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Reviewed by Douglas Dollinger

A penetrating analyst and panoptic synthesizer, Michael Scriven brings an intellectual rigour and multidisciplinary range to his thinking about evaluation that few scholars can match. While he has made scores of pivotal contributions to the field of evaluation, much of what makes Scriven so important to the study, practice, and theory of evaluation is his tenacious interrogation of basic ideas, principles, and methods.

The Future of Evaluation in Society: A Tribute to Michael Scriven, based on talks delivered at the 2011 Stauffer Symposium, presents a broad picture of this seminal thinker as seen through the eyes of other leading thinkers: Ernest House, Daniel Stufflebeam, Jennifer Greene, and Robert Stake, to name just a few of the contributors to this volume. Notably, the volume begins with a substantial piece by Scriven on the foundation and future of evaluation.

Before turning to the future, however, we should take a quick glance at the recent history of evaluation. Scriven is its central figure. Among other remarkable accomplishments, he has established strong conceptual and terminological foundations for evaluation; critiqued traditional methodologies, terminologies, taxonomies, and techniques; and developed a series of practical approaches and tools based on his theoretical and empirical insights, all of which are touched on by the commentators in this volume. His principal concern throughout has been what he calls the epistemology of evaluation, the study of its most fundamental conceptions and presuppositions. Although I suspect he would reject the label, his project strikes me as Kantian: His first task, we might say, has been to establish the possibility of evaluation as a science. This is a revolutionary project in itself.

Why bother doing it? As a response to the dogmatic slumber of positivism, for one. Whatever evaluation might claim for itself, it was, the positivists alleged, tainted by values—“the odor of subjectivity,” in Scriven’s words—and thus could not be scientific. This contention, fortified by an influential tradition rooted in Hume, assumed the force of an axiom across much of the 20th century. Scriven has devoted a good part of his encyclopedic intellect to demolishing these pervasive and obdurate prejudices. He calls this the first conceptual revolution in our thinking about evaluation. It is now underway.

The second revolution goes beyond establishing the scientific legitimacy of evaluation to affirming the status of evaluation as the alpha discipline of all the

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sciences, a step even his most ardent admirers question. This revolution, we might say, is just beginning. As an alpha discipline, evaluation has the role of, in Scriven's words, "checking and improving the credentials of all other disciplines," an ambitious role, to say the least.

For Scriven, two revolutions are not enough. A third is needed to transform the alpha discipline of evaluation into what he calls a paradigm discipline. In this role, evaluation would provide the ultimate model for the foundational construction of all applied disciplines, an even more ambitious program. In sum, these three revolutions represent the future course of evaluation for Scriven. Taken together, they also represent the conceptual backdrop against which the other contributors to this volume articulate their own visions of evaluation's future. I do not have space here to go into each of these visions. A few casual remarks will have to do.

Gazing into the future, Ernest House provides a brief but fascinating paper on the threats to evaluation, foremost among which is the cooptation of the evaluation process by evaluation sponsors, as now often happens with drug approvals and as happened recently with mortgage applications and security ratings. We could call this the *realpolitik* of evaluation. Robert Stake, for his part, doubts that we will be able to speak of evaluation as an "alpha discipline" until we make a serious study of bad practices in evaluation, including bad evaluation behaviour. Stufflebeam's essay offers a compendious description of Scriven's principal achievements and is worth reading for that reason alone. Stufflebeam's vision of the future focuses on making evaluation more useful or impactful, a concern shared also by Patton, who predicts utility will remain the primary standard of evaluation excellence. Jennifer Greene stresses the importance of relationships to successful evaluation, a dimension that Scriven tends to overlook. Karen Kirkhart extends Scriven's notion of a key evaluation checklist to multicultural evaluation. In the final contribution to the volume, Melvin M. Mark offers a series of helpful reflections on the views of certain contributors to the volume and concludes with critical comments on Scriven's conception of evaluation's revolutionary future. Among other observations, he raises the simple but important point that other disciplines may resent the presumed hegemony of an alpha discipline. In other words, it may find itself drowning in a sea of resentment.

My own sense of the future, I should confess, is gloomier. House touches on what bothers me, but "conflict of interest" does not quite describe it. I would refer to it more broadly as the modern counter-enlightenment. What I am pointing to—ironically enough in a period that so often characterizes itself as the age of science, the knowledge era, and so on—is the rise of irrationalism, that is, the effective dismissal of logic and science as guides to human action. House mentions climate change, certainly a good example, but only one of many. Natural or social, science tends to run into this irrationalism as soon as it collides with powerful human interests; moreover, because evaluation always touches human interests directly, it is liable to encounter such irrationalism as a matter of course. Examples are not difficult to find. Evaluation is, after all, human enterprise. My inkling is that evaluators will continue to struggle for the legitimacy of their discipline be-

cause of its proximity to powerful human interests. In the end, Bacon was wrong: Knowledge is not power. Power and knowledge are two different things. What is more, power often protects itself by denigrating or discarding knowledge. In other words, Scriven's first revolution is not yet over: We need to keep the barricades up, the flags flying, and the fires burning.

These papers are contributions to a symposium in honour of Michael Scriven, by general acclaim the most important evaluation thinker in our period. Because the contributors are his colleagues and friends, the contributions to this volume are free of the usual academic stuffiness and intellectual cattiness that characterizes so much scholarship in the social sciences. If the student, practitioner, or professional in evaluation wants to spend a few enjoyable hours thinking through the major questions and issues of the field with its best minds, there is no better volume to consult.