Randolph Bourne and the Politics of Cultural Radicalism

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Youth’s attitude is really the scientific attitude. Do not be afraid to make experiments, it says. You cannot tell anything will work until you have tried it.

—Randolph S. Bourne, “Youth”

We no longer make careful distinctions between the fit and the unfit, the successful and the unsuccessful, the effective and the ineffective, the presentable and the unpresentable. We are more interested in the influences that have produced these seeming differences than in the fact of the differences themselves. We classify people by new categories. We look for personality, for sincerity, for social sympathy, for democratic feeling, for social productiveness, and we interpret success in terms of these attainments.

—Randolph S. Bourne, “For Radicals”

While in Europe in 1914, Bourne wrote his suffragist friend, Alyse Gregory:
CHAPTER FIVE

You cannot think how I envy you, with all your hustle and adventure of work, your crowds of interesting friends, your ostensibly ... so easy command of life ... It would be so glorious to be “in” something, making something go, or at least connected up with something or somebody to whom you were important and even necessary.¹

They agreed that “life was primarily action,” but she had managed to “count for something in the world,” he wrote, turning her beliefs into a “motive of action, a basis of behavior, a program rather than a creed.” Yet if Bourne’s admiration was personal, it was also political, for Gregory was “learning life by action,” taking up the Jamesian challenge to experience life rather than merely to contemplate it.² She was the New Woman, and the suffragists in England and America signaled the end of a declining patriarchal order in Europe and America to his mind and the radical leadership of the modern generation. He decided Gregory exemplified youth itself, that spirit of adventure and experimentation that he offered to his own historical generation, what C. Wright Mills has called a moral optic, or a countersymbol to itself. The idea of youth was his means of appealing to a particular modern generation to fulfill its promise to humanize the scientific spirit, welcome the power of the New Woman, and move beyond moralism to pragmatism in politics.

By the time Bourne wrote Gregory, he had already formulated a philosophy of youth in Youth and Life, a collection of essays that had earned him a considerable audience for a writer of twenty-five and a position at the New Republic as a contributing editor on issues of education and the culture of youth. His ideas on the politics and experiences of youth were often phrased in terms of optimism and uplift. He praised the young adults he knew (and imagined) for their idealism, their involvement in political causes, and particularly their willingness to experiment in social relations. “The whole philosophy of youth is summed up in the word, Dare! Take chances and you will attain!”³ Given their appetite for experimentation, he anticipated a disruption of the influence of the bourgeois family, its ethos of individualism, and the middle-class career patterns expected for his generation.
But the prewar generation in America was internally divided about itself and its collective mission. If opposition to the Victorian order gave them a collective grievance and a common identity to mark out its members as a generation, they differed in their diagnoses of the new order and in the remedies they proposed to deal with social and economic crises, including the growth of poverty, the centralization of public and private authority, the rapid rise of immigration, and the possibility of building a common culture in America.

The politics of the prewar generation and its internal divisions are seen in the writings of Bourne and Walter Lippmann, two of its prominent spokespersons, who represented two sides of the divided generational mind of the modern century. I have chosen them to illustrate this divide, not because they represent the extremes of political debate in prewar America but because their views highlight the multivocality of the political climate and within the progressivist coalition itself, which ruptured only a short time later when war preparedness became the salient public issue in 1915. Their differences, often papered over in the language of generationalism, were sometimes elusive even to the generationalists themselves, including Bourne and Lippmann, as they concentrated on their desire to break with the past. My emphasis is designed to illustrate what was at stake even before the war about the idea of progress, the nature and limits of liberal reform, and the kind of civic society they wanted to build.

I have isolated two historical narratives to clarify the complicated nature of the prewar debate. The first is centered on the role of science, technology, and professional expertise to shape social reform (and save souls). Lippmann’s initial attraction to Bergsonian vitalism was supplanted by 1914 in *Drift and Mastery* with an unqualified endorsement of the leadership of the new technocrat, trained in the modern social sciences of economics, political science, and communications, who, he maintained, knew more about the public interest than the public itself. Bourne’s similarly enthusiastic embrace of instrumentalism at college, as he studied under John Dewey, was replaced by the plea for more experimentation, his attempt to rescue the pragmatism of James from the instrumentalism of social bureaucrats and to restore personal authority or “the personal point of view” to decisions about social reconstruction.
Even in his instrumentalist days at college ("we are all instrumentalists here at Columbia"), Bourne tried to temper the fascination with science and expertise as a basis for political authority by arguing that it would lead to rigid thinking (the apollonian mind) if wrenched from its Jamesian roots. "Science brings us only to 'an area of our dwelling,' Whitman says," he frequently reminded his readers. It could not address the meaning(s) of experience or offer principles of social philosophy. It could not deal with what it could not quantify or measure. The disagreement between Bourne and Lippmann over the limits of the "scientific attitude" therefore went beyond the question of the role (social) scientific expertise should take in modern reform; it extended to the very meaning of science and scientific knowledge itself.

The second narrative revealed in their writings is a related one about the gendered nature of public authority and its effect on personal liberties. Although the language of science and the language of gender did not overlap one another exactly, as templates lining up on every point, they revealed a common attention to the gendered implications of a society that was run by experts. To overstate their differences only slightly, Lippmann’s feminism looked to the liberation of women within the home or as consumers and secondarily as individuals competing in the market, welcoming the advances that modern technology would bring to (middle-class) women to make their domestic labor more efficient. Bourne’s feminism, by contrast, looked to the freedom of public women, acting outside the home, to "feminize" professionalism as well as to redistribute the responsibilities of domestic labor. He believed in the idea of a women’s culture that contained a certain sensibility beneficial for society as a whole. He therefore expected professional women—the reformers, lawyers, teachers, and social workers he knew in New York—to live outside conventional roles and resist the norms of bourgeois professionalism. He castigated them when they turned him out after late evenings of talk so they could get a full night’s sleep, and he implored them not to turn their circles of friends into tight little communities that did not tolerate difference. Through his romantic feminism he wanted, in short, the New Woman to "feminize" society and public authority or to "soften the crudities of this hard, hierarchal, over-organized, anarchic" society.
Within these two narratives, I trace the politics of the generational mind before the war. My interpretation differs from those offered by other scholars, however, by characterizing the debate primarily in cultural terms rather than in purely political terms. I have chosen to interpret these two sensibilities in Nietzschean terms, that is, as a debate between the emphasis on the apollonian mind, or the desire to order society through social reform and expertise, and the faith in the dionysian spirit, to inform political action and encourage experimentation through critical inquiry and cultural adventure. Bourne proposed to combine these two subjectivities in a “post-scientific” philosophy, a remarkably postmodern alternative to scientism and ideology, which would restore to the scientific spirit the creativity of the poetic imagination.

