# Book Reviews

## System and Humanism in Social Science

**A Sociology of Sociology.** ROBERT W. FRIEDRICHS. Free Press, New York, and Collier-Macmillan, London, 1970. xiv, 432 pp. $11.95.

**The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology.** ALVIN W. GOULDNER. Basic Books, New York, 1970. xvi, 528 pp. $12.50. Social Origins of Social Theory.

When the intellectual air is filled with a sense of urgency and impending doom, many intellectuals regard the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, or even of slowly accumulating practical knowledge, as fiddling while Rome burns. Reinhard Bendix, in an essay entitled "Sociology and the Distrust of Reason" (*Am. Sociol. Rev.* **35**, 831 [1970]), has shown that the current rebellion against the life of reason is only the latest in a series of such battles that have erupted since the beginnings of modern science.

As Bendix indicates, the smashing of scientific icons has taken two main forms. One, typified by Marx, is the attack on academic scholarship and its posture of disinterested search for understanding, the argument being that scholarly or scientific objectivity is impossible and that scientists, especially social scientists, have surreptitiously sided with the status quo. Political radicals do not reject science, but want it to serve the oppressed and the alienated. The other form of iconoclasm, which originated in the literary and artistic world, is the revolt against what is felt as the mechanistic lifelessness of a science that views nature as a unified whole broken into abstract elements and properties for study. It is far more radical in its implications than is Marxism, for it rejects the very idea of nature as a coherent reality that can be understood through communicable abstractions. To accept it is to embrace a radical subjectivism that makes all science appear meaningless.

The books under review are thoroughgoing assaults on the mainstream of sociological theory in recent decades. They manifest both antiscientific views analyzed by Bendix. They attempt to explain the rise and asserted decline of functionalist social system theory, criticize it, and predict what will replace it. Friedrichs is sympathetic to the Marxist criticism and Gouldner's main purpose is to expound it. Both come close to radical subjectivism when they tell us what sociology should be.

It seems necessary to summarize what has happened in sociology before examining what the authors say has happened, for they distort the picture by leaving much of it out, Gouldner more than Friedrichs. Sociologists since the 1920's have looked mainly to natural science as their model, making increasing use of multivariate statistical analysis as the best approximation of the experimental method possible in most social research. Beginning in the 1930's the discipline's chief theoretical paradigm took form, one in which a society is viewed as a system of interacting parts whose interdependencies function to maintain the coherence of the system as a whole—a paradigm found in much of science. Talcott Parsons, the preeminent theorist, created a comprehensive theory to show how the elements and properties of social structure interact and how dynamic processes link social structure to the organismic and personality systems of individuals and to the cultural system of beliefs and values. Parsons's theory and simpler variants of it propounded by his former students acquired the label "structural-functionalism." Other general theories developed after World War II and found many adherents, so that Parsons's was never *the* theory of sociology, but other major theories also embodied the "system" assumption that parts adjust to each other to produce a long-run tendency toward their harmonious orchestration, sometimes conceived formally as equilibrium. Some research was inspired by Parsons's and other social system theories. A larger amount of research used concepts and hypotheses not derived from any broad-scale theory and did not use the system paradigm explicitly, but the techniques of statistical data analysis, with their focus on relations among variables, lent themselves to the interpretation of findings in ways compatible with system assumptions.

Most theorists and theoretically inspired researchers of the period assumed or advocated "value-neutrality," the belief that the sociologist's job is to understand society rather than act on it. Sociologists in some less theoretically inclined research fields, such as race relations and family life, were more action-oriented, and many who specialized in theoretically underdeveloped topics, such as class stratification and community politics, did not expect to change the conditions they studied but felt strongly about them. But most sociologists in these fields accepted the idea of value-neutrality in the sense that one's sentiments should not prevent objectivity in describing the facts. Since the late 1950's sociology has moved somewhat toward applied concerns as the government and foundations have provided financial support for social intervention and intervention-oriented research of a politically liberal kind. American sociologists have always been overwhelmingly liberals, and here was a chance for some of them to do liberal things; but even these have generally felt that, while personal values may direct the choice of topics or action programs, value-neutrality is necessary in ascertaining the facts.

