

# Book Reviews

## The Social Sciences: Research Methodology

**Closed Systems and Open Minds: The Limits of Naivety in Social Anthropology.** Introduction and conclusion by Ely Devons and Max Gluckman. Max Gluckman, Ed. Aldine, Chicago 1964. x + 274 pp. \$7.95.

In this book Max Gluckman, a social anthropologist, and Ely Devons, an economist, report a methodological inquiry in collaboration with their sometime colleagues of the University of Manchester. Their study focuses ultimately on two basic problems of social science: how an investigator delimits his field of study, and whether he is justified in making "naive" assumptions about the phenomena and concepts of other disciplines which impinge on his area of inquiry.

Devons and Gluckman adopt a procedure that differs strikingly from the approach of the logician or philosopher of science in its limitation on the range of problems examined and in dealing with these problems by primary reference to five empirical essays. The contributors of these essays and the titles of the articles are: V. W. Turner, "Symbols in Ndembu ritual"; F. G. Bailey, "Two villages in Orissa (India)"; A. L. Epstein, "Urban communities in Africa"; Tom Lupton and Sheila Cunnison, "Workshop behaviour"; and William Watson, "Social mobility and social class in industrial communities."

Five procedures for demarking a field of inquiry are outlined by Devons and Gluckman. These are: (i) *circumscription*, whereby the investigator "... cuts off a manageable field of reality from the total flow of events. . . ."; (ii) *incorporation*, the acceptance of certain facts provided by other disciplines as "given," without further inquiry; (iii) *abridgment*, where the researcher makes use of more complex combinations of the facts of another discipline, which therefore may need to be summarized and simplified; (iv) *naivety*, (a) assumptions with respect to another discipline which specialists in that field would

regard as distorted or false, or (b) neglecting the research and conclusions of another discipline when these are beyond the boundary of the field the investigator has circumscribed; (v) *simplification*, the reduction of the complexity of the researcher's raw data within his own field. In practice, as the authors recognize, it is often difficult to distinguish among these principles; for example, compression (that is, incorporation and abridgment) often grades into naivety.

The authors examine the effectiveness of their analytic framework by applying it to the empirical essays, devoting the major portion of their space to the problems of circumscription and naivety. Emphasizing that the investigator must limit his system at some point, they also suggest that he keep an open mind to the possibility that closure may exclude events and relationships significant to his study. However, no general rule for decisions on closure is possible, because these are a function of the problems set by the analyst. Devons and Gluckman extol the virtue of prudence in circumscription and warn the anthropologist of the danger of exceeding the limits of his competence if he casts his net too widely. The comparative study of workshops by Lupton and Cunnison is a case in point: the investigators consider that they cannot fully understand workshop behavior without taking into account the larger social and economic systems. They therefore propose a hypothesis that involves a number of interrelated economic variables which they feel may explain observed differences in collective control of output in different types of enterprises. In Devons and Gluckman's view the researchers have overextended themselves in proposing to deal with variables which are primarily economic in nature; instead of premature closure, Lupton and Cunnison expand the boundaries of their system beyond the limits of an effective social anthropological approach.

The analysis of naivety and of the

consequences of transcending its limits, which the authors regard as their major innovation, is somewhat puzzling. The authors maintain that naivety is "... warranted and justified if the naive assumptions are not essentially involved in the analysis of the field. A fair test is to ask whether the analysis would stand if different naive assumptions were adopted" (p. 168). But if this is the case, why should the investigator make *any* naive assumptions? Presumably these assumptions would serve only an esthetic role in the investigator's analytic structure. It is difficult to believe that Devons and Gluckman are concerned primarily with the definition of an esthetic methodological component in their extended discussion of naivety. Rather, I suggest that their analysis becomes clouded when they fail to distinguish the different consequences of disregarding the "researches and conclusions of other disciplines about aspects of the events . . . [the investigator] is studying" and making *assumptions* about those events. If assumptions are made, they either play some role in analysis or they do not; if they do, it seems clear that there must be *some* consequences for analytic statements, while if they do not, one wonders why they should have been made at all.

Anthropologists familiar with Gluckman's many contributions to social anthropology will not be surprised to find that *Closed Systems and Open Minds* contains a message: the genius excepted, wise researchers will adopt a prudent policy of sound conservatism. The authors and their collaborators have raised basic issues of method; if they have not resolved these issues fully, they have developed their case in a forceful and penetrating fashion that should foster further inquiry.

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## An Atlas of Bacteria

**Bacteriology Illustrated.** R. R. Gillies and T. C. Dodds. Williams and Wilkins, Baltimore, 1965. viii + 163 pp. Illus. \$9.75.

This volume is a beginning atlas of bacteria, with color photographs of cultures and colonies grown on media especially useful in diagnosis and in differentiation together with color photographs of the organisms as seen in