391.

<sup>27</sup>Wohl, The Historian, XVI, 63.

<sup>28</sup>Preserved Smith, A History of Modern Culture (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1930-1934), II, 20.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

of "'that particular group' which has 'contributed most of the permanent value to the wisdom and beauty of the world' rather than the 'spirit of the masses.'"<sup>30</sup> He further describes the study as that of the "choicer minds."<sup>31</sup> Perry Miller, more recently, has stated a like opinion. He would confine the intellectual historian to the study of the "speculations" of the "serious and competent thinkers."<sup>32</sup>

The approaches to intellectual history have been summed up by classing them in four main divisions: (1) a history of ideas or the tracing of ideas or idea-complexes; (2) a search for the intellectual climate of an era and changes in it by studying the ideas of the "accredited intellectuals" and characteristic factors in society; (3) the same as number two except that the intellectual class is widened; (4) a search for the answer to the "Big Questions" by studying the "ideas" of all of society, with a particular stress on the masses.

It cannot be said that any of these approaches is wrong. A question could be--Just which one is intellectual history? The answer as it stands now, would be--All of them. Each makes its own contribution is the view expressed by John Greene in his article.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup>Swint, Social Studies, XLVI, 249.

<sup>31</sup>Quoted in Swint, ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Greene, Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIV

Of the first it has already been pointed out that it is more of a history of ideas. Standing alone it breathes the air of philosophy. The analyses are useful to the other "divisions" of intellectual history.

The last division appears to present a formidable task. "In an effort to make clear what large groups of men and women . . . have felt about the answers to the great questions"<sup>34</sup> or in the effort "to try to find the relations between the ideas of the philosophers, the intellectuals, the thinkers, and the actual way of living of the millions who carry the tasks of civilization,"<sup>35</sup> where does one begin? Then, too, is the massive study of what goes on "in the heart and head of the man in the street"<sup>36</sup> essential to intellectual history? Is it possible to ascertain this? These questions on this handling of ideas on a lower level are raised by a comment which concludes that perhaps this kind of "intellectual history" is not intellectual history at all.

On the level of popular acceptance, ideas can scarcely be handled in intrinsic terms: they are not sufficiently explicit for that. Efforts on the part of historians to deal with them have all too frequently degenerated into a mechanical and boring catalogue of curious notions. Where they have been successfully (that is, meaningfully) handled, they have been integrated in a general structure of explanation covering all the interlocking practices of a given society. In short, they have become a constituent part of general social history . . .<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Brinton, Ideas and Men, 4.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>36</sup>Hughes, Consciousness and Society, 10. In addition

With approaches two and three the extremes are avoided, but this is where the problems become more clearly defined. In the search for the Weltanschauung, who best portrays the ideas? One approach, as mentioned, assumes that the intellectual climate of an era is found in the thought of an extended intellectual class--the élite plus popularizers, vulgarizers, and intelligent reading public. A question put forth by a contributor to a history journal asks about this point:

. . . how an entire society, as distinguished from a few individuals within that society, comes by the ideas it holds collectively. . . . Where does the majority, the 90 per cent or more who are neither reflective or articulate<sup>38</sup>

get its views?

Professor Baumer continues with the idea that more work could be done in analyzing the exact relationship between the great works and minor or second-rate works. He says:

It might be discovered, for example, that the so-called "mind" of an age is not so very homogeneous after all; that while the intellectuals (of whatever quality) of an age share certain presuppositions, they do not share others. There may be (I believe there is) an all-inclusive intellectual framework, but this framework is sufficiently elastic to permit extremely important variations.<sup>39</sup>

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to the comment made here on these two approaches, John Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 341-344, has an appraisal of the two from the angle of the philosophical commitments underlying each approach.

<sup>38</sup>Baumer, Journal of Modern History, XXI, 192-193.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

A little challenge to this is pointed out in Wohl's article in The Historian. He says that those who extend the class of intellectuals must show as they imply "that there is discernible an historically reciprocal flow of intellectual influence from popular culture to the intellectual élite of school and academy."<sup>40</sup>

A viewpoint which favors the study of the élite intellectual class states that the dominant members in society are at one with regard to the climate of an age. "Their allegiance to this set of values is well-nigh instinctive."<sup>41</sup> The author continues:

Customarily we look to the great writings of a culture--and to a lesser extent to music and art--to enlighten us as to its ethos. It may be objected that this procedure restricts our view to an intellectual élite and fails to take into consideration the sentiments of the broad masses. Over a short period that is certainly true. But surely it is a phenomenon familiar from all ages that a new idea originally stated on a rarefied level has become within a generation or two the common coin of conversation. In thus descending from the heights it naturally loses its original distinction and precision. Nevertheless, it can go through a monstrous amount of vulgarization and still remain recognizable--still indicate the origin of a new element in the ethos.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to the statement of approaches, one further point on the scope of intellectual history remains to be made. So far the range of thought has been considered.

<sup>40</sup>Wohl, The Historian, XVI, 66.

<sup>41</sup>H. Stuart Hughes, An Essay for Our Times (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p. 37.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 38.

Intellectual history does not stop here. Ideas are important, but are not all of history. There must be a "search for connections between bodies of thought and related areas of intellectual or social experience."<sup>43</sup> An important gauge of the intellectual climate of an era is the character of society. Ideas do not exist in a vacuum. In fact, a check on the accuracy of the selection of the ideas of an era would be an investigation of the procedures and manners of its society. The two form a certain unity. This idea has been pointed out in an article on intellectual history in the William and Mary Quarterly by Louis Wright. He says:

To some scholars, intellectual history connotes a study in something abstract and esoteric, almost as colorless as a mathematical theorem. If they are concerned with the history of ideas, they try to dissect out ideas as if they were the nerves in a cadaver, and in the books in which they embalm their results one frequently detects a faint whiff of formaldehyde. They forget that ideas develop and have their effect in living organisms and cannot be separated from their social milieu without distortion.<sup>44</sup>

Again he says, "Intellectual and social history are so closely related that they cannot be divorced. . . . Disembodied ideas never float around loose, even in the most sophisticated societies."<sup>45</sup>

H. Stuart Hughes in referring to the ideas of the intellectual élite says that many of the "more profound

<sup>43</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI, 453.

<sup>44</sup>Wright, William and Mary Quarterly, XVI, 214.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 226.

components [of their set values] are never explicitly stated: they are so taken for granted that they require no open formulation--indeed, to formulate them may provoke heated denial or . . . embarrassment."<sup>46</sup> His idea is that one must look too for what they fail to say. Besides reading between the lines and looking for word patterns in written work, these unspoken ideas and beliefs are found portrayed in the existing society.

This unity between the ideas and social character of an era has caused the frequent combination of the words "social" and "intellectual" in describing intellectual history. The term "social" is ordinarily implied in the title intellectual history except in the case of the first approach which considers ideas as a completion of its task. Social history, by itself, is concerned exclusively with the working of society and has its own field, but, according to the above mentioned writers, some aspects of society must be included in intellectual history.

This is the nature and scope of the field as presented by writers on the subject. The consideration so far suggests other questions and problems of intellectual history which will be considered in succeeding chapters.

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<sup>46</sup>Hughes, An Essay for Our Times, 38.