My interpretation also differs from that of other scholars in that I consider Bourne's social criticism as an alternative to progressivism rather than as within its terms. Reading his essays closely, one finds that Bourne’s support of progressive social reform was consistently qualified and ambiguous. He supported the idea of social reform when it was democratic, rather than as a program run by experts; he supported educational reform when it tried to break down class barriers rather than serve social utility; he supported the use of science and expertise when it was experimental, preserving the spirit of James. But he did not share the progressivist faith in progress, the idea of social reform as a means of social control, or its reliance on an activist state.

Moreover, Bourne was unambiguously critical of social reform experiments that created artificial environments that isolated their clients from the disorder of the larger society, such as Jane Addams’s Hull House. He was hostile to schools that educated with an eye to making students useful to society and corporate needs, such as the vocational technology education in New York public schools. He split openly with his own university over its labor policies toward the “scrubwomen” who daily cleaned the steps and halls of the dormitories and classrooms and over its educational policy of teaching the English canon at the expense of contemporary American literature. His support and criticism of progressive educational reform, the rise of social science and management expertise, or the development of progressive social programs were part
and parcel of his broader cultural criticism in this sense. Thus in deference to his own insistence that education was inseparable from life, I have chosen not to analyze his educational theory separately but as part of his political and cultural criticism, to see it as encouraging youthful experimentation and the interplay between pragmatics and the imagination in cultural renewal.  

Before examining Bourne’s and Lippmann’s diagnoses of the modern generational crisis in America and Europe, it is worth noting that generational analysis first developed at the end of the nineteenth century, promoting—and reflecting—new categories of political agency and identity. Generational theorists writing at the turn of the century, such as Karl Mannheim, Antonio Gramsci, and José Ortega y Gasset, conceptualized generations as distinctive social groupings, similar to social classes but crossing over national, class, and even gender lines. If they agreed that generations were a workable sociological category and a potent political phenomenon, however, they differed in defining the exact nature of the generation that was the object of their study. Mannheim’s examination, the “Problem of Generations,” associated generations and the rise of generational consciousness with the formation of a dissident intelligentsia that, as a result of certain destabilizing experiences, begins to feel, articulate, and defend a core set of values and ideals against a society they perceived to be indifferent or hostile. For Mannheim, and for Francois Mentré as well, the character of a generation was therefore not marked by a common or majoritarian experience of individuals in an age-cohort group but by the experiences of its more distinctive and atypical members. Other generational theorists agreed that generational identity was fundamentally an elite phenomenon, with a clear separation of experiences between the mass and the elite that the concept did not reflect. Some scholars even argued that generationalism was a phenomenon unique to no one but the generationalists themselves.  

Though it may be accurate historically to associate the idea of generational identity and generational conflict with the rise of an independent literary intelligentsia, there is a question as to whether such an identifiable elite can be found in prewar America. Nev-
ertheless, generational identity and generational consciousness was a common frame of reference for young socialists and progressives in the first decades of the twentieth century, as well as for Bourne and Lippmann, despite their ideological differences. Indeed, the prevalence of generationalism suggests that as a framework of analysis and a form of social consciousness, it had developed as a way to foster collective consciousness in a society in which class was often ignored. Thus generationalists, in positing a generational identity, actually helped create the phenomenon, despite forces that might have undermined it, adding a new twist to Mannheim’s otherwise fruitful analysis.

The significance of generational thinking, particularly as it developed in the early twentieth century, lay in its political potential as an organizing concept and a source of identity. Generational theorists commonly agreed that generations as a social category referred to more than an age-cohort group of individuals coexisting at the same period of time. Rather, the term was used as an organizational concept and a frame of reference to conceptualize society and as a means of transforming it. Generationalists thus structured the world in terms of generational categories, using an approach in much the same fashion as did social-class analysts, as a form of collectivism and determinism. Unlike the concept of class, however, the idea of generation emphasized the temporal rather than the socioeconomic location of its members. According to Mannheim, what bound together members of a generation was not community and physical proximity but location in society or the objective facts of their existence. For him, therefore, generations were much like classes in their objective determination. American generationalists, specifically Bourne, Lippmann, and Addams, perceived themselves to be part of an entity that was facing for the first time problems of a decidedly modern nature.

In his study of the prewar generation in Europe, Robert Wohl argues that all generations believe themselves to be special, but the “generation of 1914” came to signify a particular “unity of experience, feeling, and fate,” which led to a significant shift in the meaning of the idea of generation itself. All generational theorists agreed, among them Ortega and Mannheim, that membership in a generation implied, above all, the sharing of a common destiny.11
Peerage was neither a necessary nor sufficient characteristic of generational identity or of the sense of shared destiny, which explains why Bourne frequently pointed out that "pioneers" among the older generation—e.g., William James, Walt Whitman, and Henri Bergson—had managed to articulate the values and agenda of his own generation even before a majority of them had signed on. Put differently, generations are an argument, Sherman Paul has suggested, that nicely established the synthetic nature of their identity. They stand for certain ideas or hopes and against others, by way of constituting themselves. More than the factor of age, generational consciousness, and by implication generational identity, constitutes a necessary ingredient in the formation of a generation.\(^{12}\)

The idea of generations in its modern form was tied frequently to that of generational conflict so that by the end of the nineteenth century, the idea of "youth in revolt" had emerged as a byproduct of generational theory in the association made between the world of the fathers and all that was corrupt and decadent, against which the younger generation stood in opposition.\(^{13}\) Generational consciousness and the associated idea of generational conflict signified a discontinuity with the past and an opportunity to make the world over again. It stressed a similarity of perspective among members of a generation as well as a radical break with the thought and experiences of others and with the past itself.\(^{14}\)

