In recent years there have been attempts to revisit the history of British sociology. It was often suggested that prior to 1950 ‘sociology hardly existed in the British Isles as an intellectual enterprise or even a series of pragmatic prescriptions’ (Soffer 1982:768). In particular, the UK was seen as lacking any institutionalised form of sociological study (Anderson 1968); it is only recently that this story has been fully contested. A key topic here has been this ‘problem of institutionalisation’ (Abrams 1968:4), specifically how the one major institutional event, the appointment of L.T. Hobhouse to the Martin White Professorship in Sociology at the LSE in 1907, denied backing to figures such as Patrick Geddes (Studholme 2008), his collaborator Victor Branford (Scott and Bromley 2013) and H.G. Wells (Levitas 2010). Consequently, scholars have focused on how this meant certain visions of sociology, be they based on biology (Renwick 2012), the environment (Studholme 2008), social reconstruction (Scott and Bromley 2013) or utopianism (Levitas 2010) were lost.

These works have been important and fruitful, however, this history has tended to stop with World War I. British sociology has quickly gained a ‘forgotten period’ of the years between this and the late 50s/60s when the expansion of university education and the formation of the British Sociological Association provided new impetus to discuss sociology’s history (Halsey 2007, Platt 2003). This is despite the fact sociology had a clear presence, and a number of successes, in Britain during these years as a ‘floating discipline’ (Rocquin 2014).

This chapter considers the work of a scholar active throughout this forgotten period: G.D.H. Cole. Cole is not part of the sociological canon with his name rarely, if ever, occurring in histories of the disciplines or summaries of social theory. There are justifiable reasons for
this exclusion, including Cole’s own distancing from the discipline (Cole 1957a). However, we will argue a key reason was Cole’s era and work; by coming to prominence after these institutionalisation battles Cole confronted a form of sociology which was antithetical to his views and goals. Rather than abide by its precepts he sought to combine sociology and politics in a normative theory driven by the idea of individual emancipation. As he put it: ‘“Social Theory”, then, I regard as an essentially normative study, of which the purpose is to tell people how to be socially good, and to aim at social goods and avoid social evils’ (Cole 1950:10).

In what way follows we will outline the basis of Cole’s sociological outlook. From here we will discuss how Cole linked his sociology to a normatively driven political theory before finally returning to Cole’s relation to the sociology of his day. Before that, however, some biographical detail is required.

Who was Cole?

George Douglas Howard Cole was born in 1889 and died in 1959 having been for 14 years the first holder of the Chichele Professorship of Social and Political Theory at the University of Oxford. Throughout his career, running from his first book, The World of Labour in 1913 to the posthumous publication of the final volume of his History of Socialist Thought in 1960 Cole filled many roles, he was a political theorist, a philosopher, a labour historian1, an economist and, as we will suggest, a sociologist. He published incredibly widely across these fields, including over 70 books and numerous articles.

Further to this, Cole held many roles outside academia, he was: labour correspondent for the Manchester Guardian, a founding member of both the New Fabian Research Bureau and the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda, twice chairman of the Fabian Society (despite a

1 Having effectively invented this field of study (Owen 1966)
sometimes frosty relationship with this group), a frequent writer for the New Statesman along with numerous newspapers both national and local\(^2\), a key player in the Workers Educational Association including its first Director of Tutorial Classes in 1922, a Labour candidate for parliament, director of the UNESCO seminar on workers’ education, a writer of socialist ditties and plays, president of the International Socialist Society and a tutor to prominent Labour politicians, such as Hugh Gaitskell and Harold Wilson. He even found time to write 20 detective novels with his wife, Margaret Cole (see Cole 1971 and Carpenter 1973 for detailed biographies of Cole).

During Cole’s time, his influence was vast, so much so that a so-called ‘Cole Group’ formed at Oxford (Gaitskell 1960). Indeed, the period of 1929-33 has been termed the ‘age of Cole’ within the Labour party and the wider movement (Riddell 1995) and one obituary canonised him as a ‘secular saint’ (Martin 1959:63).