CHAPTER III  
INTELLECTUAL HISTORY AND INTERDISCIPLINARY  
RELATIONS

A University of Paris history professor, Albert Mathiez, made an interesting comment on the New History. He stated:

The New History, which comes to us from the United States of course, declares with pride that to attain its aims its followers must be at once economists, sociologists, philosophers, and journalists, altogether omniscient; in short--Americans.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the passage is read with a smile, but it is true that that development of the New History which became intellectual history is, of necessity, a widely integrated field. This can be seen in an essay by Arthur O. Lovejoy in which he lists, according to course labels, twelve divisions which are principally recognized as having to do with the general field of intellectual history. These are: the history of philosophy, the history of science, folklore and parts of ethnography, parts of the history of language, the history of theological doctrines and religious beliefs, literary history as far as the thought-content is concerned, comparative literature,

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Crane Brinton, "The 'New History' and 'Past Everything,'" The American Scholar, VIII (April, 1939), 144.

history of arts, economic history, history of education, political and social history, and that part of sociology dealing with climates of opinion or ruling ideas and political institutions, laws, or social conditions in a period.<sup>2</sup>

Another statement which brings out this point says:

No other field of historical research offers such challenging opportunities for integration between history and the other fields of knowledge as does the relatively little-developed area of intellectual history. Here the interdisciplinary barriers are at their lowest and the historian is in a position to respond to the widest range of intellectual stimuli.<sup>3</sup>

Formerly historians held to their limited specialized field. Intellectual historians cannot do this. Their topic, thought or ideas, does not manifest itself in neatly enclosed channels which fit in with the various divisions of college courses. It has to be sought out and not only in the field of history. Thoroughness in the field demands a reaching out beyond the bounds of history to get to the very heart of the problem. An idea may ramify into a dozen other fields. To understand its manifestations in only one may make it actually unintelligible. Specialists in their fields may completely miss the point of important historical conceptions because of the dispersion of details which make up the whole story.

Specialization is still needed, but it is not suf-

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<sup>2</sup>Arthur Lovejoy, Essays in the History of Ideas (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1955), pp. 1-2.

<sup>3</sup>Saveth, Understanding the American Past, 51.

ficient, especially in the field of intellectual history. This has been stated in an article in the Journal of the History of Ideas by Arthur Lovejoy.

It is . . . a highly characteristic feature of contemporary work in many of the branches of historiography that are in any way concerned with the thoughts of men . . . that the fences are--not indeed, generally breaking down--but, at a hundred specific points, being broken through; and that the reason for this is that, at least at those points, the fences have been found to be obstacles to the proper comprehension of what lies on either side of them.<sup>4</sup>

This breaking through the fences into other disciplines is a necessity for any scholarship, but it is a particular need of intellectual history. Academic isolationism inhibits freedom of thought<sup>5</sup> and there is, perhaps, no field where freedom of thought is so essential if worthwhile results are to be produced.

Crossing over into other fields can have its problems. In an article, "Reflections on the History of Ideas," Arthur Lovejoy says that specialists in one field are not trained in the methods of other disciplines. They are inadequately equipped to deal with them.<sup>6</sup> This is certainly a defect of specialization which can be remedied by closer cooperation between the disciplines in areas where they overlap. This can be accomplished by mutual study of

<sup>4</sup>Lovejoy, Journal of the History of Ideas, I, 5.

<sup>5</sup>Bert J. Loewenberg, The History of Ideas: 1935-1945; Retrospect and Prospect (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1947), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup>Lovejoy, Journal of the History of Ideas, I, 5.

of problems which are, by their very nature, common to any combination of disciplines.<sup>7</sup> In connection with this John Higham points out that those philosophers, artists, literati, scientists, or theologians who contribute to the writing of intellectual history must be guided by the aims and methods of historical method as long as the field bears the title intellectual history.<sup>8</sup> Without this, the varied interests, backgrounds, and methods can only cause an increase of confusion.

There are three attitudes, stated by one writer, which intellectual historians may adopt in their studies. One may be that of expansionism in which there is jostling and rivalry among competing disciplines for a sphere of influence in intellectual history, each trying to show its superiority of matter, method or importance. Much of this immature child's play goes on in academic circles. At the other extreme, intellectual historians might stick to a policy of isolationism in which they pursue their own ways and ignore any tumult. This may be peace at any cost, but the price of incompleteness or inaccuracy is dear to pay. Lastly, a spirit of collectivism may be adopted in which scholars of the various fields inspire one another and borrow from one another for the sake of contributing to the growth and development of knowledge. It can lead to formally cooperative programs. This attitude develops

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>8</sup>Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 339.

from a mature understanding of the reality of the fact that knowledge in any field is an integral part of the body of knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

An article in Social Studies by Henry Swint points out that in reaching out for the material for his study-- those things which will clarify an intellectual climate-- the intellectual historian in his study of literature, art, philosophy, science, or religion does not study it from the angle of the literary student, the artist, philosopher, scientist, or theologian. This he, as well as members of other fields who might show him allegiance, must remember. Not the form and style, but the thought in the literature is his to study. Not the aesthetic quality or the artistic skill shown in music, painting, sculpture, or architecture, but the attitudes and the values which these portray about the period and people are his interest. He does not study philosophy to get the answers to basic questions concerning man and the world, but to note the beliefs, the concepts which elucidate the lives of the people in the period under study. Science is studied because of its importance in setting cultural bases. He studies religion to learn about man from the ways he has sought to deal with his God or gods.<sup>10</sup>

Generally speaking, the fields of interest for intellectual historians are those which have just been mentioned.

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<sup>9</sup>These three attitudes are found in Higham, ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Swint, Social Studies, XLVI, 250.

However, the various approaches to intellectual history which were differentiated in the preceding chapter have their own tendencies toward special divisions or widened divisions of the group listed. This is noted in the articles read. The extreme internal approach leans toward philosophy and belles-lettres. It is an intellectual approach which is satisfied most completely in humanistic scholarship. The extreme external approach has more functional tendencies which are characteristic of the social sciences. The central approaches are modifications of the two above with a tendency to extend the humanities widely to include popular literature and other vulgarized forms--the humanities from popular to plain "trash." This is not a clear-cut distinction. There has been much cutting across lines, but the humanities and the social sciences are different, the former exploring the inner world of values, the latter tending to objectify ideas into forms of behavior. John Higham, in his article on intellectual history in the Journal of the History of Ideas, expresses the idea that perhaps historians will see more and more opportunities by learning from each, for the discipline of the intellectual historian "lies between and to some extent bridges the gulf separating the humanities from the social sciences."<sup>11</sup>

In general, the writers on intellectual history show that there is a tendency to feel that an understanding

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<sup>11</sup>Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 343-344.

of the humanities is a must for intellectual historians. A Mississippi Valley Historical Review article by Theodore Blegen says, "In a word, I feel that the values to history of an understanding, let us say of the fine arts or of literature or of philosophy, may transcend possibly those of the more narrowly described social sciences."<sup>12</sup> He adds that the humanities give feeling and breadth in history. Another article says, "Among the branches of history the intellectual one lies closest to the humanities. . . . Certainly the humanities have influenced the writing of intellectual history far more directly than have the social sciences."<sup>13</sup>

Three areas of learning are mentioned most frequently in articles dealing with intellectual history. These are philosophy, literature, and the social sciences. Their relations to intellectual history are pointed out.

