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## Book Reviews

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*A Critical Review of Research in Land Economics.* By LEONARD A. SALTER, JR. The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1948. 258 pages.

**T**RAGIC and untimely death in the LaSalle Hotel fire cut short the career of one of the most promising young agricultural economists of Wisconsin and the Nation.

The title of this volume by Professor Salter, published posthumously, is accurate, but the book's most significant and lasting qualities are to be found in the second and third chapters which the author wrote to provide background and criteria for the "critical review."

In most respects, the second chapter is an excellent statement of the Development of Rural Land Economics. It should be read by every land economist. It comes to a focus in the statement that, to date, land economics has been concerned with the "conversion of land from one major use to another general use" and with "problems in the attainment of land tenure objectives". As these have become largely problems of public policy and public control, the account of their development is also useful in interpreting the trend from orthodox to institutional economics.

Scientific Method and Social Science (Chapter III) is by far the most important part of the book. It should be read by all scientists, for it could have been written without any reference to land. It is a fine contribution to the clarification of issues that concern all scientists—natural as well as social. Science is defined as "a continuing process of problem-solving in order to give man a better control over his experience". The author agrees with John Dewey when he says that "The building up of social science . . . is dependent upon putting social planning into effect". The "terminal test of inquiry" is in "experience".

A more widespread understanding of this pragmatic conception of science is sorely needed and the late Professor Salter rendered a real service in writing his chapter on the subject. Much still remains to be done in clarifying the similarities and

dissimilarities between natural and social science.

Using the concepts developed in Chapters II and III, the author proceeds through the remaining six chapters to evaluate in considerable detail many of the land economics research publications that had appeared before the time of his analysis. His evaluation is in terms of the extent to which the method used, as revealed by the publications, conformed to his conception of scientific method.

The outcome, as stated in the concluding chapter, is threefold:

(1) "Both personal experience and a review of current land economics literature attest to the fact that research workers are in doubt as to what to do to get research results and make a real contribution to the solution of land economic problems."

(2) "An exploration of the literature of rural social science research reveals that in all branches of the field the same doubts and confusions exist."

(3) "These confusions suggest that something more than refinements in techniques for summarizing collected data may be needed to resolve research confusion and that the inadequate conception of scientific method may be blocking consideration of important issues."

This reviewer finds it possible to agree with Professor Salter on the substance of all of these points, despite the fact that he does not present as evidence the results of his explorations outside the field of land economics. Yet it is a question whether the "doubts and confusions" are as uniform throughout the whole field of rural social science as Professor Salter's conclusions suggest. May not the research workers in land economics be somewhat further advanced in this respect than those in other fields? As a matter of fact, some of the presented evidence indicates that many research workers are still proceeding in blissful

ignorance of any necessity for doubt and uncertainty. In many areas equilibrium economics is still enthroned, and its practitioners announce their conclusions with all the certainty and dogmatism of a revealed religion. Perhaps it was Professor Salter's sense of modesty that caused him to avoid any invidious comparisons between workers in his chosen field and those in other fields.

A still different type of concern if not doubt and confusion—different from the kind the author had in mind and peculiar to those classified by the Civil Service Commission as Land Economists—has arisen during the past two decades as a result of institutional change. In the judgment of this reviewer, both the demise of Land Use Planning under L. C. Gray at the national level, and the rise and fall of County Land Use Planning under H. R. Tolley are attributable in large measure to the increasing tendency at that time for the phrase "land use" to become a synonym for "agricultural." Accepting Professor Salter's own characterization of the field of land economics as one primarily concerned with public policy and public control, what actually happened in the 1930's, was a phenomenal expansion in a field of activities recognized as appropriate objects of public policy and public control.

Thus the growing relative importance of public activities only remotely related to land economics as such, as well as the tendency for soil conservation to be "dominated by physical scientists and

engineers" (Dr. Salter), has created for land economists the necessity for orienting their field in the new situation. As only one example, when "production adjustment" in the interest of price stability may or may not involve a shift of land from one major use to another general use, the line of demarcation between "production adjustment" and land economics becomes less distinct—especially when the problems of production adjustment research are referred to workers formerly known as farm-management experts.

That Professor Salter made no use of this aspect of doubt and confusion may have been due to the fact that he considered it irrelevant for his purpose, but it seems to the reviewer that it caused many land economists to look more closely at their "field," which certainly has implications for "method." It seems probable, however, that his failure to make any use of it was due to a faulty conception of the "county land-use planning" episode. In Chapter II he found it unnecessary to interpret that experience. That he did see fit to refer specifically to the "County Land Use Planning Work Outline Number One" reflects a somewhat excessive concern for a technique as compared with the over-all significance of the movement.

Be that as it may, Professor Salter was a scholar of first rank, with a high regard for intellectual and scientific integrity. His "bias" was his low regard for the pretender and the fourflusher.

*Bushrod W. Allin*

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*The Economic Mind in American Civilization.* Volume 3, 1865-1918. By JOSEPH DORFMAN. Viking Press. New York.

IN A REVIEW of the first two volumes of this series several years ago this reviewer made a summary suggestion, "that every person working with current social problems spend some time, valuable time if necessary, to relive the economic trials of early Americans as described in 'The Economic Mind in American Civilization 1606-1865'." The identical statement cannot be made for the third volume, recently released, which takes us through 1918, although it, too, is a remarkably fine piece of work. The emphasis in the first two volumes is on problems—economic issues. But in the third volume the emphasis

changes—the professional economist comes into his own. The story shifts in substance if not in form; it shifts from one of issues and protagonists to one of theory and economists. Thus we do not relive the economic trials of American civilization in that robust but ugly era of industrial growth, combinations, and trusts, 1865-1918, in a reading of volume 3.

As an economist, this reviewer enjoyed this latest volume more than the others. The discovery of Henry C. Adams alone was worth the time spent. Early in that period of industrial growth he had caught its meaning when he