The theory of generational revolt produced a cluster of attitudes that has been termed "the ideology of youth," which reached its apotheosis in the 1920s, emphasizing in particular the sense that one's youth was a superior stage of life, marked by its purity and innocence.\(^{15}\) As Laura Nash has pointed out, the association between the idea of generation and one's chronological youth became so automatic by the end of the nineteenth century that the idea of generation "came to mean not so much men who shared the same age, as men who shared youth," undercutting, to some extent, the emphasis on the importance of voluntary membership.\(^{16}\) In identifying generation with youth, however, a generation in this sense offered its own unique lifestyle, in this instance the bohemian experience appropriate to an interclass group and its own form of political association, the youth movement based on the segregation of age and consciousness.\(^{17}\) It became possible to
refer to “youth” as a significant social group so that the generational tag was often dropped altogether, implying in the concept of “youth” the notion of the “younger generation.”

A key element of a generation’s common frame of reference, in sum, was the identification of a certain event or set of experiences that constituted a definite rupture from the past. That rupture usually took the form of a great historical event or crisis, a famine, a war, a revolution, or the like. The generation of 1914 in Europe, according to Wohl, was subject to several dislocating experiences. Among them was a marked decline in parental authority that produced in them a rejection of the “fiercely competitive capitalist society” of their “stern” fathers as a locus of “unbearable tyranny,” a deterioration of traditional forms of social identification, and at the same time, a challenge to the bourgeois ethic of competitive individualism, the latter two presenting them with the opportunity to create alternate forms of collective association that crossed class and geographical lines. The separation between the adult world of labor and marriage and the experiences of adolescence, a separation marked by increasing numbers of youth spending extended periods of time in universities and military service, according to Annie Kriegel, prolonged the dependency and increased the restlessness of young men and women. As their participation in activities of productive labor and the attainment of economic stability were postponed, the links that traditionally were forged in families and social classes began to break down even further, setting individuals free to redefine their social roles.

The disaffection of people born between 1880 and 1910 in Europe was expressed in a quiet rage against a world that was seen to be relativistic, chaotic, and morally bankrupt. For European youth, World War I thus presented an invitation (that few resisted) to restore the world to a more spiritually pure, more orderly condition. Their historical mission, they believed, was to purify and renew their world, and many of them became feverishly nationalistic and even militarist, ultimately aligning against groups on the political left. In America the chief source of generational grievance was against the society that they referred to collectively as the Puritan order: the pietistic, disciplinary culture of the middle class. They saw themselves uniting against the determinism and
moralism of a staid Protestantism, even if they divided along the lines of science (order) among the reformers or the New Woman (disorder) among the radicals.

The fragmentation and alienation that were products of this historical rupture were paralleled not coincidentally in the “discovery” of adolescence, a unique stage between the child’s identity and the adult’s, which, according to G. Stanley Hall’s 1904 treatise on adolescence, was a product of a rapidly industrializing world that delayed adulthood (primarily, for young men). Hall determined that adolescence (and by implication the younger generation) was characterized by an awareness of a radical alienation (separation) between one’s self and the world around one, which, according to more recent literature, leads to an urgent need to develop an independent and autonomous identity, using ideals, rebellion, associability, commitment to transient groups and identities, and ambivalence toward oneself and one’s own power. Bourne, having read Hall, was confirmed in his conclusion that the adolescent experience of sensitivity to and estrangement from the perceptions of the external world was generational, that is, was peculiar to his generation, the one that was in fact studied by Hall.21

In “The Two Generations,” his first published essay in the Atlantic Monthly, Bourne defended his generation against charges of laziness and self-indulgence. The “rising generation,” especially the young men of good families, according to Cornelia Comer, a contributor to the Atlantic Monthly, had abandoned the ways of the fathers by celebrating the will (Shaw) and relying on “Whitmanesque Personality.” Their lack of social accomplishment showed them to be “soft” and deformed by “mental rickets and curvature of the soul.”22 Bourne may have found the metaphor too much to go uncontested. The “older generation,” he wrote, turning the criticism on its head, had failed its children. “I doubt if any generation was thrown quite so completely on its own resources as ours is.” Left to “bring itself up,” the younger generation developed its own standards and contested the old divisions of the fathers:
We no longer make careful distinctions between the fit and the unfit, the successful and the unsuccessful, the effective and the ineffective, the presentable and the unpresentable. We are more interested in the influences that have produced these seeming differences than in the fact of the differences themselves. We classify people by new categories. We look for personality, for sincerity, for social sympathy, for democratic feeling, for social productiveness, and we interpret success in terms of these attainments.

It was their openness to experiences and ideas, their commitment to “the wildest radicalisms,” their “thirst” for varied and new experiences that represented a reformulated will to power, a fluid and malleable concept rather than a rigid and domineering one. Their power lay in their dionysian exuberance and energy, as an antidote to the apollonian drive for control. With youthful ardor and a firm set of revitalizing goals, they would bypass the problem of acquiring mastery altogether. Bourne therefore insisted that youth “must be not simply contemporaneous, but a generation ahead of its time.” As ruling ideas were “always a generation behind our actual social conditions,” it was necessary for youth to be “not less radical but even more radical than it would naturally” so that when the time came to take positions of power, it would be able to break the cycle of power and resistance that supported cultural consensus. In a shrewd understanding of the dialectic of consent and coercion that underlay the crust of hegemony, he looked to youth to redefine the nature of authority itself.

Many historians have concluded understandably that Bourne eventually resorted “to a full-fledged cult of youth” and an ideology of generational revolt led by an international band of insurgents or “league of youth.” As James Hoopes has written, “Bourne staked his hopes on a league of youth so radical that it would live socialistically in the present and help to create thereby the ‘communal life of the future.’” In light of the criticisms of his own generation in America and the reservations he expressed over the feverish fanaticism of European youth, however, this conclusion seems untenable. More often Bourne argued that the “constant
guerilla warfare" between generations could be contained by solutions permitting cooperation and mutual understanding.