Philosophy is needed in any history. One must be enough of a logician and epistemologist to be able to handle the matter of history. It becomes more of a need in the intellectual branch of history. One of the basic factors in method in intellectual history is analysis of thought or ideas. This is of prime importance in discovering the intellectual climate of an age. His philosophical responsibility becomes a real obligation because it is this

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<sup>12</sup>Theodore Blegen, in a comment on a paper by Thomas Cochran entitled "A Decade of American Histories," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, LXXIII (April, 1949), 175.

<sup>13</sup>Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 344.

interpretive unity which is needed to make intellectual history significant. This is a view of John Higham who says, "It is hard to see how an internal analysis of thought can proceed without some philosophical training."<sup>14</sup> It is from philosophy that skill in definition is attained, as well as the ability to discriminate meanings, detect basic assumptions, and formulate issues. "These abilities come into constant play in intellectual history because the factual units with which it principally deals are not events which we can observe directly but rather ideas and sentiments which we must define in order to know."<sup>15</sup>

In connection with the use of philosophy in the field of intellectual history, a periodical carried an article on "The Role of Protophilosophies in Intellectual History."<sup>16</sup> It is pointed out that a study of protophilosophies has a six-fold interest for the intellectual historian. (1) Such a study would show what philosophers have in common with each other. In seeking the pervading intellectual climate of an age it is important to have a realization of the things which the people believe to be so self-evident that they are not questioned. Usually histories of philosophy which a historian might study show innovations made in philosophies, but pay little attention

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>George Boas, "The Role of Protophilosophies in Intellectual History," Journal of Philosophy, XLV (December 2, 1948), 673-684.

to what is retained from those who have gone before. These retentions can be real clues to what one is looking for. (2) A study of the protophilosophies may explain why certain conclusions were not drawn by the philosopher one is investigating, when such conclusions seem inevitable to people of a later time. A philosopher often orientates his thinking to suit his ends. (3) It may enable one to see why a certain philosopher took up questions that his successors were not interested in, or why certain questions are not discussed while they are of great interest to those who follow. (4) The study may lead to a final solution of why people change their minds. (5) Historians with a tendency toward anachronistic interpretations of ideas would be helped. The protophilosophies show how much man has been faithful or gone beyond his intellectual past. Words vary in meaning as do ideas. Ideas lie in both the presuppositions and the overt expressions of the philosopher. (6) The study would help to clarify why philosophies are constructed.

Mr. Boas believes that such a study would be not only of interest, but also an aid to intellectual historians.

It is not, perhaps, without significance that philosophers have made important advances in the field of intellectual history. The two have natural affinities. However, it is the view of one writer that philosophers often become so involved in their interest in abstractions

that, rather than giving the substance of thought in an age, they concentrate on particular ideas without concern for genetic relationship. "It is significant that a philosopher's proposal to trace the history of liberal social thought in modern America should turn out instead as an analytical critique of five men."<sup>17</sup>

Intellectual historians can do well by using the works of the philosophers, or, where these are inadequate for their purpose, they must be able to apply philosophic method in dealing with thoughts and ideas. The matter of intellectual history is more or less abstract. It has been said, ". . .perhaps the most central contributions have come from philosophy, which is the critic of abstractions."<sup>18</sup>

Not only in method, but also in such problems as causation and relations among ideas the historian must make use of philosophy.

Despite what has been said concerning philosophy, intellectual history is not philosophy. It remains intellectual history. In his article, "Intellectual History and Its Problems," Franklin Baumer says that there are places where the fence is broken through into philosophy because in studying ideas one must know something about the ideas--not their values, logical consistency, accuracy, or aesthetic quality--which is the exclusive work of

<sup>17</sup>Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 344.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

philosophy, but "in their development and relation to each other in time, how and why they appear at a particular time, and their effects on concrete historical situations."<sup>19</sup>

While the main contribution of philosophy may be analytical precision, that of literature is of another type. Literature contains ideas of the times. One not only gets the ideas, but the imaginative and emotional overtones. This is noted by a writer who says that a study of literature can add dimension to intellectual history because of the "fusion of thought and feeling"<sup>20</sup> in it.

Arthur Lovejoy points out that "the thoughts of men of past generations have had their most extensive and often their most adequate and psychologically illuminating, expression"<sup>21</sup> in literature.

James Harvey Robinson has said that for most human history, the historian has to be content "with the face and appearance of things,"<sup>22</sup> but for a view into what went on underneath this appearance one can turn to sources in literature.

<sup>19</sup>Baumer, Journal of Modern History, XXI, 192.

<sup>20</sup>Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 345.

<sup>21</sup>Lovejoy, Journal of the History of Ideas, I, 9.

<sup>22</sup>James Harvey Robinson, "Newer Ways of Historians," American Historical Review, XXXV (January, 1930), 254-255.

Roy Harvey Pearce in his article, "A Note on Method in the History of Ideas," says that literature is the fullest form of the expression of ideas. Although the intent is esthetic the ideas as concepts or assumptions are historical.<sup>23</sup>

Opinions vary on which literature best portrays the thought of an age. Some would confine it to the higher and more refined literature, the classics of an age, that which will live on after the age as being worthwhile. Others would include this type and widen it to take in lesser types, while still others prefer to use popular forms as newspapers and other more commonplace productions.

The more complex poets of any age eminently portray its ideas. Novels and dramas also reflect contemporaneous life. These are often fictional and romantic in form, but, in reality, they are serious descriptions and criticisms by well-qualified observers and thinkers. It is part of the life which they know. They build their work from ideas which have taken on social meaning.<sup>24</sup>

As is the case with philosophers, literary men, too, have contributed to intellectual history. They "have resurrected many of the movements of thought which have

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<sup>23</sup>Roy Harvey Pearce, "A Note on Method in the History of Ideas," Journal of the History of Ideas, IX (June, 1948),

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 372-379.

supported and pervaded literary achievements."<sup>25</sup> Literature has a great historical value being "an indispensable body of documents for the study of man and of what he has done with ideas and what diverse ideas have done for and to him."<sup>26</sup> However, intellectual historians have often felt unsatisfied with their attempts, because they have a tendency for literary criticism and aesthetic appreciation which is not a part of intellectual history. They vivify literary works instead of using the work to understand thought. Literature is studied for literary value rather than for its historical value. The historical value is that "which throws most light upon what was distinctive of the thoughts, the moods, the taste, of his age and group . . ."<sup>27</sup> To be of aid to intellectual history, literary men must be concerned with a historical purpose. History and literature must break through fences in order to cooperate for the benefit of the body of knowledge. The opinion of one author is that literature ". . . is the meeting place of more subjects that are vital to history than any other single meeting place."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 345.

<sup>26</sup>Lovejoy, Journal of the History of Ideas, I, 16.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>28</sup>Bernard De Voto, "Interrelations of History and Literature," in Approaches to American Social History, ed. William E. Lingelbach, p. 54.