One of Cole’s biographies begins with the claim that ‘obscurity has never been a threat to G.D.H. Cole’ (Houseman 1979:7) yet we would argue it is a major threat now. The exception to this occurs within socialist theory where his guild, or, as current parlance has it, libertarian, socialism (Cole 1920a) continues to influence a small group of scholars (Schecter 1994, Wyatt 2011, Dawson 2013, Masquelier 2014). His continued influence in this field is perhaps unsurprising given the strongly normative element of Cole’s thought, this was central to his sociology, and his conception of what sociology should be.

*Cole’s Sociology*

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\(^2\) The Cole archives in Nuffield College Library, University of Oxford, contain a large selection of such newspaper articles. Their topics are broad, including: contemporary politics, freedom, democracy, economics and capitalism.
As we have seen above, Cole had a normative conception of sociological study as telling people ‘how to be socially good’. Therefore, his turn to sociology was not due to a positivist desire to know, or an interpretivist will to understand, but rather due to a political drive to change. As he told his students at Oxford: ‘that it is desirable to discover [social] regularities (which do exist) in order to know how to act for the best is evident’ (Cole n.d.a:7)³. Therefore, Cole’s fundamental claim that ‘the subject-matter of social theory is the action of men [sic, and throughout the chapter] in association’ (Cole 1920b:17) is as much a normative claim concerning the ends of his guild socialism as it as an empirical claim regarding the centrality of function to modernity. Consequently, while in what follows the focus will be in outlining Cole’s sociology this, as we shall see in the next section, is intimately tied to his political alternative, with its focus on individual emancipation and political pluralism.

This intimate connection is indicated by the fact that Cole’s sociology starts with political theory, namely Rousseau and the general will, as ‘the key to any rational social theory must be found in some conception of a General Will’ (Cole 1914a:149-50). However, in turning to Rousseau, Cole in effect ‘sociologises’ him, since to understand how the general will is conceived for Cole, we need to begin with the principles which condition the nature of sociality, as Cole puts it:

non-social man would be neither an egoist nor an altruist in any moral sense: he would be pre-moral. But he would have in him already, as essential parts of his nature, the qualities which under the influence of society would subsequently take on a moral character (Cole 1955a:ix)

Therefore, in drawing upon the trope of ‘non-social man’, a common hermeneutic device in social theory (Bauman 1990:5), Cole argues that an ‘essential’ part of human activity and

³ Though undated this lecture, and the other undated references which follow, would have been delivered during the late 40s or 50s with perhaps the notes reused throughout this period.
nature can be found in what he terms the ‘associative will’ (Cole 1914a:145). Humans, for Cole, inevitably associate with one another, this is partly expressed through the need for association in ‘satisfying common wants’ and social action for common purpose (Cole 1920b:49). Therefore, Cole’s sociology is one concerned with association and its expression in function; the associative will can be found when we have common interests or, as Cole also puts it, ‘obligations’ or ‘loyalties’ to others (Cole 1926). While this is primarily work-based loyalties, such as the associative form of production (Cole 1920a), it is also a wider conception, where loyalties are owed to civil bodies, such as Churches, and personal communities, such as the family (Cole 1926).

It is from such associations that morality grows. As has been noted by Lamb (2005) Cole’s particular contribution to general will theory is an attempt to understand it as a process of structure and agency, a particularly sociological contribution. To begin with the structural elements, the general will, as the guidelines for moral conduct, grows out of the various associative wills and come to exert a coercive function upon individuals. As Cole puts it, the general will develops ‘a set of fundamental laws and principles that will induce the citizens’ to act in line with its precepts (Cole 1955a:xxx). The fundamental precept of the social contract, from which the general will develops, is that a political sovereign exists to allow us to ‘realise political liberty by giving up lawlessness and licence’ (Cole 1955a:xvii). However, the associative will also drives social action since it is linked to our functional activity, as ‘nothing is done without loyalty. Loyalty is the root of the tree of good and evil conduct’ (Cole 1926:156). Therefore, when acting functionally we are not simply acting through self-interest but also through the loyalties and obligations such associative activity engenders. The general will cannot possibly regulate such a diverse society. Consequently:

As soon as the plurality of loyalties or obligations is admitted, and various groups and associations are seen as the points of focus for these various loyalties, it becomes plain that
the individual will or conscience, guided by the consideration of right, is the sole rational
arbiter of such conflicts (Cole 1926:160)

Therefore, while the general will provides moral precepts for all issues which affect all
citizens, roughly speaking, equally and in the same way (Cole 1914a:152) it is within
associational activity that forms of associationally specific and individual morality are
developed. However, it would be mistaken to treat these two planes as independent for Cole
since the general will is an *expression* of the desires of associations taken collectively and it
is through associational activity that it emerges. As Cole argues: ‘*there is no General Will
unless the people will the good*’ (Cole 1955a:xxxvii). In associative action, then, the General
Will or common good, i.e. the purpose of the association, becomes an extension of an
individual’s will, for it is both constituted by, and constitutive of, individual conceptions of
the good life.

Consequently, Cole’s sociology is fundamentally an *associational* sociology, it takes as its
prime unit of analysis the associations formed by individuals, their varying functions and
loyalties and how these change over time and space. This includes all the theoretical
assumptions such an associational sociology would hold – that we all do form associations,
that this is an inevitable part of sociality and that associations have forms of agency, the latter
of these is a claim sociologists following Cole have urged the discipline to embrace
(Schmitter 1993), though such an embrace has been infrequent. This means Cole’s sociology
has a clear point of analysis:

We have to start out, not from the contrasted ideas of the atomized individual and of the State,
but from man in all his complex groupings and relations, partially embodied in social
institutions of many sorts and kinds, never in balanced equilibrium, but always changing, so
that the pattern of loyalties and of social behaviour changes with them (Cole 1950:15)
Therefore, Cole uses Rousseau’s conception of the general will as the basis of his sociology. It was Rousseau’s conception of ‘pitié’, understood as the most fundamental and natural form of compassion, that particularly appealed to Cole, for it allowed ‘sentiment’ to become ‘a force in the shaping of human affairs’ (Cole 1950:128) and ‘rejects whatever leads in society to war or subjection of man’ (Cole n.db:8). Cole therefore borrowed from Rousseau the idea that sociality and the moral outlook entailed by the General Will, are grounded in ‘human feeling itself’ (Cole 1955a:liii) and ought to be construed as a ‘primitive social impulse that has been overlaid by bad institutions, but not destroyed’ (Cole 1950:128–9).

It is here that Cole’s sociology becomes critical, since he traces these ‘bad institutions’ back to capitalism and liberal democracy. Capitalism for Cole was the source of the inequality and poverty which blighted society and made equal realisation of associative wills impossible due to a difference in resources (Cole 1955a:xxxvii). It also was inhumane in its subordination of individuals to economic requirements and dictates. As Cole put it: ‘Socialists have all too often fixed their eyes upon the material misery of the poor without realising that it rests upon the spiritual degradation of the slave’ (Cole 1972:41). This could especially be seen under contemporary forms of management where ‘the worker is treated purely as a raw material of industry’ (Cole 1914b:119). Meanwhile, Cole rejected the fundamental premise of liberal democracy, with its focus on democratic representation on the arbitrary principle of location, rather than the socially lived differentiation of function (Cole 1920a). As we shall see, both of these were confronted in Cole’s political alternative of guild socialism.