I want to see independent, self-reliant, progressive generations, not eating each others' hearts out, but complementing each other and assuming a spiritual division of labor. I want the father and mother besides raising the children to lead independent lives of their own, to add their own life-works of art to the great picture gallery of personality of the past. He suggested an alliance—of status, on the one hand, and sensuality, on the other—an unlikely combination that could "conserve" the spirit of youth for society as a whole, coupled with the power of age. “Middle age has the prestige and the power,” and “youth has the isolation, the independence, the disinterestedness so that it may attack any foe.”

Though his own generation was the exemplar of youth, privately he wrote its members were not so independent or certain of their goals as he declared in *Youth and Life*. He knew too many prematurely old young men, following their fathers into business or settling down into families. Others seemed to be stuck in what he and his circle of friends at Columbia University referred to as Hamlet’s “destiny,” the paralysis of the apollonian mind, incapable of taking creative or heroic action. “Of course, we are all Hamlets,” he wrote in 1913. “Our decadence is hateful to us; we struggle against it, and in so doing live to a far greater intensity than does the one who sits down and contemplates it.” Hamlet’s dilemma, of course, was the dilemma of the brooding and introspective intellectual; his need was to find ways of acting in the face of (horrible) truth (or meaninglessness).

In several ways, the dilemma of middle-class youth mirrored that of the late nineteenth century, the paralysis facing the rebel fathers among the late Victorians as they confronted with terror both directions of the modern century, symbolized by Henry Adams’s Dynamo and the Virgin. For Hamlet, the solution (to inaction) was in illusion; through self-enchantment he could act. Some of the rebel fathers, according to Michael Rogin, overcame their paralysis in an embrace of the irrational to salve the anxiety of seeming dis-
order (Sorel, Nietzsche, Bergson); others found the “personal point of view” as a way of recovering the self from excessive patriarchal control (William James); and still others moved to direct action itself, ultimately in war, to rescue themselves from anhedonia (melancholia), leading to suicide (Woodrow Wilson). In some sense, all who faced terrible truths used the veil and relied on therapeutic philosophies to free them.33

Through the enabling philosophies of James and Nietzsche, among others, the prewar generation in America relieved its anxiety over its social role through experiments in social and cultural renovation, as Jane Addams aptly prescribed.34 Max Eastman, James Oppenheim, Waldo Frank, and Floyd Dell, for instance, wrote poetry and short stories for the little magazines and formed new, experimental publications in Greenwich Village or the Lower East Side. Some artists established galleries, such as Alfred Stieglitz’s Gallery 291, displaying works of American and European modern art and photography, and some directed and produced new drama in “little theaters” or in group pageants.35 Other individuals, such as Addams, Henrietta Rodman, Crystal Eastman, and Carl Zigrosser, were active in settlement houses, social welfare agencies, and the judicial system, working for improved public services to alleviate the desperate conditions of the poor and for better working conditions for labor. Some activists established experimental schools in Greenwich Village, such as the Ferrer Center for adults and the Little School House for children.36 Others worked directly within the state—as did Walter Lippmann, then a socialist, securing the election of the first socialist mayor in the United States in Schenectady, New York, in 1912, or fighting city machines in local and state governments, or, by 1917, working for the Wilson administration’s public information office.37

It was this group of politically involved and culturally active artists and writers who formed a generation and became the subject of Bourne’s political philosophy. In a Foucaultian sense, they became an effect of his linguistic and political attempt to represent them in the abstract symbol of youth. But with all representation, a gap exists between the representation and the represented, rendering, to some extent, according to Anne Norton, the crucial political concept of representation a fiction—that which stands for
that which is not.\textsuperscript{38} The prewar generation outstripped its representation in Bourne's youth symbol and reinscribed its own cultural norms in Lippmann's idea of mastery, resignifying them. In Lippmann's symbolic order, in other words, aspirations to Promethean mastery and control were neither elusive nor undesirable to this particular historical generation, proving him to be an important counterweight to Bourne's more romantic notion of youthful experimentation.

One of the most articulate spokesmen of the young progressives was Walter Lippmann. In \textit{Drift and Mastery}, subtitled "An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest," he characterized the discontent of his generation. "All of us are immigrants spiritually," he wrote. They were dislocated and restless in the wake of rapid changes in social and personal roles and relations.

We are unsettled to the very roots of our being. There isn't a human relation, whether of parent and child, husband and wife, worker and employer, that doesn't move in a strange situation. . . . There are no precedents to guide us, no wisdom that wasn't made for a simpler age.

Traditions had been demolished, the old shibboleths exposed. "The sanctity of property, the patriarchal family, the heredity caste, the dogma of sin, obedience to authority,—the rock of ages, in brief, has been blasted for us." The great problem of the age, Lippmann announced, was not securing individual freedom; it was deciding what to do with it. In assuming that Americans had been liberated, he turned to the rather perverse dilemma (of the middle class) of having too little direction and no clear vision of what they would like to become.\textsuperscript{39}

This bold claim, which ignored the material unfreedom of many Americans, was startling, but it was even more so because it directly contradicted his own political philosophy outlined only two years earlier in \textit{Preface to Politics}. In it Lippmann had argued that the problem of the modern age was the influence of too much tradition, which stifled imagination and quelled spontaneity. He drew
upon the ideas of the European thinkers—Bergson, Nietzsche, Sorel, and also Freud—to challenge the rationalism of the nineteenth century, of which he was skeptical, and to encourage the freeing of the “will” as a force for change. Yet in *Drift and Mastery*, it seemed that the problem was too much “drift” and the elusiveness of “mastery.” People were living passive lives, unrooted and directionless, uncontrolled either by principle, scientific rationality, or even, ironically, tradition. Their ineffectuality allowed industrial exploitation and corporate inefficiency to go unchecked, lingering on by “default” rather than from utility. It was a critique of the progressive reform movement as well as of the impasse in American public culture. “Reform produces its Don Quixotes who never deal with reality; it produces its Brands who are single-minded to the brink of ruin; and it produces its Hamlets and its Rudins who can never make up their minds.”