Again all intellectual historians do not agree with the relationships as pointed out. Some put more stress on the humanities while others stress the social sciences. This, no doubt, is due to the various ranges in scope which have been noted. Those who tend toward the aristocratic school ally with the humanities while the plebeian school tends toward the social sciences. Some see interrelationships, but feel that there is danger of subjectivity.

Henry E. Sigerist's admonition to scientists can perhaps be applied here. "What we need is a coordination and integration of the knowledge we already possess rather than new knowledge."<sup>32</sup> Invasion of other provinces of learning is inevitable for the intellectual historian. Wherever light can be shed on the thought of a time, he must be willing to go even if it means being "omniscient" or, in other words, "American." His is not the task of a meddler involving himself in a formal way in what he is not trained for, but of a scholar seeking, according to his own method, that which will shed light on that treatment of ideas which lies within his own province.

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<sup>32</sup>Cited in Loewenberg, History of Ideas . . . , 15.

CHAPTER IV  
PROBLEMS IN THE FIELD OF  
INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

It is not under any kind of delusion that this chapter is entitled "Problems in the Field of Intellectual History." What have already been discussed in chapters two and three are "problems." Under consideration here are other major problems which have been mentioned or alluded to in articles pertinent to the subject. It is noteworthy that some of these problems are not peculiar to that branch called "intellectual history" but are rather common in the entire field. In a branch trying to come into its own they are important.

It has been mentioned before that the method of intellectual history needs clarification. Various contributors to history journals have voiced their opinions about the method to be used. Following along in Twentieth Century style, a century which Morton White calls the "Age of Analysis,"<sup>1</sup> the intellectual historian uses analysis as an important tool. The field likewise calls for good syntheses. Some authors stress the need for more analysis,

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Russell H. Bastert, "The New American History and Its Audience," Yale Review, XLVI (December, 1956), 247.

others for more synthesis, while others take for granted a balance of power. With variation of aim and scope follows some variation in method.

The internal approach which has been mentioned, of necessity, deals largely with analysis of ideas. In keeping with the tone of this approach is the method suggested in the most recent of the articles concerning methods in intellectual history.<sup>2</sup> John C. Greene explains and illustrates a method which he claims is not original but is derived from that of Alfred Whitehead, Arthur O. Lovejoy, Perry Miller, and Max Weber.

In an effort to discover not particular philosophies, ideologies, or theories, but the general concepts that pervade the thought of an age, analysis and synthesis must be employed. He points out the great need for analysis in order that the thought of an age be handled adequately.

The first requirement is textual analysis with its need for "a wide coverage of material and a capacity to penetrate to implicit major premises."<sup>3</sup> In order to give wide coverage, the intellectual historian should aim at broadness and variety in studying source materials. American intellectual historians need to be cautioned here. It is essential for them to realize in their analysis that a study of American thought in itself is not a sufficient range for intellectual history. America is a part of the

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<sup>2</sup>Greene, Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIV, 58-74.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 60.

Western world, and its thought is inseparable from Western thought. "In short, the American intellectual historian must be first and foremost an intellectual historian and only secondarily an American historian."<sup>4</sup>

Greene continues that the analysis will reveal the major premises held in the age. Dominant ideas and sub-dominant ideas as well as remains of ideas from previous ages and new developments will be discovered co-existing. A study of the premises will reveal inherent relations.

Once the pattern of the age is established, an effort at synthesis is necessary to show the relations between various ideas. It must be shown how and why the particular movement of thought came to be. Causal influences are many and vary in the force of their influence.

After all these factors have been considered, a narrative should be constructed which tells not only "what happened and how and why it happened but makes it happen again for the reader."<sup>5</sup> In order to achieve this, emotional manifestations of the idea should be grasped from the language, literature, art, and other such creations of the day, because ideas are apprehended not only intellectually but emotionally as well. Without this the intellectual historian cannot "re-create the past and make it live again in men's imaginations."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Putting more stress on synthesis and seeing ideas at work in society is the method written up by Roy Pearce.<sup>6</sup> Writing in 1948, he said that most of the studies up to that time had been analytical--analyzing, breaking down, describing the "origin, growth, mutation, collocation, and interaction of . . . ideas."<sup>7</sup> He suggests that the reason may be that there is not enough concern with content and methodology beyond the stage of analysis of ideas. Analysis is needed in pioneering. Ideas are made available through analysis but are put back into social context by the process of synthesis in which relations between ideas, the effect of ideas on society, and the expression of ideas in the various disciplines are noted.

The form for such writing which Pearce outlines is first of all to isolate an idea as it is found in an intellectual group of some given people living in a definite section during some given period. These people share problems--political, economic, cultural, spiritual. The intellectuals of this group of people are keenly aware of these problems. They ponder them and try to understand and solve them. Gradually there are writings and debates on the ideas. These people spend their energy in such intellectual gymnastics when there are ideas that they feel are valid and significant. By studying their works an

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<sup>7</sup>Pearce, Journal of the History of Ideas, IX, 372-379.

idea is recognized.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, the idea is put back into society to see how the idea and the social body are modified and how this idea interacts with other ideas. In carrying out this last step, three types of data are pointed out as necessary inclusions for a total study. (1) As a background, the study of the society's daily living and its historical, political, and economic record is needed in order to see what made the society receptive to the idea. (2) Study the idea as it was communicated by the members of the society itself. This is done through studying the manifestations in the fields of the various disciplines during the period. (3) Study historical, political, and economic records to see if and how the idea affected action.<sup>9</sup> The totality of the field is thus considered--studying the idea, the society, and the idea working in the society.

Another method, expressed by Franklin Baumer in the Journal of Modern History, bears relation to the above, but he stresses the importance of causal relations.<sup>10</sup> The great need as he sees it is for a "tough analysis of both the process and the dynamics of intellectual change within

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 374.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 374-375.

<sup>10</sup>Baumer, Journal of Modern History, XXI (September, 1949), 191-203.

a relatively short period of history."<sup>11</sup> This analysis must first be exercised in search of the intellectual climate of a period. To do this comparative studies on the different branches of thought and their relation to one another must be made. There are many special studies in the various fields of thought but not comparative works which point to interrelationships. The period studied must be short in order that a "detailed analysis" can be made. If long periods of time, even a few generations, are taken, the job cannot be done thoroughly.

Secondly, he says, analysis of intellectual change must be made. Causation is basic to intellectual history. Philosophers and propagandists have made "intuitive generalizations" but what is needed is that historians make a "tough analysis." Again, short periods of time close enough to each other should be studied in order that, by close observation, intellectual change can be seen at work. There is a possibility that general laws might be formulated as a result of such studies. If not general laws, at least some clarification would be afforded.

From the discovery of the intellectual climate to the study of causes for it, the same author puts inquiry into the effects of the idea next in his suggested method of procedure--a study of how ideas work and are worked on in society.

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 195.