Before turning to that, however, it is important to note that Cole differentiated himself from two figures that seem similar to him, Marx and Durkheim. His relationship to the former is somewhat complex, for although he did not identify as a Marxist, he was keen to acknowledge his debt to Marxism (Cole 2010). This was unlike most sociologists of the period, in whom Marxism generated a fearful and conservative reaction (Rocquin 2014:198).
Cole in fact devoted an entire book – *The Meaning of Marxism* – to the task of re-assessing this school of thought in the light of empirical conditions and as a response to the vast array of (mis)interpretations of Marx’s work. Here Cole attempts to recover ‘the constructive influence of the minds of men’ (Cole 2010:17) in historical change, which some of the precepts of scientific Marxism had effectively obscured. Cole, therefore, not so much wished to reject the materialist conception of history as to praise Marx’s recognition of the constantly changing nature of ‘all living things’ (Cole 2010:3), even with the challenge posed by a newly emerging middle class to radical social change and scientific Marxism’s ‘profound error to contribute to “classes”…any reality distinct from that of the individuals which compose them’ (Cole 2010:1). Here one finds another explanation for Cole’s fervour for the General Will’s capacity to treat the ‘reality’ of the common good and the ‘reality’ of individual conceptions of the good life as co-constitutive.

Cole’s similarities to Durkheim are notable and wide (see Dawson 2013) and indeed Cole read Durkheim and appreciated much of his work. He crowned him, reflecting the canon at the time, ‘the most important French sociologist after Comte and LePlay’ and praised his insistence on the ‘functional character of diversity’ (Cole 1952:125). However, he had two key criticisms. Firstly, he argued that while Durkheim’s discovery of coercive social facts was central he didn’t fully discuss why societies develop their particular value structures (Cole n.d.c:4). Secondly, he criticises Durkheim for rejecting the notion of class struggle which reflects his nature as a ‘conservative social thinker’, who ‘emphasises the danger of new social tendencies coming into conflict with the existing moral order of a society, and so leading to its disruption’ (Cole 1952:127). Both of these points are united in Cole’s focus on the demands of capital as both giving society certain value structures and in making class struggle central.
Therefore, Cole took up a unique position in the emerging sociological canon of his day, distancing himself from key figures and placing himself in the tradition of Rousseau. In doing so, he had a key grounding for a critical and normative sociology, in which he opposed the perversion of a ‘primitive social impulse’ by ‘bad [liberal capitalist] institutions’ to the actualisation of the General Will within a socialist alternative. In the following section we will look further at how Cole linked his sociology and politics.

Cole’s Politics and Alternative

While we have noted above that Cole had an associational sociology, his normative focus was always driven by individual freedom and empowerment. He shared with Durkheim a belief that contemporary societies were marked by a regime of moral individualism (Cole 1950:151-6) and put his own valuing of this into religious language with the claim that ‘my Zeus is man’ (Cole 1950:16). Indeed, it was due to this belief in individual empowerment that Cole turned to associations since each individual was realised or ‘made particular’ by engaging in associational activity (Cole 1920b:19-20). Therefore, this drove Cole’s alternative: guild socialism.

Guild socialism, in Cole’s hands, was based on the two critiques which, as noted above, emerged from his critical sociology. Firstly, capital not only exacerbated poverty but also reduced the individual autonomy and freedom found in work. Cole refused to accept that people could not ‘suffer deeply from spending their lives in tasks in which they find no pleasure’ (Cole 1957b:17) and, drawing his inspiration from William Morris (Cole 1957b), identified the source of this lack of pleasure with a lack of autonomy in a form of production subjected to the rule of the capitalist market. We have no evidence that Cole read Marx’s

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4 Of course an irony here is that, unbeknown to Cole, Durkheim had also lectured approvingly on Rousseau from a sociological perspective (Durkheim 1970).
Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, but had he done so, he would have surely been impressed by its critique of the wage system, the division of labour and its concern for the role of work in the individual’s ‘open revelation of human faculties’ (Marx 2000: 102). However, Cole did not limit the scope to a critique of labour and was keen to emphasise the fact that the ‘good life is a blend of satisfactions achieved from consumption and satisfactions achieved from successful creation’ (Cole 1950:97). As such, he recognised the need to restore control in both spheres, for even the consumer failed to experience true autonomy on a marketplace dominated by ‘commercial agencies’ (Cole 1972:107). Such a concern for self-realisation of individuals qua producers and consumers led him to advocate the replacement of the capitalist system of allocation via the market with dialogical coordination between producers and consumers organised into democratic associations. Additionally, since a key tenet of guild socialism was that ‘economic power precedes political power’ (Cole 1920a:180), ruling class power was seen to permeate political institutions, meaning that the state assumed ‘more nakedly and obviously the shape of an instrument of class domination’ (Cole 1920a:22).