In place of routine, he proposed that “purpose” be substituted: “We can no longer treat life as something that is trickled down to us. We have to deal with it deliberately, devise its social organization, alter its tools, formulate its method, educate and control it.” In practical terms, the solution was that the younger generation would need to forge new instruments of management and manipulation, placing the future in the hands of the “industrial statesmen,” a new class of professionals, schooled in the science of business administration and expert in the rational organization of industrial production. “You have in a very literal sense to *educate* the industrial situation, to draw out its promise, to discipline and strengthen it.” The sort of education he had in mind, as evident in the discourse, emphasized discipline and control to shape social behavior, following the assumptions of the educator E. A. Ross, who argued that the conscious manipulation of behavior would produce a consequent alteration in moral character. Lippmann and Addams, among others, viewed the expert as the policeman and redeemer of society in general, capable of producing that change in character. The results, Lippmann went so far as to add, would civilize the whole social conflict. With the new professional business administrators in charge of streamlining production and rationalizing employment practices, revolution would be unnecessary.
If the shift in his position was not explicitly acknowledged, there was no doubt that Drift and Mastery urged a reassertion of control and discipline through scientific administration and technocratic expertise. Experts in the “art of society” could create the future consciously through the application of reason and science, designed to maximize efficiency. To be fair, it was not a call for scientism, for his notion of scientific management contained a sense that creativity, cooperation, and democracy were components of mastering one’s environment. He appealed specifically to Jamesian pragmatism as the source of that collaborative effort among a community of peers. Nevertheless, the clear faith he and other progressive intellectuals placed in professional expertise and technocratic solutions illustrated strikingly their decision to subject free creativity to the tests of rationalism and efficiency. Lippmann’s greatest fear, it seems, was of the “waste” that would come from the profit motive and the disorder that would result from too much rebellion. Science, in addition to denoting invention, fellowship, and creative experimentation, implied the discipline that was necessary to impose on capitalism in order to prevent social unrest.  

Bourne greatly admired Drift and Mastery, recommending it as “a book one would have given one’s soul to have written.” It offered a diagnosis similar to his own, as outlined in his essays on the generational crisis in Youth and Life and in his articles on educational reform for the New Republic. Yet it is surprising that Bourne did not realize that their conceptions of mastery through science were ultimately incompatible or that the training of a new generation of experts would violate his own commitments to the idea of democratic education. If he were troubled by Lippmann’s preoccupation with mastery, which he had decided to be an (unliberating) illusion, he did not say. These differences and their implications can be seen in the distinctive diagnosis Bourne offered of the nature of the economic and family crises his generation faced and of the kind of scientific spirit he recommended for the schools and (social welfare) institutions.

In Bourne’s analysis, the unprecedented condition of his generation’s freedom was primarily a consequence of the changing rules of the marketplace. “The economic situation in which we find ourselves, and to which not only the free . . . but the unfree of the ris-
ing generation are obliged to react, is perhaps the biggest factor in explaining our character.” Whether working class or middle class, the choice seemed to be between immersing oneself in the “routine of a mammoth impersonal corporation . . . or . . . living by one’s wits within the pale of honesty.” Members of his generation were skeptical of all forms of discipline and control, he argued, and so they looked with ambivalence on the professions of public relations and business management that Lippmann outlined for the modern saint. Though they wanted to “count for something in life,” in looking at “the men who ‘count’ in the world today,” they decided, as Bourne put it, that they “did not want to count in just that way.” His language suggested that their fears were of a physical threat to their very existence. Corporate domination appeared in menacing images of organic and corporeal consumption. The bureaucratic “Moloch” “devoured” its young; it “swallowed” or “consumed” or “smothered” or enveloped the new recruits, invoking images of maternal power.

By contrast, family discipline appeared in images of mechanical destruction. The family could “distort,” “warp,” and “mutilate” the child’s individuality; it could “shrink” the soul and “stunt” one’s personality. Its methods were direct, blunt, and clinical. It used ridicule and censure. Both the middle and working classes were threatened by the “sect-pressures” of hierarchical organizations that would (literally?) consume or destroy them.

In Bourne’s analysis, the crisis of the family and of the new corporate economy became a crisis of education. The centrality of education to his political thought places him in the company of other democratic theorists, including Rousseau and Kant, as Joseph Featherstone points out, as well as James and Dewey. The “helplessness of the modern parent” caused mothers and fathers to turn to “experts” in childrearing, a move that paralleled the turn by owners of corporations to experts in industrial engineering and scientific management. Many of the responsibilities formerly left to the family and the community were charged to the schools, as the state was sometimes seen as unduly corrupted or partisan. Increasingly schools were regarded as the institution to eliminate
abuse and injustice caused by larger social, economic, and political forces. “The school already overshadows the church. . . . [It] constantly encroaches on the home. It provides play and work opportunities that even well-to-do homes cannot provide.” It was a change Bourne and many progressives welcomed. But he warned that educational reformers ought not to concentrate solely on reforming administration and professionalization, or they would risk creating “capable administrators faster than we create imaginative educators.”

The progressives’ response was again divided over the kind of mastery that was desirable to shape the economic and social order. The more political of the educational reformers wanted to modernize and centralize the public education system, believing that schools could be run as efficiently as business corporations. They focused on improving administration and cultivating expertise, arguing that specialists must replace politicians and that teachers be trained as professionals and promoted on the basis of merit rather than through political cronyism. The social reformers, on the other hand, favored a change in curriculum and pedagogy, a more costly set of programs designed to meet the varying needs of children in different classes with diverse language skills and abilities. They stressed the need for schools to socialize children and to improve the living conditions of the city’s immigrants and the poor, filling the gap left by the family and community. Their agenda was modeled along the lines of the social work idea that schools must take charge of children in all aspects of life, taking them off the streets and devising programs that would give them the incentive to remain in school and that would train them for productive work in society.