In articles by John Higham there are a few more comments on method. He points out that for its own practical purposes, in order to develop autonomy in the field of history, intellectual history must work on the "clarification of the causal connections between ideas."<sup>12</sup> This calls for internal analysis. But at the same time intellectual history must contribute to history as a whole. This means "studying the causal linkage of ideas with political, social, and economic events."<sup>13</sup>

In another article, he states that comprehensive syntheses cannot make any significant contributions at present and that narrowly specialized monographs are already numerous.<sup>14</sup> He feels that a new kind of synthesis is needed. Such would follow after there has been close analysis of popular attitudes and their ramifications over long spans of time in order that transitions may be noted. His ideas on what to analyze are found in this statement: "Concepts as democracy, nationalism, individualism, class consciousness, race prejudice, anti-intellectualism and fundamental beliefs about God and nature still challenge historical scholarship."<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 347.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI (April, 1951), 471.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

Merle Curti's ideas are stated by a historian as stressing a need for studies in local history as a background. The background and education of early settlers, the role played by church, school and press, "forces . . . that differentiate one community from another . . . the relations of Main Street to the world"<sup>16</sup> as well as histories of American colleges and universities, the professions, anti-intellectualism, moderates and their ideas would all make profitable studies. After many such are made, material would thus be provided for comprehensive treatment. This is a big order because no section can be understood until novelists, poets, essayists, painters, musicians, sculptors, historians and biographers have interpreted it.<sup>17</sup> All have contributions which can be made to intellectual history.

Louis B. Wright speaks in a similar strain when he says, "The greatest advances in studying . . . intellectual history . . . will come from fresh appraisals of society on various levels and in various places."<sup>18</sup>

The whole problem of method boils down to be (1) the study of sources to discover ideas which make up the intellectual climate; (2) following the ideas through their growth and mutations and establishing causal relations; (3) trying to see how the ideas have worked out in society.

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<sup>16</sup>Blegen, Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXI, 9-10.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>18</sup>Wright, William and Mary Quarterly, XVI, 226.

There seems to be agreement on this general form, but there is some variation in numbers one and three. What should be studied as the sources of ideas and what should be the scope of the study of the working of the ideas are where the problems lie. Whatever the course chosen, many hours of patient, hard work are involved plus having to cross over into fields which are unfamiliar and for which the ordinary historian is not prepared.

The question arises: Which method is best? John Greene answers this by saying, ". . . every method has its advantages and disadvantages. . . . No single approach to the study of ideas is sufficient in itself. Tastes vary, problems vary, and every individual makes his contribution in his own way. . . . Mere prescriptions and recipes do not constitute intellectual history. . . . The proof of intellectual history is the reading."<sup>19</sup> It is also said, "There is no methodological magic for the historian."<sup>20</sup> Insight and wide experience are most important. Others wait for harmony and order in method.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Greene, Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIV, 59; 74.

<sup>20</sup>Schlesinger, Arthur M., Jr., "A Comprehension of Political Behavior," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, LXXII (April, 1948), 186.

<sup>21</sup>Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 339; R. Wohl, The Historian, XVI, 62.

Objectivity is another problem in the field. An article by Thomas Neill in the Historical Bulletin states the view that the possibility of the subjective element entering into intellectual history is greater because "the historian plays a more important role in treating of ideas than he does in writing political, economic, or diplomatic history."<sup>22</sup> These latter are more immediately tangible. Due to the part the historian plays in intellectual history, it can be superficial or even propaganda. In Consciousness and Society by H. Stuart Hughes it is said that "the commonest error of the intellectual historian is to write about things that he does not really understand--things that he has not 'internalized' and thought through again for himself."<sup>23</sup> Careful analysis must precede any attempt at interpretation. What is said cannot be the result of a game of guess-work or oversimplification. Maurice Mandelbaum holds that after a thorough study has been made, the interpretation must follow from the inherent meaning, significance, and order which the facts contain. Then the interpretation will not involve a distortion of the truth. There is usually no doubt that facts can be objectively ascertained.<sup>24</sup> With proper method, the interpretation can also be as objective and not the product

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<sup>22</sup>Thomas P. Neill, "Terms and Ideas: Altered Meaning in History," The Historical Bulletin, XXVI, (May, 1948), 77.

<sup>23</sup>Hughes, Consciousness and Society, 6.

<sup>24</sup>Maurice Mandelbaum, "Causal Analysis in History," Journal of the History of Ideas, III (January, 1942), 34.

of a historian's own whims or private aims.

Objectivity is closely related to causation. To be objective the historian follows causal relations in the ideas, facts, or events he deals with. Causation is a problem with which the entire field of history is concerned, but there has been a notable lack of "sustained consideration" of the matter.<sup>25</sup>

Causation has a closer connection with intellectual history than with any other branch of the field. The intellectual historian's aim is to understand an era in terms of its basic ideas and then to understand history in terms of idea eras. His work would be a mere catalogue of ideas (or perhaps it would be more correct to say an encyclopedia of ideas) if it were not for the fact that in rigorously analyzing the thought of an era he sees inter-connections--causal relations--which make it possible to create a synthesis. The thought put back into its context, of necessity, shows existential dependence between ideas, between ideas and activities of society, and between ideas and events.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>A few articles concerning causation in history are: Morris R. Cohen, "Causation and Its Application to History," Journal of the History of Ideas, III (Jan., 1942), 12-29; Louis de Raeymaker, "The Metaphysical Problem of Causality," Philosophy Today, I (Winter, 1957), 219-229; Frederick J. Teggart, "Causation in Historical Events," Journal of the History of Ideas, III (January, 1942), 3-11; Maurice Mandelbaum, "Causal Analysis in History," Journal of the History of Ideas, III (January, 1942), 30-50. A more complete treatment of both objectivity and causation is found in Maurice Mandelbaum's book, The Problem of Historical Knowledge (New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 1938).

<sup>26</sup>Mandelbaum, The Problem of Historical Knowledge, chap. vii, p. 203 ff.

One of the big questions about causation is how much ideas influence facts or facts influence ideas. Are non-logical or logical elements more basic? It is admitted that there is an interplay of both, but the extent and the manner in which ideas influence history is a subject of much discussion. In his book, A Preface to History, Carl Gustavson says that social forces, social action, and human institutions are impossible without ideas. Ideas are threads which hold men together "We are inclined to doubt if the idea is usually the most basic factor in any great historical movement, yet, equally obviously, it cannot be omitted from any discussion of such a development."<sup>27</sup> He says that opinions on the weight of ideas vary. Men of action show little faith in ideas while others sacrifice for ideas.

Another writer believes that much nonsense has been written on this question. He says philosophers believe ideas make history. This he thinks is rather biased. It is flattering for professors and intellectuals to think their ideas "win friends and influence people," but actually this is rather hard to see. However, he does admit "that ideas along with other factors make history."<sup>28</sup>

Besides this question of weight of ideas, causation itself is a complicated web. This is discussed in an

<sup>27</sup>Carl G. Gustavson, A Preface to History (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1955), p. 162.

<sup>28</sup>Baumer, Journal of Modern History, XXI, 200-201.

article in the Journal of Philosophy which says it is not a matter of simple succession in time. There is cross-connection and there is overlapping. No simple rule can be formulated. Some causes operate separately, others jointly; some are necessary and sufficient causes, others conditional; some are relevant in broad ways as to include many other factors, others in narrow ways being specific and unique factors.<sup>29</sup> But no matter what the causes are or what weight they have, all human activity has, in some sense, mental components. Ideas can be traced.