The second critique concerns the nature of representative democracy, since assuming that one person can represent each individual in all their functional activity ‘flagrantly violates the fundamental principles of democracy’ (Cole 1920a:31), instead:

The essentials of democratic representation, positively stated, are, first, that the represented shall have free choice of, constant contact with, and considerable control over, his representative. The second is that he should be called upon, not to choose someone to represent him as a man or as a citizen in all the aspects of citizenship, but only to choose someone to represent his point of view in relation to some particular purpose or group of purposes, in other words, some particular function. All true and democratic representation is therefore functional representation...Brown, Jones and Robinson must therefore have, not one
vote each, but as many different functional votes as there are different questions calling for associative action in which they are interested. (Cole 1920a:32-3)

Both of these critiques lead Cole to develop a system based upon associations, the guilds, representing individuals in their three fields of production, consumption and ‘civic activities’. Each guild then has executive authority over its particular field (Cole 1920a). Importantly for Cole, this would be a highly devolved system so that the main activity of guilds happens at the level of ‘the factory, or place of work’ (Cole 1920a:48). Guilds would be representative bodies where workers vote on issues of procedure as well as related concerns such as wages, appointment of managers and workplace regulations and would be in dialogue with consumers regarding the allocation of resources. This recognises the value of political and moral individualism and how this is ‘made particular’ by functional activity while also removing the power of private capital by placing control in hands of the producers and consumers alike.

Within such a system the state, refashioned as the ‘commune’, has its field of activity greatly limited to co-ordination between guilds that negotiate their common interests and desires. While this commune body still has some executive activities (foreign affairs, ‘coercive’ functions, taxation) the principle of functional representation makes sovereignty multiple and connected to associative wills (Cole 1920a:139-40). Furthermore, since ‘the good State must be a State based on equality – on the equal participation of all its citizens’ (Cole 1955a:xxxvii), the guilds ensure that all citizens get functional democratic voices in socialised corporations and, by removing the market mechanisms in favour of negotiation, lessen advantages of income while guaranteeing dialogical coordination.

These are the broad outlines of the guild socialist system, which we don’t have the space to explore further (see Dawson 2013:62-72, 106-9; Masquerier 2014:143-68). Instead, what is
important for our discussion here is that Cole’s guild socialism rests upon his sociological viewpoint and critique. It is only by conceiving of the general will emerging in a process of interaction between associative and general wills, with the goal of equal participation from all, that the justification for guild socialism can be realised.

Reflecting Cole’s wider interests and his turn to sociology, he also used guild socialism as an inspiration for practice, ‘willing the good’ in this case was based upon the concept of ‘encroaching control’, which is ‘directed to wrestling bit by bit from the hands of the possessing classes the economic power which they now exercise’ (Cole 1920a:196). Unsurprisingly, this required an association, the trade unions, to be active in advancing control and the gaining of economic power. Therefore, not only was Cole’s sociology linked to an alternative, but also a way of realising this alternative. It is this focus on means and ends, what later writers would term Cole’s attempt to become the labour movement’s eminence grise (Riddell 1995:947) which gave his sociology a unique position in its day.