Both sectors of the education reform movement came together over the issue of pedagogy. They agreed that the traditional method of teaching through memorization must be replaced with a scientific pedagogy, based on an understanding of the nature of children and stressing psychology and ethics rather than the arbitrary authority of the teacher. As Diane Ravitch has noted, however, in New York City, there was a wide gap between the intellectual ferment of progressive educators and the practices of the schoolroom. Education remained traditional, with virtually a military dis-
cipline prevailing in the classroom, and teacher-centered, with the teacher demanding obedience and attention from students. Indeed, during the first decades of the century in New York, educational reform amounted to little more than a temporary routing of Tammanist ward trustees, a standardization of curricula, a centralization of personnel decisions, and a streamlining of expenses in the quest for efficiency by rotating students in shifts day and night, actually reducing the educational budget per capita, despite the overcrowding and dilapidated physical plants.

Dewey’s proposal to turn the schools into “workshops” in democracy, teaching citizenship as well as practical skills for the world of work, seemed to Bourne to be a promising set of propositions to remove the factorylike environment of the traditional classroom and to attend to the real class differences in educational preparation. As laboratories for practical experiments in a cooperative, intergenerational democracy, the schools could integrate “work-study-play,” allowing students’ interests to determine their studies. But Bourne also read in Dewey’s theories an encouragement of democratic socialism because of his emphasis on broadening the domain of culture to include the practical and industrial arts and on abolishing the distinction between people who worked with their hands and people who worked with their heads. Dewey’s form of education would turn children into little socialists, in Bourne’s view, because it would be classless, rejecting the class-based divisions in education that serviced those divisions in society. “Democratic education does not . . . fasten class education upon us.” Anticipating the pedagogy of the Brazilian educator, Paolo Friere, Bourne’s idea of democratic education involved preparation for a future society rather than a reflection and reinforcement of status quo hierarchies. Education as “preparation for life” involved preparation for a future life rather than for the life of the moment. If it were “self-conscious,” it would determine the nature of society itself. “To decide what kind of a school we want is almost to decide what kind of a society we want.”

The new education held the promise of a new society because it would prepare the child to live as an integrated “worker-citizen-parent,” possible only in a society that had abandoned bourgeois individualism. At the same time it would bring that new society into
effect as it prepared children for the future: it would restructure the culture of public institutions, its authority structure, and its governing philosophy, as well as re-order social relations, constructing programs around children/citizens rather than children/citizens around programs; it would refrain from treating children as adults or from forcing them to conform to the needs of adult society; and it would remove invidious distinctions between kinds of learning. Put simply, democratic schools represented the theory and the practice of radical change in Bourne’s view. They could actualize a pragmatist tenet that purposive action could shape one’s environment and would bring into effect the new society. In this construction of the role of educational reform, Bourne was perhaps more pragmatist than Dewey himself.

More important perhaps in terms of his own political thought, Bourne’s reliance on the schools suggested his belief that they were the mechanism of change to deal with social and economic dislocation. In contrast to his much more frequently voiced anti-institutionalism, his educationism revealed a willing and conscious reliance on practical, institutional responses to effect change. This openness to institutionalism as politics is a significant concession, for he often stood outside the state and outside the institutions of mass society in his radical criticism, which frequently left him with no place to stand and no basis on which to build a constructive political philosophy or practice. Despite his reservations about piecemeal reform, the schools were at the center of his theory of social transformation, understood as both prefigurative and practical sites for experiments in a cooperative learning experience.

Because the Gary schools emphasized “learning by doing” and student activities grew out of real-life situations and because the schools contributed to the local community, both Bourne and Dewey thought they were workshops in democracy and, to some extent, were inseparable from the public culture. The university-extension aspect of the Gary schools made it literally a “people’s university,” in Bourne’s phrase.

When the Gary plan was imported to the New York City schools in 1916–1917, however, it became another means for progressivist administrators to streamline costs and turn overburdened class-
rooms into factories for education. A coalition of immigrant parents, Tammanists, and traditional teachers and principals routed the progressive reformers in 1917, rejecting “platoon schools” and the caste-education that immigrant parents feared would result. For the first time, Bourne and Dewey disagreed over the direction of educational reform and the issue of the appropriateness of adopting the Gary-Wirt plan for the more heterogeneous New York City. Dewey supported the adoption of the plan on a trial basis; Bourne resisted it, recognizing the costs to working-class and immigrant students of tracking and part-time education.

With this disagreement, Bourne’s educational theory became less of an unreflective adoption of Dewey’s educationism. Bourne’s lack of critical distance is evident in many of the articles he wrote for the New Republic as education editor, reprinted in Education as Living. Dewey’s own ambiguity over the ends of education may have contributed to Bourne’s failure to appreciate the degree to which the new educationism could induce conformism. Though Dewey urged educators to be “guideposts” for students’ interests by shaping children to be useful to society, as Richard Hofstadter indicated, he “had no criteria for discriminating where, when, and toward what” children ought to be guided. Bourne assumed on the other hand that democratic education would thoroughly resocialize children rather than reinscribe and reinforce gender and class roles. The child-as-redeemer-of-society seemed to capture Bourne’s own emphasis on releasing the forces of youth in society at large, prefiguring a modern, democratic society.

As a result, he simultaneously expected too much of educational reform (the breakdown of social classes) and not enough (schools could not teach morality and should not try). Moreover, his views were often inconsistent. Privately he regarded his own university as an environment that nourished “beloved community,” but publicly he denounced it as an institution that reinforced the “sect-pres­ures” of organized institutions he tried to escape, most notably the bourgeois family and the corporation. “The issues of the modern university are not those of private property but of public welfare.” His profiles of Nicholas Murray Butler, the president of Columbia University, and his sketch of a retired professor, an itinerant intellectual, reflected disillusionment with the professionalization of the
academy and the modern university’s inhospitality to thinkers. In these conflicting expectations and reservations about the power of educational reform, Bourne’s ambivalence about the power of institutionalized politics remained.

His solution to the drift of which Lippmann wrote in 1914 therefore was not mastery and not science, but freedom itself.

The youth of to-day cannot rest on their liberation; they must see their freedom as simply the setting free of forces within themselves for . . . radical work in society. The road is cut out before them by pioneers; they have but to let themselves grow in that direction.

The very circumstances that produced youthful drift and indecision were, in Bourne’s analysis, those that held the greatest opportunity for a “trans-valueication of values.” “It is the glory of the present age that one can be young. Our times give no check to the radical tendencies of youth.” The experience of bringing themselves up reaffirmed the importance of staying young. “We believe in ourselves; and this fact, we think, is prophetic for the future.” What was needed was not new instruments of control and domination but a further release of youthful energy. “The secret of life is . . . the spirit of perpetual youth.”

