Book Reviews

Expecting the Worst

The Unprepared Society. Planning for a Precarious Future. DONALD N. MICHAEL. Basic Books, New York, 1968. xviii + 138 pp. $4.95.

Beyond Economics. Essays on Society, Religion, and Ethics. KENNETH E. BOULDING. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1968. x + 306 pp. $9.50.

Futurism—an activity of some rather gifted and rigorous contemporary social scientists—by that name seems a new focus of intellectual and scientific activity. But it should be distinguished from some of its spectacular classical predecessors. The pessimism of old Ecclesiastes ("nothing new under the sun") is obsolete. The methodology of Judaic prophets, Greek oracles, astrologers, and horoscopists at best is only of therapeutic or exhortatory use for confused people needful of being told what to do or not do. Historical determinism in its cruder forms—Marx, for instance—now fares no better. Jules Verne and his descendants enjoy a better reputation than Nostradamus, largely for their ability to extrapolate from known scientific laws to dramatic, playful technological consequences (though to go to the moon, or the depths of the oceans, in a comfortable Victorian parlor indicates the limits of Verne's abilities at cultural prophecy).

Futurism as here described is engaged in by scientists sensitive principally to policy problems of large-scale organizations. In this sense it differs from forecasting as practiced by those whose views are governed either by profound personal convictions or by strong impulses for constructive innovation. Neither Henry Ford nor the Wright brothers brooded deeply about the "social consequences" of their marvelous machines; the Ford Foundation and Lockheed now do. Luther (to take a different instance) does not seem to have been troubled by a possible scenario of massive bloodshed, privation, and terror arising from people's taking his views seriously. ("Ich kann nicht anders," he once said. Ford and the Wright brothers would have said the same. Cf. "doing one's thing.")

Futurism as practiced by Herman Kahn, Bertrand de Jouvenel, and others is quite different. It is addressed more to multiple futurist possibilities, including some probabilities, and has as its principal focus the *ways* in which large-scale human organizations may evolve and interact; it is neither apocalyptic nor utopian, pessimistic nor optimistic; one of its principal concerns is the impact of technological innovations upon social organization, yet it is also sensitive to the ways in which changing qualities of social life-styles may profoundly alter, or sustain, such organization. The paradox inherent in their approach consists in this: while the "future" (at any given point) appears open-ended and indeterminate, "history" in fact *is* closed; certain things will certainly *have* occurred; what may be the scenarios?

Donald Michael's and Kenneth Boulding's recent books show us some special futurist views. I hope I may be forgiven at the outset for a signal shortcoming in this review. One theme—the future of social organizations—links these two works and that is the theme I am considering. But Boulding's book of essays covers far too wide a range of subjects to be confined in this Procrustean bed. Written by an economist distinguished for his range of thoughtful inquiry, these fascinating essays (a collection of small pieces covering nearly two decades) deserve more attention than I can give them here.

Throughout *The Unprepared Society* Michael is concerned both with forecasting social organizational change and with wondering where it will all lead—what it all will come to—and how-whether social managers can-should cope with the many overstresses which he foresees. (Much of his book employs the verb "will" for happenings which, as he admits, are conjectural. "I will use 'will'," he warns us, "sometimes simply to break the tedium of 'very likely,' 'very probably,' 'highly likely,' and so on. I make no claims to precognition.") His catalog of futurist probabilities (likelihoods, inevitabilities, possibilities) offers no surprises to even a casual reader of newspapers: huge population increases; increases in the size of dependent populations; increased urbanization; more protests (rent strikes, boycotts, violence); worsening race relations; more mass violence and counter-violence; more generational gap-itis; more air pollution; more books, more TV pundits, more hippies, and more drugs; collectivism; anarchism; thalidomide-type drug tragedies; and so on. Some are simply gleams in a pessimist's eye: Asian famines that "will" exterminate half a billion people in one year; massive, fatal air invasions over New York City; gigantic airline crashes; and other mass phenomena such as would have fascinated Hieronymus Bosch. The principal civic worries he entertains also are not newcomers to thoughtful people but are less dramatic: career roles may subsequently not correspond to career training; essential information about public policy may become so arcane that most people will not know what actually is "going on" or should be done; "new ethical issues" will "arise over involuntary submission to purposes established by enlightened power"; and so on.

By now the reader may rightly have concluded that Michael, as forecaster, is no Pollyanna. This would be to put it too mildly. In point of fact, the chief burden of *The Unprepared Society* is that American society is not prepared for all this. He quotes Tom Wicker, of the New York *Times*: "20th century man crouches like an old woman on a stoop, pointing her rusty shotgun at the oncoming expressway." "Individuals" cannot affect the "grinding course of things"; radical, disruptive new approaches in institutions will be resisted by their inmates, yet vast numbers of people will demand such changes. Planners, including scientists and technologists, are no better than ordinary people—"intellectually limited and emotionally crippled human beings, stumbling along on untested methodological crutches over a volcanic terrain." It is then no wonder that the question for him is "whether customary institutions can cope adequately with the consequences of using partial scientific-technological knowledge to apply unprecedentedly powerful technologies to the operation of an unprecedentedly complex society" (p. 80).