"Intellectual history is displaying increasing usefulness as an integrative tool"<sup>30</sup> in the field of history. No facts can be explained by their mere occurrence. Reis and Kristeller in their article mentioned above express the view that by analyzing the basic ideas of an age, the intellectual historian is laying a foundation for penetrating the inner structure of the various activities of man, many of which are the particular subjects of other fields of history. This leads to understanding, not just explanation. Within this inner structure of such facts or events lies the basis for the most exact character of causal relationships.<sup>31</sup> By establishing

<sup>29</sup>Lincoln Reis and Paul Askar Kristeller, "Some Remarks on the Method of History," Journal of Philosophy, XL (April, 29 1943), 242. Another reference to this is Cohen, Journal of the History of Ideas, III, 14.

<sup>30</sup>Higham, Journal of the History of Ideas, XV, 346.

<sup>31</sup>Reis and Kristeller, Journal of Philosophy, XL, 243.

causal relationships the basic object of synthesis--contribution to the understanding and organization of history as a whole--is achieved.

These seem to be the major problems of intellectual history. Several other points termed "pitfalls" have been mentioned. (1) It is a major temptation for the intellectual historian to want to "cover" his material thoroughly. He may attempt some kind of definitive study. In this field any effort to be definitive is absurd. It is impossible because he would have to be an expert in all the fields with which he must deal.<sup>32</sup>

(2) Intellectual history must be rational. In trying to avoid imposing their own patterns, many become "so afraid of doing violence to the integrity of their materials that they shun any systematic presentation. Hence the invertebrate character of so much that passes for intellectual history."<sup>33</sup> In order to avoid one trap it is not necessary to go to the other extreme and admit chaos. Careful analysis points out inherent causal relations which can be followed for smooth and ordered presentation.

(3) The intellectual historian must understand ideas in the light of their own time and place in order to be accurate. Thought from the past cannot be properly

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<sup>32</sup>Hughes, Consciousness and Society, 6.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 7.

interpreted with a frame of reference to an entirely different period and place.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the problems, intellectual history writing in its varieties goes on. Basic work in the problems of method, objectivity, causation, and the earlier mentioned ones of nature, scope, and interdisciplinary relations remains to be done. It is stated that such a field as intellectual history needs a great deal of freedom to be of value. Regardless of the implications of such statements, true freedom is always freedom within bounds. Laws or rules make order and unify activity. In unity there is strength. From remarks concerning confusion and need for solving problems<sup>35</sup> it appears that the field of intellectual history awaits this freedom, unity, and strength.

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<sup>34</sup>Neill, The Historical Bulletin, XXVI, 89.

<sup>35</sup>Supra, chap. 11, p. 17.

## CHAPTER V

## THE VALUE OF INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

The origin, growth, and development of intellectual history, as well as the interest and enthusiasm which have been evident, are not merely a flair for something novel. The field has importance. It is valuable and useful not only to its related branches of history, but to other fields of knowledge and to the world in general.

Its value as an integrative tool in the field of history has already been pointed out.<sup>1</sup> It is in the light of the basic ideas of an era that its economic, political, diplomatic, social, and constitutional history make real sense and their inter-relatedness is seen. Ideas, as formulated by the intellectual historian after careful analysis, whether they have influenced developments or have been influenced by developments, are the articulate expression of the presuppositions of the era--its beliefs, its hopes, its fears. The various phases of man's social activity which history deals with are reflections of this thought. John Higham says they appear much richer when viewed in conjunction with the intellectual traditions and the emotional temper which they

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<sup>1</sup>Supra, p. 58.

are expressions of.<sup>2</sup> The various aspects of history whether they be economic, diplomatic, constitutional, political, social, or any other variety, cannot be known and understood thoroughly without the other thoughts and interests out of which they have risen and remain associated. Intellectual history seems to be considered somewhat like the soul of history. Ideas give a basis for interpretive accuracy and lessen the dangers of relativistic, spurious, or propagandist history. Written history takes on unity--each aspect developing within the framework of its setting, an idea era. It would seem that the various branches of history and intellectual history are properly inseparable. Henry Swint's article in Social Studies states: "Indeed, it seems probable that some of the confusion which is now so apparent among us flows from a recognition of the interrelatedness of social, intellectual, artistic, economic, and political aspects of human existence and human history."<sup>3</sup>

Not only is intellectual history of value in the field of history, but in other branches of knowledge as well. As has been pointed out in a preceding chapter,<sup>4</sup> literature, music, painting, architecture, sculpture, religion, science, and philosophy are studied in the process of discovering the intellectual climate of an age. These

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<sup>2</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI, 467.

<sup>3</sup>Swint, Social Studies, XLVI, 250.

<sup>4</sup>Supra, chap. iv, p. 58.

yield leads to basic ideas of a period. Once these ideas are formulated, the matter of these subjects can become all the more meaningful. They, too, are simply parts of the whole which made up the activity of man in the period. Their interpretation would be richer and more accurate also in the light of the idea framework in which they developed. Intellectual history then becomes a unifying force among many areas of learning.

It is also suggested that social scientists could benefit from a systematic analysis of their writings by intellectual historians, who, by long practice, are skillful in selecting thought patterns in writings.<sup>5</sup>

Two tendencies in recent intellectual history reveal other services which it can render. Ralph Barton Perry and Ralph Gabriel have concerned themselves with an "interior" history of traditional thought, while those like Merle Curti have written more of an "exterior" or social history of American thought.<sup>6</sup>

Both tendencies show the stimulus which intellectual history has received in the last thirty or forty years. Franklin Baumer states that during this time the first really serious problems have struck America. Old beliefs and values have been criticized and nothing satisfactory has been put in their places. Either there is despair or

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<sup>5</sup>Greene, Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIV, 74.

<sup>6</sup>Barker, Pacific Historical Review, XX, 2-3.

frantic grasping for security.<sup>7</sup> That something which is often grasped is the past tradition of our country--concepts of what made America great. "Democracy," "freedom," "the spirit of our forefathers," "the noble principles of the Declaration," "our hallowed Constitution" are a few of the favored phrases which are appealed to as holding this greatness which shall never be tarnished as long as the ideals of our founding fathers and first statesmen are preserved.

John Higham explains the first of the tendencies in intellectual history, exemplified by Ralph Gabriel and Ralph Barton Perry, as an effort to analyze, redefine, and reformulate these traditional ideas and to show their continuing relevance.<sup>8</sup> The essence of the ideas is studied as well as changes in underlying assumptions in the years of growth and development of the country. The clichés take on meaning, losing the aura which has surrounded them through years of sentimental, patriotic usage which has deluded men and caused them to hanker unrealistically for the past rather than understanding the real basic ideas which underlie our democratic tradition and moving forward to make them live on adapted to the conditions of changed times.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Baumer, Journal of Modern History, XXI, 202.

<sup>8</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI, 470.

<sup>9</sup>These ideas are gleaned from Ralph B. Winn, American Philosophy (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1955), p. 309.

The second tendency is a study of "ideas more in the light of their instrumental role in solving problems and stating social concepts."<sup>10</sup> Rather than analyzing the ideas themselves, the operation of the traditional ideas is exposed to scrutiny. For example, reform movements are studied. Reforms are ideas in action. Economic adjustments, migration, urbanization, and industrialization are other examples of ideas operating in society. Thus, in an indirect way, the values of ideas are noted.

