Book Reviews

Disorder and Social Theory

American Sociology. Perspectives, Problems, Methods. TALCOTT PARSONS, Ed. Basic Books, New York, 1968. xxii + 346 pp. $6.95.

I am writing this shortly after the national convention of the American Sociological Association, held during the last week in August in a Boston whose saving grace was a cooling cloud cover. This setting is fitting enough for the task, considering that at least ten of the contributors to *American Sociology* are either Harvard trained or on the Harvard faculty and its editor, Talcott Parsons, is both. It must be understood at the outset, then, that the book is bound to offer a singular conception of American sociology and that an evaluation of it does not necessarily apply to American sociology as a whole.

Many of the contributors to this volume were also at the Boston meetings, presented papers, and received all the distinguishing attentions that distinguished men are customarily accorded during the massing of the troops, but nonetheless they were not at the center of things; and they were certainly not where the action was. Parsons' *American Sociology* is a bit like the Sunday New York *Times* summary The Week in Review, soberly backward-looking, condensing all the news fit to print, and more or less out of date and out of touch before it is circulated.

What makes *American Sociology* seem dated, however, is not that there has been an outpouring of new research since its publication but rather its failure, indeed its incapacity, to reflect the rapid flow of new sentiments that has, for some time now, been churning through universities and that came to flood level in the sociological community, making its public debut, at the Boston meetings. Whether or not the logic of science accords any significant place to collective sentiment, the annals of social science are a record of the collisions and collaborations between the rules of intellectual decorum to which social scientists are supposed to conform and the sentiments—often indecorous—that actually stir them.

There were really two concurrent meetings at Boston: the official one routinely managed by the ASA, and a series of unscheduled, "underground" meetings organized by the young men and women of the "radical caucus," the sociology liberation movement, with a noticeable leavening of Columbia University militants. The two tracks paralleled one another untouching, until the climactic occasion of the ASA plenary session, when more than a thousand gathered to hear Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Wilbur J. Cohen. Scheduled to be a routine honorific occasion, this became what may prove to be a historic event, in a modest way, when ASA President Philip M. Hauser, of Chicago, having heard that the radical caucus planned to demonstrate at Cohen's talk, invited the group to express its dissenting views from the platform.

The key dissenting talk was made by a young, denim-dressed sociologist from Canada's Simon Fraser University, Martin Nicolaus. In cold, measured tones Nicolaus declared: ". . . the Secretary of HEW is a military officer in the domestic front of the war against the people. . . . The department of which the man is head is more accurately described as the agency which watches over the inequitable distribution of preventable diseases, over the funding of domestic propaganda and indoctrination, over the preservation of a cheap and docile labor force. . . . This assembly here tonight . . . is a conclave of high and low priests, scribes, intellectual valets, and their innocent victims, engaged in the mutual affirmation of falsehood. . . . The profession [of sociology] is an outgrowth of 19th-century European traditionalism and conservatism, wedded to 20th-century American corporation liberalism. . . . The professional eyes of the sociologist are on the down people, and the professional palm of the sociologist is stretched toward the up people. . . . [He is] an Uncle Tom not only for this government and ruling class but for any. . . ."

These harsh words, applauded vigorously by the caucus and its sympathizers, hissed by a few of the older ex-radicals, were met by a larger group with shock and stony forbearance. At the end of Nicolaus' talk, when the caucus walked out in culminating protest, a young woman came up to me, said she wanted me to know that the young people had "really understood" a recent article I had written, and removing a black armband from her sleeve placed it around my own. Nonplussed, I asked what it was for. Mourning for sociology, she replied.

These and other events at the Boston meetings present a fascinating contrast to Parsons' version of American sociology and, in reviewing it, we are bound to wonder whether it refutes or confirms Nicolaus' acerbic diagnosis. In some measure there is an inherent dilemma in Nicolaus' judgment of American sociology, for its very utterance implies that not all sociologists are "intellectual valets and their innocent victims," as does the very presence of young sociologists among the radical caucus and in the leadership of the student rebellions from Nanterre to Columbia Universities.

