

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.

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## 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

types of links being talked about were already highly abstract and could not therefore be seen "on the ground" in the way so many of the contributors in this book seem to imagine. In any case, ties in themselves, without a consideration of what they might be about, are pretty meaningless. Some of the contributors try to overcome this problem by talking of intensity, but here again the idea of intensity without a consideration of what kind of intensity does not help much, and if further refined the idea becomes too complicated to be handled by simple measurements of scale.

The authors are all in various ways aware of the problem. Some just give up such an ambitious project to talk about something else less all-embracing. Others try to corner the notion of scale, and this is especially true of Barth himself. He, at least, has the advantage of clarity over such contributors as Jacobson and Grønhaug, who further muddies the water by barely relevant mathematical analogies, as does Schwartz with even more misleading biological ones. Barth seems the most enthusiastic advocate of concentration on scale, which he sees as providing a way of contrasting different social situations that is both significant and empirically verifiable. He starts his concluding chapter by stressing again and again how much the study of scale is a procedure of discovery of non-subjective, real, out-there phenomena. It comes therefore as something of a surprise to be told by him that the most generally applicable sense of scale is "the size of the minimal region or population that embraces all types of members within a system." Surely he cannot believe that types of members within systems can be observed in the natural science sense he seems to favor, and indeed as we proceed in his conclusion we inevitably move away from this material view of society to ever more theoretical or subjective aspects.

With such problems in deciding what scale is, or what it is the scale of, it is not surprising that the authors have problems in attributing any very specific correlate to it. Indeed, two of the papers clearly imply that without a deeper knowledge of the character of the social formation scale and differences in scale of social organization are not very illuminating. Barnes, in a paper largely devoted to showing that the framework developed by Redfield and Wirth was, in fact, based on the particular circumstances of North and South America, demonstrates that it does not apply to the very different circumstances of Norway. The point surely is that there are

other, equally or more significant factors at work that themselves give meaning to differences of scale, while scale of itself tells us little. The point is made even more emphatically by Berreman in a lively contribution where he contrasts the effects of village size and intensification of external contacts in Northern India and the Aleutian Islands. His conclusion is that these are different cases and that no general lesson can be learned simply in terms of scale. It seems a pity, therefore, that the implication of this has not been taken to heart or challenged by those other contributors who seem more convinced of the usefulness of the concept, and confrontation of the issue is not replaced by describing the complexities of scale here and there, since this in no way can demonstrate its universal and analytical importance.

There are other interesting chapters in this book, but they seem to touch on the central issue only peripherally. Thus Gellner discusses his theory of nationalism, which tries to explain why nationalism should occur precisely in those societies where earlier theories, such as that of Durkheim, predicted that it would become irrelevant. Colson argues that as

the number of people we come into contact with increases we develop mechanisms for exclusion, and she gives the example of the Gwembe Tonga of Zambia, on which she has exceptionally good long-term data. Bailey explores the way British political parties can be considered either a good or a bad thing, and some data on the immensely complex question of "tribes" in India are given by Sinha. None of this, however, really establishes a theory of scale.

I have no doubt that this book and the conference on which it was based were genuinely called for. The ideas with which it deals are all too often left unexamined. For me the examination has demonstrated that scale in itself is not a very illuminating concept. This is not something that is immediately obvious, and I am grateful to have been enabled to reach such a negative conclusion. I believe that with a little less enthusiasm the main contributors to the book might have done the same.

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## A Proffering of Underpinnings

**On Human Nature.** EDWARD O. WILSON. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1978. xii, 260 pp. \$12.50.

*On Human Nature* completes, its author tells us, an unplanned trilogy, which, starting with insect societies, progressed through the sociobiology of vertebrates and is here concluded as a speculative essay on the application of sociobiology to the study of human affairs. Sociobiology is here defined as a "hybrid discipline that incorporates knowledge from ethology . . . , ecology . . . , and genetics in order to derive general principles concerning the biological properties of entire societies." Wilson's thesis is that without the underpinning provided by such principles the humanities and social sciences are doomed to remain ineffectual, unable to provide more than limited descriptions of superficial phenomena, with no real understanding of underlying causes. It is a thesis not calculated to endear its author to all his readers.

The first, and central, proposition is that our social behavior is to a significant extent genetically determined. "The accumulated evidence for a large hereditary component is more detailed and

compelling than most persons, including even geneticists, realize. I will go further: it already is decisive." What does this statement mean? And why should we accept it? Let us consider the evidence first. Wilson points to some rather obvious ways in which human society is affected by human nature. It can hardly be doubted, for example, that our capacity for language is in some sense dependent on our genetic makeup and that human culture has been profoundly affected by that capacity, or that most social organizations reflect, in one way or another, the length of an infant's dependence on its parents. Even the most determined opponent of sociobiology would presumably accept that human society reflects some biological facts such as these. If this were all Wilson had in mind, there would be little to argue about, and *On Human Nature* would be a very dull book.

But it is not. We are soon given more exciting fare. Wilson sees evidence of genetic determination in a wide, not to say haphazard, array of supposed facts. Some examples will give a flavor of the argument. First, there are characteristics we share with other higher primates. Thus "our intimate social groupings con-