A scientific approach was a youthful attitude because it was experimental and flexible. “Youth’s attitude is really the scientific attitude. Do not be afraid to make experiments, it says. You cannot tell anything will work until you have tried it.” In welcoming the scientific attitude, he put in a plea for science in its place. “The scientific philosophy”—by which he meant “dusty positivism” modeling itself on the natural sciences, the empirical social sciences, and the new sciences of business administration and social welfare—was no more than a substitute religion, “as much a matter of metaphysics, of theoretical conjecture, as the worst fanaticisms of religion.” Where faith had served to give people a sense of place well into the nineteenth century, science provided the same for people at the turn of the century. As ideology, (social) science
replaced the Victorian emphasis on moral perfection with a secular belief in the idea of human progress. Both science and religion were expressions of the will to power, under the guise of service to others and the disciplining of society. “We must resist the stern arrogances of science as vigorously as the scientist has resisted the allurements of religion.”

In short, his critique was not of science but of scientism as a mystical force assumed to solve problems of meaning, metaphysics, and social utility. Science had a role to play, one that was “relegated strictly to the practical sphere,” used for the “tools” it provided “to control our environment.” Its laws were “not visions of eternal truth, so much as rough-and-ready statements of the practical nature of things, in so far as they are useful to us for our grappling with our environment and somehow changing it.” Science and social science provided “a description simply of the machinery, the behavior of the world, not of its palpitating life.” Science was “in no sense valid as an interpretation of life and life’s meaning.” Different kinds of cognition were at stake between the rational and the experiential and different judgments. “The interpretation of the world lies not in its mechanism but in its meanings, and those meanings we find in our values and ideals.” For these values, “we must trust our own feelings rather than any rational proof.” Even if practiced rigorously, science as a basis for understanding experience as it was lived was insufficient. “We must somehow comprehend a world where both the cold, mechanical facts of the physical plane exist and the warm emotional and conscious life of desires and ideals and hopes.” Science, to be truly scientific, should be flexible, critical, and interested in human purposes as much as material accomplishments. “Relativity is thoroughly scientific; it is the absolutist way of thinking that is theological.”

Clearly Bourne’s critique of science was a critique of ideology and reification rather than a rejection of science per se. He was skeptical of the promises of scientific rationalism and positivism because, ironically, they were not scientific enough. “In spite of his lip-service to science,” the rationalist was “fundamentally unscientific.” “By constantly attempting to disprove . . . the other world,” he managed to keep it alive. Bourne’s critique of scientism and plea for the modesty of the scientific enterprise marked the beginnings of his
critique of intellectuals who were invested in reproducing power/knowledge interests, connections that became more clear to him through the war’s reliance on intellectual participation.

In place of the “Anglo-Saxon” emphasis on Promethean mastery and domination, exhibited in the fascination with science and technology, he proposed a “post-scientific ideology,” combining the “wonder” and “imagination” in Whitman’s poetry, Maurice Maeterlinck’s mysticism, James’s pragmatism, and the capacity for objectivity and abstraction found in the “new science” of primitive psychology. This ideology integrated instinct and intellect, D. H. Lawrence’s blood and judgment, the “personal vibrations” of the artistic life with the “quiet sea of impersonality” of the scientific mind. As Sherman Paul has suggested, it amounted to a “new idealism, scientific in method but mystical in scope.”

The solution Bourne proposed differed markedly from Lippmann’s conclusion that Bergson’s élan vital would fritter itself away unless it came under the control of scientific discipline. Unlike his *Preface to Politics*, in which he looked to intuition or creative myth as an escape from drift, in *Drift and Mastery* Lippmann aligned himself with the growth of the bureaucratic corporation, the centralized state, and the hegemony of professionals and managers promoting the “scientific spirit.” Bourne, unmasking scientific expertise and the idea of rational control to remove social conflict as ideology, argued that the current fascination was a theological fascination with faith itself. Although the scientific manager might exude charm and kindness, he warned, “his object in life is to make men efficient [and] to make them purr while doing it.”

Again he recommended giving up on mastery altogether: “This belief in the power and the desirability of controlling things is illusion. Life works in a series of surprises. One’s powers are given in order that one may be alert and ready, resourceful and keen.”

Rather, he turned to the feminist movement for the kind of “post-scientific philosophy” that he hoped would transform the Anglo-Saxon preoccupation with mastery and control. The frank rejection of masculine hierarchy and institutions exhibited by English and American feminists impressed him, as he wrote from Paris:
The feminist movement is so inspiring, for it is going, I hope, to assert the feminine point of view,—the more personal, the social, emotional attitude towards things, and so soften the crudities of this hard, hierarchical, over-organized, anarchic—in the sense of split-up into uncomprehending groups—civilization, which masculine domination has created in Anglo-Saxondom. The identification of the feminine with the “unofficial” and “naturally human and sensitive” has been understood to reflect Bourne’s appreciation of a women’s culture. That appreciation is also suggested by his frequent association with the feminist community in New York, the friends such as Elizabeth Irwin, Elizabeth Westwood, Mary Alden Hopkins, and Alyse Gregory and acquaintances such as Frances Perkins, Katherine Anthony, Crystal Eastman, and Helen Boardman. His admiration of their cultural politics is worth noting at some length:

There is a most delightful group of young women here who constitute a real “salon.” . . . They are decidedly emancipated and advanced, and so thoroughly healthy and zestful, or at least it seems so to my unsophisticated masculine sense. They shock you constantly. . . . They have an amazing combination of wisdom and youthfulness, or humor and ability, and innocence and self-reliance, which absolutely belies everything you will read in the story-books or any other descriptions of womankind. They are of course all self-supporting and independent, and they enjoy the adventure of life; the full, reliant, audacious way in which they go about makes you wonder if the new woman isn’t to be a very splendid sort of person. . . . They talk much about the “Human Sex,” which they claim to have invented, and which is simply a generic name for those whose masculine brutalities and egotisms and feminine pettinesses and stupidities have been purged away so that there is left stuff for a genuine comradeship and healthy frank regard and understanding.