All of this has been increasingly attacked since the early 1960's by radicals and "humanistic" sociologists, who together have become an influential minority of younger sociologists with some older allies. The two categories overlap considerably but not completely, for there are scientific radicals and nonradical humanists. Friedrichs and Gouldner are humanistic radicals. Their histories of the events we have described and their predictions of the reorientation of sociology flow from their critiques of what they say sociology has been. Their chief complaints are that structural-functional system theory has conservative (read "repressive," bad) ideological implications, and that the theory and the quantitative research methods that have grown up along with it treat man as a passive object propelled by social forces rather than as an active creator of his own life.

The alleged conservatism of struc-

tural-functionalism (Gouldner) or any system paradigm (Friedrichs) reflects its focus on the orderly regularity of social life and the mutual adjustment of system parts. A focus on order, the authors believe, may lead the theorist to see more of it than really exists and to regard conflict as a temporary and self-correcting aberration; or it may lead him to fix upon social order as something to be sought, at the expense of other goals, not just something to be analyzed. According to our authors the first of these views makes the theorist uninterested in reshaping society, and the second leads him to offer his services to the powers that be in defense of the status quo. Both authors cite as evidence the heavy dependence of sociologists on government research funds. Inasmuch as the largest source of these funds has been the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, a somewhat novel inference from their argument would seem to be that HEW runs the country and wants to stamp out social change. Gouldner implies precisely this, maintaining that the purpose of the welfare state is to repress those who accept its money, presumably by quenching their thirst for revolution with every sop it throws to them.

The complaint about the objectification of man—or, as Gouldner puts it, the "autonomy of society" as a set of forces acting on individuals—consists of two separate arguments. One is that when sociologists measure attributes of a person or his behavior, they somehow transform him into nothing more than the abstractions they have measured, robbing him of his fullness as a human being. The other is that when they seek causal explanation of the properties they have measured, sociologists rob the individual of freedom by attributing his behavior to the explanatory variables rather than to his own decision to do what he does. In short, a sociologist who uses abstract rubrics to describe a person or ascribes causes to his behavior has turned him into a robot. On the basis of this kind of reasoning, Friedrichs and Gouldner argue that sociology should not adopt natural science as its model.

The authors analyze the rise and predicted fall of structural-functional system theory in similar though not identical ways. Friedrichs sees the history of sociology as an alternation between "prophetic" and "priestly" modes of thought. Prophetic sociology, as he defines it, cries out against social evils. Priestly sociology accommodates itself to the world; it interposes the sociological priesthood between social nature and the laity by interpreting the mysteries of society, and it enters into alliances of throne and altar. The "cloak of neutrality" lends authority to the priestly role, but the cloak is false because values inevitably influence choices of problems to study and clients to work for. Friedrichs does not deny, nor does Gouldner, that hypotheses, once stated, can be tested objectively.

Friedrichs explains the rise of what he calls priestly sociology as primarily though not entirely a reflection of sociologists' occupational self-interest and working conditions. Sociologists wanted to be "scientific" and knew that scientific status required both method and theory. Parsons produced a theoretical scheme that fitted the scientifically respectable concept of system. The development of computers, with their capacity to simulate system processes, helped establish the system paradigm, and the placid academic life of the 1950's made for a priestly rather than a prophetic stance. The sudden abundance of money for research and liberal social action led sociologists to shift their interests from self-generating social processes toward planned social change. This shift did not abandon the system paradigm but only the emphasis in some system theories on automatic adjustment of system parts to each other. Its advantages for sociologists were obvious: they, the priests, would no longer sit and watch society but would use their mysterious knowledge to manage it, never forgetting to pass the collection plate. This cozy vision reigned unchallenged for only a few years until it came under attack from a new generation of prophets in the 1960's.

Friedrichs is not sure where it will all end, but he makes some cautious predictions and states his own preferences. He does not expect the currently modish "conflict" paradigm to put an end to the concept of system, for he believes that society does have systemic features. Without guessing what they will be, he predicts a "pluralism" of competing paradigms; he reasons cogently that Thomas Kuhn's analysis of scientific revolutions, with dominant paradigms all but completely replacing their predecessors, is inapplicable to social science, because social science paradigms are challenged not only by new facts they cannot encompass but also by social upheavals outside the sciences themselves—such as the current student revolt—and not all observers react alike to these. Finally, Friedrichs opts for a prophetic sociology he calls "dialectical humanism": dialectical in seeing the tension and interaction of opposites, such as man the product of society versus man the creative chooser; humanism to put the abstract pieces back together in our image of man and emphasize the individual more and the system less, stressing "spontaneity as over against necessity, freedom as over against order, . . . the individual as over against the social. . . ." From this it is clear why he believes social science should not be like natural science, and it is not evident that he even thinks it should be social, for he wants us to talk about individuals acting independently of social or other deterministic forces.