Still it must be said that volumes such as this are grist for the radicals' mill. For far from wearing mourning crepe, Parsons' volume is a self-congratulatory celebration, a hymn of thanksgiving for America the affluent, and a benediction for a modern society in which the traditional distinctions between ruler and ruled are allegedly no more. This will not surprise those who have followed Parsons' work since its crystallization in the late 1930's, when it responded to the Great Depression with the judgment that things were not so bad, and which, despite many intervening wars, mass slaughters, and internecine conflicts, continues to stress the viability of modern societies in general and of American society in particular, so that he is able to offer us at this moment in history a sociology text in which "change has not been singled out for salient treatment as an independent focus" (p. xvii). It is this set of optimistic and "liberal" sentiments that fuses with Parsons' theoretical outlook, which, he acknowledges, conceives sociology to be the study of system "integration" (p. xi) and which places him in the tradition of social theorists, beginning with Auguste Comte, who think of progress as the unfolding of "order" and who focus on society's need for conformity rather than dissent—a bias that unfortunately invites comparison with the social the-

ories of Hubert Humphrey and Richard Nixon.

In this and other ways, the sociology of Parsons and his contributors justifiably exasperates the rebellious. For example, in Peter Blau's contribution there is a fundamental assumption that "once firmly established, an organization tends to assume an identity of its own which makes it independent of the people who have founded it or of those who constitute its membership" (p. 54). Aside from whether this is a "fact" or a metaphysical assumption, it makes a difference whether one views such autonomy of social structures—their alienation from their own constituencies—as a normal condition to be accepted or as an endemic and recurrent disease to be opposed. It is inherent in the occupational ideology of many modern sociologists not only to stress the potency and autonomy of social structures—and correspondingly, the dependence of persons—but also to accept this as normal and given, rather than to ask: Under what conditions does it occur, aren't there differences in the degree to which social structures get out of hand and live independently of their members, and what accounts for these differences?

Charles Tilly's essay on urbanization presents another important case in point. "No country," complains Tilly, "has a social accounting system allowing the quick, reliable detection of changes in organizational membership, kinship organization, religious adherence, or even occupational mobility" (p. 77). From Tilly's standpoint as a research-oriented sociologist, this is a bad thing. Yet what kind of country would it be that would have such a relentless, quick, reliable, all-embracing system of information about its population? Surely it would be a country in which the potentialities (at least) of the most complete totalitarianism were at hand. Doubtless Tilly would reject such a society as quickly as I. What he and others fail to see, however, is that many of the conventional methodologies of social research premise and foster a deep-going authoritarianism. As Yale's Chris Argyris has put it (but not in this volume), conformity to "rigorous research criteria would create a world for the subject in which his behavior is defined, controlled, evaluated, manipulated and reported to a degree that is comparable to the behavior of workers in the most mechanized assembly-line conditions." Information systems always premise systems of social control. To the degree that the social sciences are modeled after the physical, they tacitly (or otherwise) assume that the human "subjects"—very much the right word indeed—of social science may be controlled in the same manner that other sciences control their nonhuman materials. Such social sciences will be mindlessly ready to buy increments of information at the cost of human dignity and freedom.

In short, then, from its substantive assumption that human beings are "in fact" the raw materials of independent social structures, to its methodological assumption that men may be treated and studied like other "things," there is a strong repressive current in sociology, as in other social sciences, a current that congenially resonates the impulse of any modern political elite to view social problems in terms of technological paradigms, as a kind of engineering task.

