

Thinking About Societies

A History of Sociological Analysis. TOM BOT-
TOMORE and ROBERT NISBET, Eds. Basic,
New York, 1978. xvi, 718 pp. \$29.50.

This is a book on the background of sociological analysis. I say "background" rather than "history" because it presents thinkers, and movements of thought, primarily in their relevance for today rather than through their development in the context of their times.

It is a big book. There are 17 chapters and 17 authors. (Eleven of the authors hold academic posts in the United States, five in Great Britain, and one in France.) There are 700 pages of text. These pages are used. The margins are narrow, the writing is tightly organized, and the story takes us from the 18th century to the present. There are the expectable chapters on leading thinkers and perspectives and there are three chapters dealing with substantive questions: Frank Parkin writing on social stratification, Steven Lukes on power and authority, and James Coleman on relations between sociology and social policy.

This is not an easy book or one for casual readers. Most of the authors write for someone who knows a good bit about the contents and controversies of the social sciences and the elements of social thought since Montesquieu and Adam Smith. Given such a reader, most of the authors have something substantial to offer. I think, for example, of Bottomore's lucid, fulsome chapter on developments in Marxist thought since Marx (curiously, the book contains no thorough discussion of Marx's own ideas—or of Emile Durkheim's or Max Weber's) and Wilbert Moore's admirably dispassionate treatment of functionalist thought. Four chapters are magisterial, being fresh, authoritative, and, within the compass of 40 or so pages, amazingly complete: Kenneth Bock on theories of progress, development, and evolution; Robert Nisbet on conservatism; Anthony Giddens on positivism (from Comte to Carnap to Popper) and its critics; and Berenice Fischer and Anselm Strauss on interactionism. (Two chapters, although provocative, are for the very specialized reader: Edward Tiryakian's treatment of Durkheim as a so-

ciological Kantian and Kurt Wolff's examination of the social relevance of phenomenology.)

The pity is that most of this has so little immediate bearing on the work that sociologists do. But that is also true of the courses in theory that most faculties in sociology require of their students. The book accurately mirrors the contents of those courses—or of superior versions of them.

The editors tell us that the "initial conception of the book rested . . . upon a fairly rigorous distinction between sociological analysis and social thought in a broader sense" and that they have concentrated "upon sociology as a theoretical and empirical science" (p. viii). Those choices alone will lose them those sociologists who believe that unless research has obvious relevance for the realization of a moral vision it is worthless (and who are convinced that, given that relevance, any fool can do good research).

How far do the authors and editors take us beyond social thought and toward an appraisal of the nature, the power, and the lineage of those empirical studies that most sociologists regard most highly, studies that emerged from general and systematic arguments and that supply findings that are evidential for the validity of those arguments? Not far.

As the editors say, a first analytic framework adopted as the movement toward sociology began was the idea of a society. There had, of course, been systematic and comparative descriptions of major forms of kinship and religion, of economies, and, especially, of legal and political systems. The relevant idea of a society was that of a bounded social arrangement that encompassed all these institutional relationships. Sociology was to be the science of societies: of their properties and careers as total systems and of the flowing, shifting relations between each such system as a whole and its principal parts. This is a key idea in most of the best European work in the 19th century. It was the basis for efforts to identify and characterize the principal institutions, to specify the essential nature of their interrelations (as, for example, in Marx's economic determi-

nism), and to describe and begin to explain the emergence of one form of society from others (as in theories of societal evolution or in specific studies of the emergence of an urban or industrial or capitalist social order). In the hands of Marx and the historicists the use of societies as an analytic framework passed over into the methodological dictum that particular "social laws" hold only within societies, or within some major variety of societies, the laws being different in societies of other varieties.

There was an interest in all these subjects in the United States, but here the principal theoretical framework was, if anything, more general. In the United States sociology came early to be understood as the scientific study of social relations, societies being but one form of such relations. Wherever we find people, it was argued, they have arrangements for doing things together. Some of these are planned, but most are not. Sometimes the arrangements serve people well, but they never are fully satisfactory. What determines the way people get organized and what are the consequences of their being organized in one way rather than another? What are the general principles and components of a social relationship and what, in given circumstances and for given purposes, is the most advantageous way to organize a nation or an army, a department store or a hospital, a secret society or a learned society, a family or a singles' bar, a friendship or a marketing system, a protest movement or a mob? Or a society?

I have gone to this length to characterize the American framework in order to make three points about the book. First, the framework is never explicated. We are given some of its roots in Bierstedt's discussion of Montesquieu and of Hume and Adam Ferguson. (A synoptic picture of those beginnings appears in Gary Wills's recent book *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*, Doubleday, 1978.) But the fact that this background then led to a comprehensive and distinctive framework that the social sciences in America were able to exploit is never discussed. It is even forgotten that Talcott Parsons saw as his purpose in his classic, *The Structure of Social Action*, to abstract from Marx, Marshall, Durkheim, Weber, and Pareto what general theory of social relations their work contained. Second, and as a result of the first failing, the potentialities of a generalized understanding of social relations for a treatment of the phenomena peculiar to societies are never confronted. Third, and as one

would expect, the treatment in this book of developments in sociology in the United States tends to be limited, much of their living context being absent.