Gouldner's book is the second in a four-volume series tracing social theories from classical Greece to the future. This volume starts with the European origins of contemporary Western academic sociology in the early 19th century, but most of it is devoted to American sociology in recent decades and about a third of it treats one sociologist, Parsons, whose ideas Gouldner thinks dominated Western sociology almost completely from World War II until the recent challenges from the left. Thus Gouldner's work offers much more historical depth than Friedrichs's, but less breadth in discussing the recent period. Gouldner argues that the underlying assumptions of Parsons's theory are those of conservative theories from Plato onward. Prominent features of conservative social theories, he says, include emphasis on societal integration rather than conflict and on shared moral values legitimizing the status quo as the chief means of integration.

Gouldner's explanation of the directions taken by theorists' work is starkly simple: theories flow from theorists' social class interests and life histories, and from nothing else. In the 1930's, says Gouldner, Parsons wanted to defend the existing order because his own life had been untroubled and successful. With millions unemployed and Marxism in the air the defense was no easy task, but Parsons rose to it with a theory emphasizing the maintenance of social stability by shared values. The thing about values is that everyone can have them equally in a stratified society. Parsons called his early theory "voluntarism" and made a place in it

for the individual, who needed moral incentives to accept society as it was, starvation and all. By 1950 the economy was humming, the nation was unified by victory in war, revolution appeared unlikely, and Parsons therefore felt safe in jettisoning the individual and focusing on the autonomous social system. Later in the 1950's Parsons moved from conservatism to welfare state liberalism because that was where the money was and because Washington bureaucrats had replaced capitalists as the principal tormentors of the poor. Sociologists liked Parsons's theory because of his Harvard-based prestige, because they were taught it by his former students at other graduate schools, and because their middle-class interests were the same as his.

Gouldner expects structural-functionalism to fade away because the career of a theory depends on how well it "resonates the sentiments" of the times, and he approvingly predicts "the construction of a total counter-culture, including new social theories. . . ." His full exposition of what will replace it will come in a later volume, but part of the recipe is "reflexive sociology," in which the heart is substituted for the head in evaluating theories so that "liberating" ones are accepted and "repressive" ones are rejected. Reflexive sociology is not Marxism, though Gouldner's depiction of Parsons and his followers is in the Marxian mold. Gouldner never tells us exactly what liberation or repression is, but the distinction seems to involve the encouragement to do one's own thing as against attachments to moral codes or established institutions.

Friedrichs and Gouldner attribute the development and acceptance of theories they dislike to sociologists' occupational or class interests, thus using the autonomy-of-society or man-as-object explanation against which they inveigh elsewhere, but neither applies this explanation to theories he likes. Gouldner does analyze why alienated upper-middle-class youths renounce conventional success goals and await liberation by new theories. Neither author explains why nonyouthful liberative prophets spring up on demand to provide the theories. If we apply their explanations of why repressive priests theorize as they do, there must be some push into prophecy too and some payoff from it. If conservative theories are made by successful people, are radical theories made by failures? Hardly, for radical sociologists include many who have

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won scholarly acclaim and foundation grants. Do the prophets seek applause from the young or leadership roles in the liberation movement? Conceivably. The authors do not ask such questions except about their opponents.

Both books, Gouldner's especially, give seriously misleading histories of sociology. At no time has Parsons's theory dominated the work of sociologists as Gouldner claims. Friedrichs correctly observes that other theories and even a few prophets have flourished concurrently. The other theories, collectively, have generated much more research than has Parsons's. His theory is so intricate that it is hard to extract from it simple hypotheses amenable to statistical testing. Social system theory and statistical research methods have appealed to sociologists because they have held out the promise of scientific status for the discipline, as Friedrichs points out; but it is not always easy to wed the two. Far from being dominated by any theory, research sociologists have more often chosen good methods than theoretical significance when they could not manage both, and sometimes their research has failed to produce much understanding of social life because the data were not seen in the social context a system theory can illuminate.