More than any other, this group of feminists symbolized to him the great hope of the modern revolution. Not only would a feminized/ist
culture “soften” the “crudities” of masculine civilization, but it also would place personal relations on a different plane, more cooperative, more egalitarian, and more responsive to personal needs and differences. “Whether we could work the feminine into our spirit and life . . . the personal, the nonofficial, the naturally human and sensitive” was his mark of that revolution’s success. Accepting women as “an equally valid personality” would disrupt America’s “chivalric attitude towards life,” a “dread fear of life, sex, despair, and the depths of experience.” Since American culture associated the feminine with “effeminacy,” it placed women in a “highly artificial position, adored and despised, at once and “transform[ed] every feminine human being into a lady and then ma[de] her uncomfortable or illegitimately flattered by reverencing her.” To the hardened masculine mind, a feminist revolution meant reformulating “too many codes, too many relations.” To Bourne’s mind, however, “it would make life an adventure rather than a ride in a suburban train.”

Although he welcomed the “feminine” qualities of the New Woman, he also admired the public involvement, activism, and autonomy of feminists and suffragists, qualities associated traditionally with masculinity. Their political activity was not cooperative but confrontational. They put themselves on the line; they risked arrest, went on hunger strikes, and endangered their personal safety. The British suffragists had developed “a model for all revolutionary parties the world over.” In addition to his admiration of a women’s culture, then, it is clear that he was impressed by the direct political activism of the suffragists, probably because they reshaped political discourse and altered the exercise of power, despite fears of the (real and perceived) powers of (public) women. His feminism was therefore complicated, associating on the one hand femininity and the feminization of culture and consciousness with traditional female attributes, and on the other, conceiving of feminism more broadly, in terms of activism, independence, self-reliance, and energy, qualities that ranked among the highest cultural ideals he held. If these cultural values were traditionally associated with masculinity, he associated them with the dionysiac—that is, with youth itself.

Indeed, the association of feminists and youth and the dionysian was made from the start. “Youth” was “really more typical of the
feminines I have known than the youths," he wrote in 1911 with reference to the feminists and suffragists he knew. Feminist rebellion was a youth revolt because it frankly rejected traditional power relations and was thoroughly anticonventional. Like the youth of his generation—the activists, writers, radicals, and bohemians—feminists had little power or status and certainly no class privilege, but they were energetic, committed, cooperative, and courageous, terms of power and dionysian vitalism. Suffragists also were demonstrating that power was not inimical to femininity; they offered "stunning proof that even the most constant participation in the melee of public life doesn't necessarily make women unwomanly. I think it rather tends to make them great." Female power, associated with chaos and disorder, was feared with the appearance of the New Woman. Bourne may have agreed, but he welcomed it as he welcomed the dionysiac in an excessively apollonian culture.

Although he did not fully unmoor the traditional cultural understandings of gender and gender difference, he subverted the easy association of certain characteristics with certain gendered subjects. Citing the differences between men and women as erotic differences, he showed the importance of freeing individuals from the regulative fictions of sexual difference.

So much of the cruelty in human relations seems to me to spring from the unequal endowment of desire and appreciation in men and women, and this arises largely from the inequalities of position and social milieu.

If he positioned women conventionally, on the side of sensitivity and cultivation, he saw that difference as a contingent one, subject to an economic order that prized independence and autonomy. In offering a view of gender difference as a difference in desire, however, he anticipated the return to the theoretical exploration of the semiotic, the jouissance of the presymbolic order, to which feminist poststructuralists have turned in the latter part of this century.

Nothing may more clearly distinguish Bourne's social radicalism from Lippmann's progressivism than their views on the feminist movement, women's economic power, and the treatment of
women’s “roles” or “natures.” Lippmann revealed a fundamental ambivalence to “the woman’s movement” and the idea of women as politically active and an open hostility to the idea of women as full participants in the economic substructure.

The first impulse of emancipation seems to be in the main that woman should model her career on man’s. But she cannot do that for the simple reason that she is a woman. . . . She cannot taboo her own character in order to become suddenly an amateur male.

There were “plenty of men on this earth,” he continued, setting to rest the thought of welcoming women into industry or the professions. “I, for one, should say that the presence of women in the labor market is an evil to be combatted by every means at our command.” For women to achieve mastery, they must learn to integrate the discipline of science into the home. By rationalizing marketing chores and organizing childcare, they could take advantage of scientific advances and alleviate some of the burdens of homemaking. Women could, and should, exercise their powers as consumers, Lippmann insisted, and in that capacity they might strengthen the consumer influence overall in politics. But mastery for women emphatically did not mean extending to them political rights or agency as producers, much less economic resources, other than those that pertained to their primary roles as housekeepers.

Lippmann used mastery as the measure of social progress; Bourne used the liberation of women because women were more subject to institutional controls than even he, an outsider freed from many Protestant expectations. For women it was much more difficult to reject gendered conventions. In the final analysis, Bourne’s youth revolution was conceived as much in terms of a sexual revolution as a generational rebellion. By feminizing culture, members of his generation would socialize it; by feminizing consciousness, they would restore the personal point of view into human relations. By feminizing politics, they would make it more active and confrontational. In short, in backing the feminist revolution, he was also reasserting the dionysian virtues of the younger generation.
The shift from youth to young intellectual began increasingly to carry the weight of his social agenda, and by 1915, he began referring to young intellectuals rather than to the more abstract youth as his historical agent, particularly as the youth of Europe and America began to turn toward nationalism and militarism during the course of the war. His reference to young intellectuals, as the vanguard not only of their generation but of intellectuals as a whole, implied that there were individuals of a certain age and type who could carry the cultural and social agenda forward. His attention to their role and responsibilities constituted his response to the increasing importance of intellectuals in the war effort. The progressives in particular saw the war as the "great integrative enterprise" they were looking for to turn their talents to practical effect. Bourne's criticism of their rush to war brought him to break openly with the pragmatic-progressive wing of the liberal intelligentsia. His most trenchant critique was the culmination of his effort to battle for the allegiance of his own generation.