

An Assessment of Ethnology

A Century of Controversy. Ethnological Issues from 1860 to 1960. ELMAN R. SERVICE. Academic Press, Orlando, FL, 1985. xii, 353 pp. \$48. Studies in Anthropology.

In an attempt to depart from conventional histories of anthropological theory that deal with successive schools of thought or "great men," Elman Service focuses instead on what he considers to be the major topics of controversy in ethnology between 1860 and 1960. His interest lies in "the clash, mix, syntheses, and rejections of ideas" propounded through time by various theorists, with the aim of assessing the "intellectual progress" of ethnology (p. vii).

After setting the scene with an introductory section on 19th-century social theorists (with special homage to the work of Lewis Henry Morgan), Service reviews the differing viewpoints of important protagonists in debates about the following topics: kinship terminology, social structure (descent groups, totemism, and religion), the origins of government (conflict versus integration theories), economic organization in primitive societies (property, substantivism versus formalism), and the nature of society and culture (for example, debates about the superorganic and whether culture is located in some external reality or "in the mind"). Service's concluding section suggests (among other things) that anthropological debates through time have been underlain by a fundamental division into intellectual "moieties" that often misunderstand or talk past one another. "Moiety A" espouses natural science, determinism, evolutionism, social structure, generalization, comparative method, "environmentalism," and an organismic analogy; "moiety B" emphasizes the humanities, "free-willism," relativism, culture, particularism, holism, "mentalism," and a language analogy (p. 289). Although Service identified with moiety A earlier in his career, the "mellowing" of age has made him "doubt that the controversies had a necessarily right or wrong side" (p. 286). Social behavior can be viewed from varied perspectives, he says, and it is erroneous to believe that behavior must be, for example, either "subjectively patterned" or "objectively institutionalized," rather than both (p. 316). Finally, he concludes that ethnology has not progressed very far in terms of agreement about various issues discussed in the book. But it has achieved greater knowledge and sophistication about human societies and thus has contributed significantly to refuting commonly held but erroneous as-

sumptions and generalizations about racism, biological determinism, and the like.

Service gives ethnology a mixed review, and his book evokes a similar response, as well as several questions. First, it is unclear (at least to me) at what audience this work is aimed. Despite the somewhat unusual organization of the book according to topics, much of the material will be familiar ground to seasoned professionals, although Service's review could be quite useful to students and others needing a concise synopsis of who said what about certain issues. (Here he cannot avoid dealing with "great men" such as Spencer, Durkheim, Kroeber, Malinowski, and Lévi-Strauss, as well as Ruth Benedict.) Even old hands, however, may benefit from Service's pointing out new details of what seemed to be well-known territory, as well as his salutary warnings about potholes in our theoretical and methodological path. Readers may also be intrigued or disturbed (depending on their theoretical proclivities) by Service's shift away from the materialist-evolutionist-scientific stance of his earlier years to a more "sympathetic" tolerance toward "individuals with whom I once disagreed so heartily" (p. 286). (Some of his remarks on this point could also be construed as implicit criticism of some of his former confreres who are still staunchly allied with moiety A.)

A second point of puzzlement is the choice of issues and time period. Readers who are cognizant of Service's career will note that most of the topics discussed are ones that he has been concerned with in his previous works. Fair enough, one might say, since anybody's selection of subjects is bound to be subjective in one way or another. Still, one could question whether debates about kin terminology or totemism warrant such detailed consideration (even as illustrations of more profound theoretical issues) as against other points of controversy in the intellectual history of ethnology. The particular choice of topics and the cutoff date of 1960 (chosen, says Service, to afford a sufficient sense of perspective) give the book a somewhat antiquarian quality. There is some justification for the notion that it is difficult to make reasoned judgments about the recent past. But readers who are not anthropologists should be aware that post-1960 ethnology saw a number of intellectual developments that make some of the controversies in this book now seem very old hat or even, as Service himself says about one of them, "a terrible waste of . . . time" (p. 283). It should also be noted, however, that some

other debates (for example, points of difference between moieties A and B) still rage unabated.

Some other questions and reservations could be voiced. For example, it is a pity that Service decided to forgo "an attempt at an analytic 'sociology of knowledge'" (p. viii), because the result is that many of the theoretical debates seem to be esoteric wrangles in an ivory tower. Indeed, sometimes they were. But there are also linkages to be made between anthropological conceptions and a broader social context; and in scattered sections where Service notes these (for example, the connection between a liberal-reformist political stance and a theoretical emphasis on individuals and free will) his points are illuminating.

It is, however, perhaps unfair to dwell upon what the work might have been. Within the parameters he set, Service has provided a book that has both practical and intellectual value. It is a very helpful reference source for anyone needing a succinct, intelligent historical review of positions taken by major theorists on various topics. The book also reminds us of certain fundamental questions and problems underlying ethnological theorizing. Perhaps they can never be resolved, but we need to keep pondering them.

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North American Lakes

Quaternary Evolution of the Great Lakes. P. F. KARROW and P. E. CALKIN, Eds. Geological Association of Canada, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, 1985. vi, 259 pp., illus. \$C35. Geological Association of Canada Special Paper 30. From a symposium, London, Ontario, 1984.

The middle latitudes of eastern North America are crossed by watersheds between Arctic, Atlantic, and Gulf of Mexico drainage systems. The Laurentide ice sheet advanced and retreated across these divides, disrupting the preglacial drainage, excavating the basins of the Great Lakes, and causing vertical isostatic movements of the earth's crust. The evidence of these late Wisconsinan pulsations is a complex of interbedded glacial, lacustrine, and organic beds in a succession of interdependent lake basins with interlocking histories that have intrigued geologists since Louis Agassiz studied the Lake Superior basin more than 135 years ago.

This region of glacial lakes has been made