We have, then, expounded in this book, the historical movement from social thought to a sociology using the idea of society as its analytic framework and, undeveloped in the book, the rise, from the 18th century, of a sociology aiming at an explanation of social relations of whatever form. These are prospectuses for a science. They place it in a larger universe of discourse; they assert its distinctiveness and its worth.

Within each of the two sociological endeavors there developed an appreciation of certain analytic problems. Several chapters of this book are devoted to them. For example, social relations can be seen as arising to serve their members' needs, whether the members are groups or individuals. This leads to the concern with the creation and renegotiation of relations among those members that Harry Bredemeier treats in a chapter on exchange, a concern that also plays a part in the chapters on interactionism, latter-day Marxism, and positivism. Social relations can equally be seen as setting requirements that must be met if the relations are to be maintained—requirements, for example, for the authoritative settlement of internal conflicts or for the orderly allocation to participants of costs and benefits. These issues are the focus of the chapter on functionalism. Social relations can be seen to exist as norms or rules or symbols or systems of meanings rather than as relations among human individuals or groups. That way of seeing things is taken up in the chapter on phenomenology and in Bottomore and Nisbet's account of structuralist thought (Kant, Hegel, Durkheim, Lévi-Strauss, Piaget).

And there the book stops. Are the metatheoretical questions covered? Yes. The epistemological controversies and the major analytic perspectives? Most are treated. But these are prolegomena to the kind of theory that is sufficiently specified to define evidence and be confronted by it. There is a lot of such theory in sociology—theory around the study of complex organizations, the life cycle of social movements, the vicissitudes of social protest, the forms and properties of kinship, the course of social and political development in new states, the social ecology of communities and regions, and so on and on. And, although it is employed to interpret particular instances of social relations and organization, much of this theory is highly general in form. Is it too recent in origin to be a part

of a history? Or have we come upon a question for the sociology of knowledge? That is, why have these editors, and their discipline, all supposedly concerned with sociology as, in the editors' words, "a theoretical and empirical science," yet to subordinate metatheoretical and epistemological concerns to the requirements of what seems to be a body of general and substantive scientific theory? This last, I am disposed to think, is a key question and one that two recent books, Richard J. Bernstein's *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976) and R. H. Brown's *A Poetics for Sociology* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), assure us is not easy to answer.

Bottomore and Nisbet's book deserves to go into a second edition. When it does, I hope it will take up some of the issues the editors realize were omitted (analyses of culture and knowledge) and some others of equal interest: analyses of social structure and organizations, of ecological systems, and of the promise and products of various approaches to interpretative understanding and to sociologically based social psychologies. But perhaps this calls for a second volume. If it is of the quality of this book, it will be very good indeed.

GUY E. SWANSON

*Department of Sociology,
University of California,
Berkeley 94720*

An Idea in Anthropology

Scale and Social Organization. Papers from a symposium, Burg Wartenstein, Austria. FREDRIK BARTH, Ed. Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 1978 (U.S. distributor, Columbia University Press, New York). 292 pp. Paper, \$20.

Anthropologists are engaged in a permanent search for a new euphemism to describe the societies they study that is both less offensive than the term "primitive" and also—now that they are spreading their field wider as the supply of remote tribes dries up—more accurate. One of the most favored of these euphemisms is "small-scale society." This book is an attempt to explore what is meant by the term and by the concept of scale to which it refers. The authors also try to decide whether this concept isolates a significant or illuminating aspect of societies. Of course the idea that the scale of the society is highly significant has a long history in the social sciences. Contributors to this book seem to take as their starting point the ideas of

Godfrey and Monica Wilson, who tried to use scale as a way of analyzing social change, especially in Africa. They also consider such classic theories as that of Durkheim, who differentiated those societies where people are drawn together because they recognize in each other persons similar to themselves (mechanical solidarity) and those where people need each other because they are actually different (organic solidarity). They also pay attention to the folk-urban continuum delineated by such writers as Redfield and Wirth, who contrasted folk society, which was characterized as being without markets and the profit motive and as looking to towns for illumination and to the land and tradition for mystical communication, with urban society, which was characterized by impersonal, anonymous social relationships, impermanent, single-stranded ties, and the money nexus. These types of contrast are both numerous and familiar, but it should be noted that very few of these earlier writers regarded the differences between societies at either end of their continuum as directly due to scale; rather, they nearly all saw scale as an aspect of a more fundamental difference of which it was merely an epiphenomenon. The appeal of earlier writers nonetheless should leave us in no doubt that the concept of scale in one form or another has been haunting the social sciences, and it seems only right that it should be considered frontally.

The first question the authors have to face is what is scale? or rather, what is the scale of? This is a particularly worrying problem for the contributors to this book because the intellectual tradition within which they are writing is that of British social anthropology in its reformulation in the '60's, a tradition that has always seen society as a system of connections of an almost material nature between individuals. These connections form a network that again is visualized as almost physical and that can therefore be described in terms of degrees of density, the areas of high interconnection forming darker patches in the tangled web of society. The first task would therefore be to draw these lines connecting individuals and perhaps to evaluate their "intensity." Barth, for example, in one of his contributions to the book tries to list the principal contacts he made during a fortnight and compares these with similar data for another individual. Many of the writers refer to "network theory," which was again an attempt popular in Britain to systematize and arithmetize this sort of notion. However, the attempt never got very far for the reason that the