As for sociological research, Gouldner ignores it and Friedrichs does not examine it systematically. Much of it has decidedly not assumed that social life is all harmony. Quite the opposite view is apparent in numerous studies of race relations and community politics, for example. Such bias as has been brought to these studies has nearly always been liberal, with discrimination unmasked and communities described as controlled by oligarchies of rich men —and this before as well as after the federal cornucopia appeared in the late 1950's. Parsons has himself analyzed social changes and conflicts, and in doing so he has not departed from his social system assumptions, which include long-run equilibrating processes rather than static equilibrium conditions at given points in time. Some of the best studies of social change have used Parsons's ideas. A theory that stresses the mutual adjustment of system parts can be helpful in pinpointing sources of change and conflict when the parts are not adjusted. Such a theory does not define conflict out of existence any more than a physical theory involving the concept of equilibrium denies that explosions happen.

A central idea in both books is that when we pin an ideological tag on a theory by calling it repressive, prophetic, or whatnot, we say something about the validity of the theory. This notion is alarming, for it would turn sociology into substandard moral philosophy with the resonating of sentiments replacing reason and observation as the basis for constructing and judging theories. Thus Friedrichs and Gouldner have attacked more than one brand of sociological theory. They have attacked the rational underpinnings of the entire discipline, without which it cannot and should not be taken seriously as an intellectual enterprise. Many young sociologists find such attacks congenial, and a few are more direct in their plans to do away with objective sociological inquiry. But they are in the minority, and most sociologists will continue to do what they and other scientists have always done, using reason to construct theories and evidence to evaluate them.

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# The Energy Ethic

**Environment, Power, and Society.** HOWARD T. ODUM. Wiley-Interscience, New York, 1971. xii, 232 pp., illus. $9.95.

Odum's book is another attempt to remind the world how disastrously out of tune we are with nature's balance, which we injure at our peril: he feels that to restore the harmony we must understand the workings of both ecosystems and societies. To this end, he develops a grand synthesis of the principles governing ecosystems and societies, an act of courage for which he cannot be too highly praised. Odum's primary concern is energy: he shows how dependent we have become not only on solar energy, which always has fed us and "always" will, but on the coal and oil that fuel the making and running of machines which enable so few to raise food for so many and which permit the productivity supporting our affluence. He has nightmares of what will happen when the exhaustion of these fossil fuels forces us to learn from the underdeveloped peoples whose balances we have so undermined how to live on solar energy alone, but he seems more concerned about how to preserve our "life support system" if atomic power sustains our ability to exploit and derange the planet.

The result is a most maddening work, which at first sight seems totally undisciplined, a chaotic mixture of the asinine, the banal, and the brilliant, with random observations, often in conflict with the available evidence, on nearly everything under the sun. Odum writes an oppressive jargon, interspersed with elaborate circuit diagrams meant to simulate energy flows in the systems he discusses. The first half of the book seems a jeremiad against our dependence on fossil fuels; the second half hymns the complexity of the industrial society these fuels maintain, identifying as God the system of energy flows linking nature and industrial man, and articulating rules of worship for this Antichrist. But in this wealth of confusion, there are themes of very great interest indeed.

First is the theme of energy. A community evolves until there is no energy left over for a new invader to exploit. This tautology, like "the survival of the fittest," seems exceptionally useful. A mature community, then, should not leave unused energy to fossilize as coal or oil: Odum therefore claims Permian coal swamps were simple, immature systems. He is probably wrong: there are complex peat swamps in the modern tropics. His remark, however, forces us to ask why, in all this time, anaerobic bacteria have not evolved to digest peat in acid conditions. Odum extends this principle to assert that it is sinful to waste energy, for the Devil always finds mischief for idle energy to do, as in short circuits, riots by bored teen-agers, and floods of unused rainwater cascading from deforested mountains to the sea. The energetic extravagance of automobiles seems blasphemous to him.

More interesting is Odum's common philosophy of ecology and economics. Economists will no doubt associate it with an old and honorable school of thought, which I am too ignorant to name; ecologists may find his attitude