Cole and British Sociology

Above we outlined what we termed Cole’s ‘sociology’; however, nowhere does Cole use that term to describe his work. Indeed, as we shall see below, Cole rejected the label of ‘sociologist’. This is despite the fact Cole had some early and important connections to the world of British sociology, for example he published in the British Journal of Sociology (Cole 1957a), the Sociological Review (Cole 1914b) and the American Journal of Sociology (Cole 1946), was one of the sponsors on a letter which called for the formation of what would become the British Sociological Association (Platt 2003:18-20), reviewed many of the key sociological books of his day, such as Lockwood’s Blackcoated Worker (Cole 1959) and was acquainted with many of the early sociologists in the UK, including Barbara Wootton via the Workers’ Educational Association (Oakley 2011:96) and Michael Young who worked under
him during Cole’s brief period at the Ministry of Labour during World War II (Cole 1971:231). Furthermore, his 1955 *Studies in Class Structure* has been claimed as one of the first sociological monograph on class in the UK (Abraham 1973:626); its discussion of the emergence of a new ‘technical’ middle class and changes in forms of social mobility with the emergence of new occupations prefigured much sociological debate on class in the second half of the Twentieth Century.

Cole also contributed towards the further institutionalisation of sociology in Britain. Upon returning to Oxford – as a Reader in Economics in 1925, during the war as the leader of the Nuffield Social Reconstruction Survey and later as the Chichele Professor – Cole agitated for greater inclusion of the social sciences at the University (Worswick 1960). For Carpenter it was largely due to Cole’s advocacy on University committees that lectureships in sociology were established and that ‘Oxford finally came to accept sociology’ (Carpenter 1973:219). Indeed, throughout his time in the Chichele professorship Cole was perhaps the only lecturer at Oxford to teach the theories of sociologists, including Durkheim, Comte, Turgot, LePlay, Ginsberg, Weber, T.H. Marshall and Parsons (Cole 1952).

It also seems that at the time, and for some time after, Cole was thought of as a sociologist. As part of a torrid attack by the writer St. John Ervine in 1934 on Cole as ‘the greatest enemy of freedom alive in this land’ compared to whom ‘Sir Oswald Mosely is a devout lover of liberty’ (Ervine 1934a) Ervine claimed that ‘I have no doubt whatever of his authority or his influence among a large number of ardent politicians and sociologists’ (Ervine 1934b). From a more sympathetic position, Houseman spoke of how Cole’s desire to write accessible texts on social matters made him an early advocate of ‘popular sociology’ (Houseman 1979:94). While Scott argues that Cole’s ideas ‘became influential elements in the emerging mainstream’ of British sociology textbooks (Scott 2014:214). Cole was also enthusiastic about one element of the emergence of sociology. In the UK political and economic theory
had largely been separated as disciplines; however, due to the growth of sociology in continental Europe, including the work of Durkheim, this divorce ‘has not been anything like so complete’ (Cole 1934:3). This, for Cole, was to the great credit of sociology since economics and politics cannot be divorced in theory or practice, reflecting his desire to overcome such boundaries, condemning the ‘isolation of specialised studies from the general study of Society as a whole’ (Cole 1950:29).

Yet Cole rejected the label of sociologist. To understand why, it is easiest to quote him at length.

Because I hold strong subjective views on these and other social questions, and have always taken part and interest in social investigation primarily for the purpose of furthering causes in which I believe, I have always rejected the appellation of “social scientist” and have been reluctant to accept that of “sociologist” for fear of being expected to restrict my conclusions to what can be inductively demonstrated on the basis of purely factual studies. This does not mean that I reject, or seek to minimize, the importance of studying as impartially as possible all the relevant “social facts” on the presence of which any effective action for change must needs rest to a very great extent. I want certain things because I believe them to be worth wanting, not because they are actually wanted (Cole 1957a:167)

Therefore, as Cole put it,

I am not a “social scientist”, but a social idealist who tries to make use of the factual verdicts of scientific investigators, but not to be ruled by them, except in excluding the impracticable from my field of aspiration (Cole 1957a:168)

We have seen above how Cole operated as a ‘social idealist’ in his attempt to link ideal conditions of existence to a normative project. The more pressing issue for this section is what led Cole to paint this picture of sociology and then differentiate himself from the
discipline. To understand this, we must return to the question of the state of British sociology during this ‘forgotten period’ of its history.