One of the beauties of most of these essays is that, being intended for popular consumption, they are swathed in fewer layers of gauzy jargon. One can more readily see the assumptions on which they rest, the politics they imply, and the ideological stimulants that blow their minds. In S. M. Lipset's essay, for example, he remarks that "basic structural changes while maintaining traditional legitimacy in political institutions would appear to be the best way to avoid political tensions" (p. 159). But is the avoidance of political tensions always best, and for whom? Moreover, if I can fathom Lipset's meaning here, he is saying that political stability would be achieved if efforts at social change prudently stopped short of changing established ways of allocating and justifying power. Ought we not ask whether or when the clinging to established legitimations of political power is one of the ways in which elites seek to block other "basic structural changes" and thus help destroy their societies? Moreover, what of countries where political legitimacy itself is based on revolution? One also wonders whether Lipset would apply his assumptions about continuity to Soviet Russia and tell liberals there that they, too, must adapt their reform impulses to their nation's traditional mode of legitimating political power and thus maintain its autocratic traditions of politics. Politically, Lipset's argument is the classical conservative brief against abrupt, tensionful change and on behalf of legitimacy, continuity, and gradualism.

The celebratory tone of this volume is brought to a patriotic pitch when Lipset argues for the exceptional grace that was bestowed on American society when George Washington, for reasons unexplained, refused the crown. This triumphal theme is elaborated by Albert Cohen, who implicitly answers those who call America a sick society by maintaining that, to the contrary, "the United States is a dynamic, growing, prosperous, more or less democratic society" (p. 237). The celebration continues, with Thomas Pettigrew recounting the story of Black progress in the United States, where, he holds, "one out of every three Negro Americans today can be sociologically classified . . . as middle class" (p. 263), and reassuring us that racial violence today, far from being a symptom of a societal malaise, is, to the contrary, proof of the "rapid social progress taking place" (p. 270). Rapid, from whose standpoint?

Reinhard Bendix also reassures us that in modern society the words "ruler" and "ruled" no longer have "clear meaning" (p. 278). Presumably this is so because the people now exercise "control through periodic elections" (p. 278) and "the fact that every adult has the vote is a token of the regard in which he is held as an individual and a citizen" (p. 279). The franchise, Bendix tells us, has been "extended." One wonders if that is how the matter would be put by those who were arrested, beaten, and killed in the struggle to register Blacks in the South—would *they* see what had happened as an "extension" of the franchise?

Much of this is, indeed, as Martin Nicolaus said, the sociological consecration of a myth: a myth of a progressive society, whose every disturbance is a sign of progress, of the America blessed by George Washington, where democracy goes hand in hand with affluence. It is a myth made persuasive by a number of techniques. One is the technique of calling the partly filled glass of water half-filled, rather than half-empty; where American Blacks are described as one-third middle class, rather than as two-thirds miserable. It is a myth consecrated by the strategy of the Great Omission. For in all this there is scarcely anything about war, not an echo of the new revisionist historiography; indeed, the word "imperialism" does not appear in the index, and there is nothing about the relation between democracy, affluence, and *war*. But myths are not merely narrative tales that begin with "Once upon a time" and end with "They lived happily ever after." Most powerfully of all, myths are incorporated invisibly into the total view

of social reality by the entire structure of language and conceptualization. When the bloody struggle to register Blacks in the South becomes the frictionless "extension" of the franchise, a mechanical way of viewing *all* social change is implicitly communicated.

The myth-consecrating impulse among some sociologists has recently found its ideological justification in an article, published elsewhere, by Talcott Parsons and Charles Ackerman, where we are told: "The 'facts' of science are myths. This is not a new thought. It is, however, one whose implications for theory-building have not always been recognized; we believe that they must be." Perhaps this formulation is a sign that Parsons has lately become aware of the mythological character of his own work. In any event, the rest of us should. As if much in the body of this work were not enough to lend disturbing substance to Nicolaus' charge that many sociologists are propagandists for the American *status quo*, Parsons adds a certain literalness to this in his preface (p. xviii) by explaining that "The chapters of this book stem from materials prepared for the *Forum* series of the Voice of America."

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Mechanics of Support and Motion

Animal Locomotion. JAMES GRAY. Norton, New York, 1968. xiv + 479 pp., illus. $15. The World Naturalist.

Most of the research ever done on animal locomotion has come from Britain, most British research on locomotion has been done at Cambridge, and no one anywhere has contributed as much to the field as Sir James Gray of Kings College. Now, in an active retirement, Gray has written a major book which will long be a valued reference.