Such historical perspective is looked upon as one of the most indispensable weapons today for discovering the basis for the success of America and its way of life, in order that the tradition may be carried on and that in efforts to spread that way of life the underlying concepts may be passed on.

Intellectual historians are also asked to help discover and define problems which today beset the world. Russell Bastert, in an article in the Yale Review, observes that the twentieth century reveals itself very well by the type of questions it asks of its past. During the nineteenth century there was confidence and optimism. History only had to account for "how we got where we are." The twentieth century is not as happy and confident. It asks not only "how" but "why we got where we are." Whitehead once said, "A culture is in the finest flower before it

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<sup>10</sup>Higham, American Historical Review, LVI, 470.

begins to analyze itself."<sup>11</sup> Our own culture asks analytical questions about the past mostly because it is upset about itself. John Greene, in the Mississippi Valley Historical Review, asks why the same type of analysis which is used to reconstruct the ideas of past ages cannot be as serviceable in discovering tensions in thought today. He says:

It should be possible for an intellectual historian steeped in the thought of earlier periods and rendered sensitive by long practice to the underlying assumptions of written discourse to assist modern scientists, social scientists, historians, and others by calling attention to the thought patterns implicit in their writings. . . . The tendencies and habits of thought which are dredged up by analysis have a long history, and the understanding of that history is relevant to the clarification of thought in the present. No other person is so well equipped for this task as the intellectual historian.<sup>12</sup>

With clarification of thought comes insight into possible remedies for the tensions and problems which exist. In this way intellectual history has within it possibilities to make it a helpful guide in the modern world. Answers to problems will be seen, but as Crane Brinton points out, society has to be informed and be able to understand what is going on. Just as public health made strides after people gained understanding of the germ theory, wanted to get rid of disease, and then gave full cooperation with experts, so even if the experts

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<sup>11</sup>The above observation and this quotation are found in Bastert, Yale Review, XLVI, 259.

<sup>12</sup>Greene, Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLIV, 74.

see answers to modern day problems, they cannot make their work effective unless there is some general knowledge and desire to cooperate. For this reason, some knowledge of intellectual history on the part of all the citizens can provide a beginning and a background for clarifying and lowering much of the tension in modern thought and for possible action to better conditions.<sup>13</sup> In this way intellectual history furnishes the way to reach out into history and pluck those tiny fragments of "wisdom so sorely needed to make 'all our yesterdays' something more luminous than a befooling light along 'the dusty way to death.'"<sup>14</sup>

Intellectual history also suggests possibilities of prediction. However, the intellectual historian is not a prophet by trade. Any historian who, through careful analysis, knows the main outlines of idea eras in the history of Western thought deepens his understanding of the present and increases the chances of describing the general framework within which men of the western world will think in the future. He will be enabled to see things in the long run and to detect trends and developments.<sup>15</sup>

From the study of history journals, these appear to be the values and importance of intellectual history

<sup>13</sup>Brinton, Ideas and Men, pp. 18-19; 20-21.

<sup>14</sup>Louis Gottschalk, "A Professor of History in a Quandary," American Historical Review, LIX (Jan., 1954), 285.

<sup>15</sup>These are the views of Baumer, Journal of Modern History, XXI, 202.

and the reasons for interest in the field. Intellectual history contributes to the unification of knowledge which has been so torn apart by modern demands and need for specialization; it points out the real values on which America has been built; it aids in clarifying thought and seeing possible remedies for modern day problems; it suggests possibilities for prediction. Many hours of long, patient investigation face the intellectual historian, but a good scholarly work not only adds to historical knowledge. It can render wider services also.

CHAPTER VI  
AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY  
IN EDUCATION

What writers have said concerning the lack of unity in aims, method, and scope in intellectual history, Henry Swint has verified in an article in Social Studies which is the result of a study of course offerings in the field. His observation is that "an extreme looseness of definition and disparity of emphasis is indicated by the great variation manifest in course offerings in intellectual history."<sup>1</sup> He makes this comment after studying syllabi, outlines, reading lists, and lecture titles; interviewing and corresponding with professors teaching such courses; and tabulating results of a questionnaire sent to these professors. The same divergences which were noted in written intellectual history were noted in these efforts to study American intellectual history as it is being taught today.

Course titles themselves begin the great variation. In order to get the latest picture of intellectual history in education, a study was made by the writer of this paper of the latest issue of 500 college bulletins dated from

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<sup>1</sup>Swint, Social Studies, XLVI, 245.

1958 to 1962 which still verifies what Mr. Swint found in his study of 1952-1953 courses. The study shows about 50 different titles among approximately 175 listed courses in American intellectual history. Even if they do not have the word "intellectual" in their titles, it is evident that it is intellectual history in some form which is being offered. The most frequently used title is "Social and Intellectual History of the United States." Some variations of titles are: "Trends in American History," "History of American Thought," "The American: An Analysis of American Thought and Character," "American Cultural History," "Intellectual History of the United States," "Social History of the United States," "American Thought and Civilization," "Intellectual and Literary History of Modern America," "The History of the Growth of American Ideas," "Men and Ideas in American History."

Not only in titles, but also in course descriptions there is great diversity. This points to the truth of what has been said concerning the confusion in defining intellectual history, in stating its aim and purpose, and in setting its scope. The scope in this instance seems to be the biggest problem.

It is interesting to note in a few of the bulletins well-worded lists of descriptions for courses until the title "Intellectual History" is encountered. It remains alone on a line with no description. Perhaps it will have the note: "Limited Registration," "Only with permission of

the instructor," "For senior honor students and graduates," or, rather amusedly, the comment that this course will fulfill requirements for American History certifications which are needed. On the one hand, this shows the calibre that such courses should possess, on the other that although there is evident growth in the field there is still some doubts about it. History departments in large and small colleges want to list it, but there is a certain vagueness about it.

Some of those who offer descriptions of their courses in the field make them short and broad as "survey of the major trends in American intellectual development," "a study of the forces that have shaped American society," "the development of social and cultural trends and significant intellectual ideas," "development of social and intellectual movements, institutions and leaders," or "development of American life and thought."

Many others have from mildly to extremely detailed accounts of the scope of their courses. One rather large group emphasizes a study of American ideas, thoughts, or beliefs with attention to religion, education, science, the fine arts, philosophy, and literature. Another analyzes the growth in American thought through contributions from popular origins such as schools, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, motion pictures, television, radio, art, and popular religious movements.

Identifying and tracing some of the characteristic patterns of thought is the expressed purpose of another

group of courses. Among topics discussed in these are: Puritanism, the Great Awakening, the Enlightenment, Transcendentalism, the philosophical basis of democracy, Romanticism and realism, nationalism, social reform movements, Darwinism, imperialism, isolationism, pragmatism, progressivism, the philosophy of the New Deal, the impact of the atomic age. No description lists all of these, but they are the points of interest to this group. Related to those who have this end in view are the few who express their objective as seeking out the sources, interconnections and expressions in great documents of the principal systems of ideas or commonly held opinions which have influenced the way of living in this country--those ideas about man and God, nature and society.

Still another set of course descriptions revolve about the idea of thought developments as they affect society. The study is of the family and community life, the position of women, industrialization, urbanization, labor, immigration, sports, and amusements.