The pre-WWI period of British sociology, the time of the ‘problem of institutionalisation’, would have been a congenial environment for Cole. It is easy to imagine him engaging with Geddes’ idea of sociology as applied civics given his own inspiration from William Morris and the ideas contained in his *A Factory as it May Be* (cf. Geddes 1904, Cole 1957b). He also would have been in agreement with the key argument of Wells that sociology is the ‘creation of Utopias – and their exhaustive criticism’ (Wells 1906:367) given his own focus on using social theory to assist in willing the ‘good society’ (Cole 1950:1-16). Alas, Cole was born too late for such debates. Therefore, when Cole speaks of sociology in this period having an ‘outlaw’ status (Cole 1950:23) he was referring to its second quest, following institutionalisation; the one for scientific recognition. As Renwick notes, after the battles for the Martin White Professorship, the task of establishing sociology as an autonomous science began (Renwick 2012:170-7). In doing so, two distinct paths emerged, traced by Cole (1952:117-18). One path, which Cole linked to the LSE, turned to evolution and the philosophy of history. Since this was influenced by the work of Max Weber it also tended to adopt the concept of value-free study. The second field, influenced by Durkheim, tended to move into the field of cultural anthropology through its use of the comparative method. Once again, this method tended to value objectivity in its desire to make value-free comparisons. In order to achieve such objectivity Cole argued sociology had become an increasingly ‘statistical’ discipline with only a few acolytes of theorising left. These few had, in turn, become aempirical and akin to philosophers rather than sociologists (Cole 1950:26-7).

All of these elements, as we have seen, clashed with Cole’s conception of intellectual study. Firstly, he was strongly opposed to intellectual specialisation, which he saw as especially prominent in the greater use of statistical techniques. Secondly, while always valuing the role
of theory, he consistently sought to connect this to material conditions, saying the social theorist is constantly concerned with finding ‘data’ (Cole 1950:12). Thirdly, it contrasted with Cole’s belief in sociology and social theory as the study of how to be ‘socially good’. However, what counts as good, and the ends we should be seeking, is fundamentally, for Cole, a moral judgement (Cole 1950:249) and, as he also argued, ‘you can’t prove anything to be good’ (Cole n.dd:4). While Weber used a similar distinction between ‘facts’ and morals in his defence of value-freedom Cole goes in the opposite direction, arguing:

It is often suggested that the sociologist will be endangering his objectivity if he identifies himself with the advocacy of any specific social policy, and that he ought in his investigations to set aside his personal beliefs and values and confine himself to a coldly impartial survey of facts. But what nonsense this is!...the investigator who remains coldly aloof will never discover some of the most essential facts – especially the facts about the value-judgments of the persons whose conditions and mutual relations he is setting out to study. His duty as a sociologist is to remain aware of his bias, and to correct it in arriving at his conclusions: his duty cannot be not to have a bias, for it is often his having one that is his strongest inducement to undertake his investigations (Cole 1957a:170-1)

Therefore, since moral positions lead us to certain topics and to appreciating the position of those we study, it is inevitable that morals, and biases, become part of sociological analysis. The fact that for Cole so many sociologists had attempted to ignore this, in effect creating a divide between a ‘pure sociologist’ who simply collects facts and a ‘policy maker’ who can decide ends, was the key problem with the sociology he encountered (Cole 1957a:171). It is notable how close this view is to that of Howard Becker in his classic Whose Side are we On? (1967). Therefore, not only was Cole born too late for debates on the utopian elements of sociology, he was also born too early for debates on its values and normative ends.
There are undoubtedly other reasons Cole didn’t make it into the sociological canon. His aversion towards specialisation in favour of generalism is shared by other ‘failed’ sociologists, such as Geddes (Law 2012). Moreover, given the importance of books in canon building (DaSilva and Vieira 2011), Cole lacked that one truly great text which could be put on reading lists as a systemisation of his thought, reflecting Cole’s desire to write broadly and quickly, rather than carefully and in-depth (Carpenter 1973: 217-27). *Guild Socialism Restated* and *Social Theory* were close – the latter of which Scott (2014:213) places as one of four ‘pioneer’ British sociology textbooks – but these were shaped by the aforementioned normative view, making them unsuitable for sociology’s emerging quest for scientific recognition. But, to truly understand why Cole is not placed within the history of British sociology, it is central to understand the conditions of institutionalised sociology during his time. Cole simply did not ‘fit’ within the discipline’s quest for scientific recognition and therefore was left to work within and across other disciplines. As we have suggested, had Cole been born later or earlier this may have been different, but sociology had the unfortunate luck of Cole working in the forgotten period of the discipline while also being alienated from it.