A background is assumed in systematics and anatomy (particularly of vertebrates and arthropods), algebra and trigonometry, and basic mechanics, particularly of resolution and components of forces, torque, and fluids in motion. A short introductory chapter presents Newton's laws and then, skipping the relation of muscle force to gross and fine structure, comments on power, energy, and efficiency. Six chapters on aspects of the locomotion of fishes and amphibians—Gray's principal research materials—are excellent presentations of both experimental and theoretical work. The chapter on reptiles stresses snakes. That on birds is one of several that are in part difficult to follow. The long chapter on mammals, a class not studied at Cambridge, is perhaps least satisfactory. Too much is covered too superficially for the discussion to be entirely accurate or to provide continuity and insight. The treatment of gaits is limited to the classic, but now dated, books by Muybridge and Howell. In one chapter on terrestrial arthropods Gray relates waves of limb movements to displacement, forces, and footfalls; in another, S. M. Manton herself writes a summary of her many outstanding contributions to the description, analysis, and functional interpretation of arthropod locomotion. Other chapters are about annelids, nemerteans, and mollusks, but even the locomotion of fibroblasts is included.

Understandably, emphasis is given to the author's own contributions and to those of his associates: R. Bainbridge, O. R. Barclay, R. H. J. Brown, J. E. Harris, A. V. Hill, H. W. Lissman, and others. Specialists will recognize that the book weaves together papers previously published. Gray disclaims thorough, even, or inclusive coverage of his vast subject; "Studies in Animal Locomotion" might have been a more apt title. Climbing per se, digging (except by some arthropods), insect flight, and locomotion in most invertebrate taxa are omitted.

The book suffers from organization along systematic instead of functional lines. Thus, gliding amphibians, flying reptiles, bats, and birds are treated in separate chapters, and several modes of swimming appear again and again. Forces between whole animals and their environments are stressed, with frequent attention to posture and equilibrium. Consequences of the inertia of oscillating systems are mentioned but not emphasized; levers are usually presented as weightless. Similarities among animals are noted repeatedly (for example, the myopodia of nemerteans and the coils of the sidewinder, and undulations of sperm, snake, and eel). The overall impression is of a progression of exercises based on the mathematical description of representative situations. Gray largely leaves to the reader the task of relating his subject to evolution and to the fine points of structural and functional adaptation.

The bibliography of 312 titles will be of great value to all who study animal locomotion. Unfortunately it omits several papers cited in text and includes incomplete citations. Some omissions are puzzling: despite Gray's studies in the mechanics of support, E. J. Slijper's pioneering monograph on the spine, B. Kummer's contributions, and principles developed in these papers are neglected. The 17 papers on animal locomotion by P. Magna de la Croix are not credited.

One must be impressed by the scope and scholarship of this book. Gray notes the great demands placed on the sensory apparatus, makes notable contributions to the understanding of the complex neurocontrol mechanism, and impresses the reader that coordination of the response system is intricate almost beyond belief. In this able summary of the major part of a distinguished career, it would have been welcome had he let a sense of awe and wonder subtly show now and again among the formulas.

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A Disposition of Objects

The Rays Are Not Coloured. Essays on the Science of Vision and Colour. W. D. WRIGHT. Elsevier, New York, 1968. x + 154 pp., illus. $5.95.

Newton first understood, more than 200 years ago, that "the Rays to speak properly are not coloured," and "Colours in the Object are nothing but a Disposition to reflect this or that sort of Rays more copiously than the rest . . . ." Yet color seems so compellingly to be a property of an object that few among us doubt the obvious. Indeed, the insights of Newton, supported by two centuries of scientific elaboration, are not fully appreciated even by the practitioners of color, such as the artist and the paint manufacturer, let alone the man in the street.

W. D. Wright is a physicist and one of the fathers of the CIE (Commission Internationale de l'Éclairage) system of color specification. Despite the proven usefulness of this system, Wright admits (pp. 126–27) that it "does not give precise information about the spectral composition of the light [or] any