Although I did not write Science and the Social Order to help establish the sociology of science, it has played its part in that enterprise. I trace out the contributions of various new social conditions and of various other scholars to the emergence and maturation of that field, which is now a full-blown specialty with a firm cognitive and professional identity. [The SCI® and SSCI® indicate that this book has been cited in over 165 publications since 1955.]

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May 27, 1988

When I wrote my Science and the Social Order in 1952, the sociology of science was not yet a social-science specialty with a realized professional identity. That identity began to be established only in the late 1960s and the 1970s. And I did not write my book with the sociology of science foremost in mind. What was foremost in mind was the late Talcott Parsons's lectures and writing on the theory of the social system. I wrote my book to exemplify the usefulness of that theory, I might have chosen any one of a number of other social structural or cultural subsystems of society for this purpose, for example, social stratification (about which I did publish a book later) or religion, but I chose the subsystem of science because that was the one with which I felt most familiar.


As an undergraduate at Harvard in the late 1930s and then again as a graduate student in the early 1940s, I had become acquainted, through course lectures, reading courses, and their books, with the work on the social aspects of science of such scholars as Robert K. Merton, Parsons, George Sarton, L. J. Henderson, and James Bryant Conant. I had also read the work of the so-called British "scientific humanists": J.D. Bernal, J.S. Haldane, and Lance-lot Hogben. So it was easiest for me to do a social-system analysis in that area.

My book was little noticed at first. More attention was paid to it as a result of what happened later. In 1957 Sputnik alarmed everyone about the apparent relative weakness of American science. There then occurred activity in all Western countries about science policy. On the intellectual side, Merton began again to work intensively in the sociology of science. Derek J. de Sola Price published his path-breaking quantitative studies on the structure and growth of science, and Thomas S. Kuhn published The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, which fruitfully brought together the history, philosophy, and sociology of science.

Still later, there occurred more innovations for the sociology of science and also the beginnings of a realized professional identity. Among the innovations were the invention of the Science Citation Index® (SCI®) by Eugene Garfield, the use of survey research techniques and citation data from the SCI® by sociologists like Jonathan and Stephen Cole, and then the excellent studies of the actual substance of scientific ideas by a group of British scholars such as David Edge, Barry Barnes, Michael Mulkay, Harry Collins, Steve Woolgar, and Richard Whitley. For a sample of their work, see the journal Social Studies of Science, edited by David Edge at the Science Studies Unit, Edinburgh University. We now have several international professional associations, journals, meetings, and much cociting work in the sociology of science. A great difference from Science and the Social Order in 1952!