Many of the courses, whatever they may treat, attempt to point out the development of American attitudes and characteristics and the part ideas have contributed to the American way of life.

Also mentioned very frequently and expressed in a variety of ways is the study of the interplay of ideas and social practice; ideas and environment; ideas and achievements whether political, economic, or diplomatic;

ideas and the American scene; ideas and events.

Such is the divergent pattern of course offerings in intellectual history today. The variations of the above are numerous, but these appear to be the general trends.<sup>2</sup>

In about one half of the colleges which were studied, the course was divided into two semesters of work. The dividing place varied, but was set most often at 1865. Other divisions were placed at 1850, 1860, 1861, 1877. Most started with the foundation of the colonies and finished with the present day whether offered as one course or as two. A few started with the year 1763. In a couple of instances there were three courses offered, one following from the other.

Returning to Mr. Swint's study, his statistics regarding teachers of intellectual history are of interest. These show that such courses are relatively "newcomers" in colleges. This survey dates back to the school year 1952-1953. Out of 200 questioned, 75% of the intellectual history professors replied. Most of them agreed that the field was new. Sixty per cent of them said the courses were added since 1945. Not only were the courses new, but the teachers were generally the younger men. Sixty-five

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<sup>2</sup>Reference to Henry Swint's article: Social Studies, XLVI, 245. He gives results of a section of his questionnaire which asked that the degree of emphasis given various topics be indicated. It is interesting, but he points out the limitations of such a study.

per cent had taught less than ten years.<sup>3</sup>

Prospects for the future look good. In a study made in 1952 sponsored by the American Council of Learned Societies and reported on in the January, 1956, American Historical Review, intellectual history was holding its own. The questionnaire was sent to 4,662 members of the American Historical Association. Returns tabulated totaled 2,562 acting professional historians. There were 282 additional graduate students. Sixty-three per cent of the professional historians held their doctorate and thirty-one percent their masters. The median age of the professional group was 41, of the graduate group 29. Over one-third of the group had a United States History major.<sup>4</sup>

Of the group reporting, 742 said they had a first specialty in topical specialties. Of this group 14.7% or 109 were in intellectual history. This was only topped by diplomatic history which had a total of 136 or 18.3%.

A second specialty was reported by 840. Of this group 161 or 19.1% were in intellectual history. Diplomatic history here trailed to 141 or 16.8%.

Out of 955 reporting a third specialty, 165 or 17.3% were in intellectual history compared with its closest runner-up diplomatic history with 15.5% or 148 of the total.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 244.

<sup>4</sup>This and the following related statistics are from J. F. Wellemeier, Jr., "Survey of United States Historians, 1952, and a Forecast," American Historical Review, LXI (January, 1956), 340; 344.

These figures point not only to the interest in the field but also to professors and writers of history who are acquainted with intellectual history. Their classroom influence and their writings have borne and continue to bear fruit.

A survey of doctoral dissertations in history in progress in 1949 showed one-half (about 800) in United States History about one-third of which were in social and intellectual history. The work was scattered among forty universities.<sup>5</sup> This article says:

The general fact is that American social and intellectual history in all the active universities . . . shows an unseparated diversity of interest, such as is unprecedented in our guild, I am sure, from the very beginnings of professional historiography.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the prodigious amount of work which is in progress, Swint says there is little sense of "themes thought through, one book supplementing another in continuities of scholarship."<sup>7</sup> It is a new frontier which needs filling in.

Intellectual history is scarcely fifteen years old as a figure of sustained interest in college history departments. The study of the five hundred liberal arts colleges reveals that about one-third are teaching courses in American intellectual history. The field has held its own in those fifteen years. Although there are political, diplomatic, and constitutional historians who still smile

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<sup>5</sup>Barker, Pacific Historical Review, XX, 5;7.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 4.

sympathetically upon the intellectual historian, the field remains one of the most rapidly growing fields of American historiography. The need remains though for the intellectual historians "to orient themselves, to come to a better understanding of content, to some definition of basic terms."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Swint, Social Studies, XLVI, 248.

## CHAPTER VII

## CONCLUSION

This study of American intellectual history has set forth the ideas of contributors to history journals and authors of a few books which have had bearing on the subject. The study began with the origin and development of the field from the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century to the more recent works in the field. Contributions from other fields of learning, particularly literature and philosophy were noted as well as the works of historians.

The nature and scope of intellectual history remain somewhat vague and confused as the journals reveal. The biggest problem here appears to be the undefined scope of the field. In order to deal more easily with the varying concepts of these properties of intellectual history, the articles suggested four approaches to the field which were described from the viewpoints of the various authors. These four divisions are not sharply defined. There is overlapping. Few intellectual historians could be completely fitted into the separate "moulds." Viewpoints on these approaches were set against each other and an inconclusive statement by one writer that every approach has its value and its own contribution to make seemed to

be the only valid point to be made. The "what" and the "who" to be investigated remain to be clarified by intellectual historians.

According to opinions stated in the periodicals, intellectual history has connections with several branches of learning. Arthur O. Lovejoy's full list shows the vast field open for investigation by intellectual historians. The areas most frequently mentioned and stressed were literature and philosophy, although the fine arts, science, religion, and the social sciences were also included as important. The need for dropping departmental pistols and cooperating wherever possible was noted by several writers. There is a general opinion that departmental fences have been successfully broken through in many instances. Several times it was pointed out that problems lie in the background training of scholars in the various fields. A growth in understanding among the departments is believed to be a means toward reaping a harvest of mutual benefits.

In addition to the problems of nature and scope and interdisciplinary relations, articles in the journals point out problems of method, objectivity, and causation as well as a few minor pitfalls which the intellectual historian must guard against. The views of about six men were stated concerning method. Some stress analysis; others hold that the time is ripe for more syntheses. Because of the abstract quality of so much of intellectual history,

objectivity is believed to be a special problem in the field. Causation occupies a central place in the list of problems, but it is seen as yet to be a complicated web which has not received sustained consideration in the field of history. Its importance is seen in the creation of syntheses.

Articles point out that the values of American intellectual history lie in its contribution to the unification of knowledge as an integrative tool; its analysis which shows the basic realities upon which American democracy was built; and its powers of clarifying thought and seeing possible remedies for the tensions in the world.

American intellectual history in education shows promises, particularly in the number of graduate students who have taken interest in the field and in the doctoral dissertations which are being produced. These combined provide more teachers in the field as well as scholarly studies in various phases of American intellectual history. However, at the same time, the field in education reflects the problems which have risen in written intellectual history. Course titles and descriptions show confusion in aim and scope.

From what has been noted in the studies made of the subject, it appears to be well-rooted, but, as several writers state, basic work on the clarification of its problems remains to be done. Every new field in the course

of its development is confronted with similar problems. A spurious harmony is not the goal. If there is need for further exploration, controversy, and discussion, then the field is progressing, and such activity should be encouraged. This will eventually lead to a more defined field. Many trails have been blazed. These need to be widened and smoothed while others remain to be carved. Interest, cooperation, and careful study will be the means toward advancing a field, still in its pioneering stage, which already has made unprecedented strides and flourishes among the senior branches of the field.

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