5 It is striking how similar Cole’s position is to someone else alienated from British sociology in this period: Karl Mannheim. Having arrived at the LSE in 1933, Mannheim instantly, and famously, clashed with Ginsberg and what he saw as the ‘untheoretical empiricism’ of British sociology (Kettler et al. 1984:120). Such a breach became even more pronounced when Mannheim turned his hand to normative prescriptions and the construction of his ‘Third Way’ (Mannheim 1943). He was eventually forced to give up on sociology, spending the last year of his life in education research. Therefore, Mannheim and Cole confronted a form of sociology totally unaccommodating of their utopian and theoretical leanings. Indeed, Cole provided a lengthy review of one of Ginsberg’s books where, rarely mentioning Ginsberg, he makes clear his belief in the need for both empirically driven theoretical enquiry and an orientation towards how actors can produce social change (Cole 1953). While
Conclusion

As this chapter has hopefully shown Cole was a unique intellectual, yet he also confronted many of the issues which our discipline still confronts today, for example, what it means to be a ‘sociologist’ but also be ‘public’ and ‘political’. He had his share of successes and continued to feel pride in the idea that his guild socialist work may have ‘left a strong impression behind’ on much of the Labour movement (Cole 1932:66). But, Cole never lost his fundamentally optimistic, utopian urges; despite his advocacy of a link between sociology and policy he could never be what Burawoy later termed a ‘policy sociologist’, required to craft policy with the ends decided by someone else (Burawoy 2005); Cole would always want to decide the ends too, hence why he defined policy broadly as ‘what ought to be done’ (Cole 1957a:158). He held strong to the view that ‘one could set out to be scientific and moral’; to decide both means and ends (Cole 1950:249). This assured that Cole had a troubled relationship with leading lights in the Labour party who not only felt they had the authority to decide the ends but would flinch at Cole’s utopianism. Indeed, when Clement Attlee would have Cole to visit he would welcome him by saying ‘give me a pair of starry eyes Douglas and I will do what you say’ (Foot 1968:53).

So Cole was a dreamer but there was another part of his personality we haven’t covered. While many speak of his kindness and humility (see Martin 1959) he was also, by all reckoning, a bit lacking in humour and very much your stereotypical ‘aloof intellectual’ (Brown 1960). Cole was, in perhaps his most lasting public contribution, the inspiration for the character of Professor Yaffle in Bagpuss. Oliver Postgate, Cole’s nephew by marriage and creator of the show, justified his choice by saying he wanted a character who ‘had no

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Mannheim had already ‘made his name’ as a sociologist before coming to Britain, Cole had no such opportunity to be removed from British sociology.
sense of humour and wasn’t a bit ridiculous’ but who also was a ‘distinguished academic personage who would claim to know everything and would go “nerp, nerp, nerp” in a birdy way’ (Postage 2010:296). Recognising these two parts of Cole character, the dreamer convinced by the value of associational forms of socialism and the dry academic puts us in mind of how Cole concluded his biography of another humourless dreamer, Robert Owen. The final words Cole used to defend Owen can apply equally to himself: ‘Well, “non-sensical notions”, as well as bores, are oftentimes the salt of the earth’ (Cole 1930:322).

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