It is disheartening to have to report the pallid palliatives Michael would apply to relieve this discouraging future. "The most we can do in the immediate future is to try deliberately to develop the needed capabilities in the relatively

few people accessible to the rare appropriate educative environment and hope that the products of such education will be at the right place at the right time to make the right difference in the actions that affect our society for better or worse" (p. 118). Objectivity in teaching is not enough; future teachers must stop being "passive, neutral persons" and fuse into their teaching certain specified forms of exhibitionist activism, of which Michael's subsequent small catalog of examples is confined to the following: "unionizing activities," "protesting Vietnam," "scuba-diving," "yoga," "LSD," and "new theologies." The rationale for this selection is that since "way out" activities will be a "critically important part" of tomorrow's world, students should get an early whiff of them from exemplary adults—an amazing reversal of current procedures. Whether such forms of teaching should be confined to Michael's elite is by no means clear, but he does make a couple of remarks about the difficulty of legitimating his specially trained Platonic kings to run all the rest of us: "The world," he says, "would have had . . . to concur" in this elitist decision; and in any event, "what the consequences would be for the larger portion of the society . . . I am not prepared to explore here" (p. 124). "At the very least, we must share our struggle with the young. . . . If they don't learn, or aren't allowed to learn, I don't think there will be a way out" (p. 125, concluding remark of the book). Whether yoga, LSD, and new theologies will assist the Civil Aeronautics Administration to deal with huge (and "inevitable") air crashes, or the Indian government with gigantic (and "inevitable") famines remains to be seen. But possibly such regulatory activities would prove too mundane for Michael's philosopher-kings, and would devolve upon less interesting, humble folk.

Boulding may not instruct in yoga, but he has more thoughtful things to say on future tendencies of social organization. He perceives social-organizational tendencies in an evolutionary, not apocalyptic, perspective—a perspective in his view which transcends or encapsulates other systemic possibilities, such as mechanical-repetitive and equilibrium frames. As he says, "In the evolutionary process time's arrow points 'up,' towards the development of ever more complex and improbable forms. . . . The nature of that complexity, however, . . . cannot be known in advance, at least by an organism with a merely human capacity for knowing things" (p. 162). There are risks in trend projections—the folly of linear curve extrapolations; the possibilities of systemic "breaks"; the intrusion of unheard-of technological discoveries or organizational theories—yet some guesses are better than others (as, for example, his guess that the absorption of America's farm population into other callings has about run its course, and that shifts out of America's industrial labor force in the next 15 years will not be very spectacular). The development of complex control systems —electronics, automation, cybernation —does not fill him with horror: "That the ultimate results of this development will be benign can hardly be doubted except by . . . extreme pessimists who regard . . . any extension of man's power as a mere increase in the opportunity to do evil" (p. 170).

Boulding is concerned, as Michael is, with what he calls the "milk and cream" problem—that is, a possible separation within and among nations between those people who "adapt through education to the world of modern technology" and those who don't make it—a phenomenon which on a world scale is far darker than it is inside the United States: "Such a situation [of cleavage] could hardly persist without corrupting the cultures of both the rich and the poor" (p. 171).

Social inventions, similar to such previous ones as banking, insurance, the corporation, and "the socialist state," will be necessary—only they will require more rapid development than in the past. "Maybe," he says, "a social invention is needed here in the shape of an educational subsystem which will give the culture of the poor a status of its own." Perhaps a society such as America could afford to abandon its egalitarian, homogenizing pretenses, and "invent" a mosaic society of many small subcultures. Perhaps we should be less critical of "frills," as opposed to skills, in our educational system (p. 173). Whether such proposals are wise (and this reviewer has grave, if poorly thought out, reservations about them), in point of fact many Americans are already taking them extremely seriously. Their implications need to be carefully, rather than impetuously and passionately, explored—if in fact such a separation of reason and emotion is possible any longer.

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Sociometrics

Stochastic Models for Social Processes. DAVID J. BARTHOLOMEW. Wiley, New York, 1967. xii + 275 pp., illus. $9.50.

The notion that behavior is best regarded as a stochastic process, that is, as a temporal sequence of events that can be analyzed by the theory of probability, has led to the increasing use of a probabilistic rather than a deterministic framework in the mathematics applied to the social sciences. A firm foundation for the construction of stochastic models for sociological problems was laid by J. S. Coleman, a sociologist, in *Introduction to Mathematical Sociology* (1964). In his preface Coleman expressed the hope that his book would be quickly followed by such systematic growth in the area of mathematics for social processes as to cause the book to be rapidly outmoded. His hope concerning the growth of the field is being realized. In *Stochastic Models for Social Processes*, D. J. Bartholomew, a statistician, has made a timely and important contribution. Compared to Coleman's book the subject matter treated by Bartholomew is somewhat limited, in that essentially only internal structural changes in graded social systems and changes in the input, output, and total size of such systems are considered; but this restriction has allowed the author to study in much more depth questions specific to these systems.

Underlying the construction of stochastic models is the notion that the members of a graded system are at any given time in one of a set of possible "states," which may either be discrete or form a continuum. The main object of the mathematical analysis is to find the complete distribution theory of the random variables of interest. The selection of the dependent variables is not completely arbitrary; it reflects the interests, history, and particular methodological problems of different disciplines. Thus mathematical psychologists have argued that the dependent variable in psychology is, or should be, response probability, while mathematical sociologists have typically used the number of people in each state as their main dependent variable. Throughout the book the object of the analysis is to find the expectations for the numbers in each state at any given time. Variances of these numbers, which are typically more difficult to get, are found for only a few Markov chain models.