

Cults and Their Attractions

Cults. Faith, Healing and Coercion. MARC GALANTER. Oxford University Press, New York, 1989. x, 230 pp. \$22.95.

For 15 years, Marc Galanter has studied cults from a psychiatric perspective and has published his observations in such journals as *American Journal of Psychiatry*. Now he offers a monograph, collecting and expanding on this material, seeking to explain cults to his fellow psychiatrists and the general public and offering fresh theoretical ideas to social scientists of religion. His primary research focused on the Divine Light Mission of adolescent Guru Maharaj Ji and the Unification Church (Moonies) of Sun Myung Moon. But he also discusses the suicidal Peoples Temple of Jim Jones, Philadelphia's MOVE commune eradicated by bloody force in 1985, Alcoholics Anonymous, Synanon, and other groups, mainly on the basis of published reports.

Galanter often uses the term *charismatic group* instead of *cult*, and he defines such a group as a set of persons with a shared belief system, a high level of social cohesiveness, and influential behavior norms who impute charismatic or divine power to the group or its leadership. Many of the groups widely labeled cults by the mass media and several categories of social phenomena so labeled by social scientists lack some of these characteristics to a greater or lesser degree, however. For example, cults in the extensive contemporary Pagan or Ritual Magick traditions tend to be weak in all these characteristics, and there is much scientific literature about client cults and audience cults that generally lack group structures altogether. Furthermore, many individual members of cults fitting Galanter's definitions do not exhibit the high level of psychological dependence he describes, some being clever manipulators achieving their own goals within the group. In a sense, then, the book is more about psychiatric aspects of relations between dependent persons and charismatic groups than it is about cults *per se*.

Often, psychiatrists come into contact with cults through disturbed patients who are members or through outraged parents seeking help in rescuing their children from one, often through the mechanism of having them judged mentally incompetent. It is therefore easy for psychiatrists to assume

falsely that cultism is synonymous with mental illness. Galanter has avoided this fallacy, and he stresses both that cults can actually help cure mild emotional problems and that seriously deranged individuals seldom fit well into their demanding social systems. He does, however, assert that emotional problems are a chief motivator for joining, and he tends to see cults as a psychiatric phenomenon.

An alternative view, reflected in much sociological literature, is that unusual motivations are not needed to bring an individual to join a cult, especially in sociocultural climates that are friendly to religious innovation. Persons raised in the occult milieu join a cult simply as part of their family tradition, just as the offspring of Methodists would join a Methodist church. In sectors of society where conventional churches are organizationally weak, among the well educated or residents of the Pacific region, for example, new religious movements may provide the same transcendence and spiritual uplift that other people get from standard denominations. Other people may join cults because they rationally—and often correctly—calculate that they will benefit thereby, achieving more interesting lifestyles, experiencing pleasurable adventures, and even gaining very real financial, erotic, and status rewards.

In support of his view, Galanter offers results of a number of psychological questionnaires he administered to Moonies and Divine Light members. For example, a survey given to 104 participants in an introductory Moonie workshop revealed that those who actually joined scored lower on a scale of psychological well-being than did those who dropped out, and participants may have scored lower than the general public. The quantitative phase of Galanter's research deserves serious consideration, but it also raises again all the still-unanswered questions of validity of questionnaire measures of mental health. For example, after dozens of excellent studies we still do not know whether women suffer more often from neurosis than do men or whether the sexes simply differ in norms for expression of emotions. Groups that stress a healing message are apt to induce participants to express themselves in distress-laden terms. The fact that a psychological scale has crite-

ria validity, successfully distinguishing persons in psychiatric treatment from persons not in treatment, does not prove that any variations picked up by the scale when administered to other populations reflect psychopathology. One would expect powerful response biases among members of ideological subcultures.

Galanter's analytical framework is creative and eclectic, but it draws most heavily on three perspectives: psychoanalysis, sociobiology, and Weberianism. A common characteristic of these three is that they are interpretative approaches, seldom subjected by their proponents to the risk of empirical falsification but used to give meaning to a set of facts that might be explained quite differently by an advocate of another school of thought. Galanter does not analyze cult membership as transference of dependency on parents, but he does stress the way commitment can assuage a person's neurotic fears and confusions, much of his evidence coming from psychoanalytic case histories. Sociobiology enters as a way of explaining the altruistic submission of the individual to the group, something ingrained in humans by thousands of generations of living in hunter-gatherer bands not unlike charismatic cults, but Galanter does not take this line of analysis to the logical conclusion that cults represent a natural lifestyle for humans in contrast to the alienation of modern society. Weberian analysis, widely used by sociologists of religion, employs Max Weber's concepts of *ideal type* and *charismatic authority*, but both of these notions have drawn increasing criticism within the field of religious studies for being antiquated, blunt tools no longer capable of advancing scientific knowledge. For example, the ideal-typical concept of charismatic group may foster circular reasoning: If cults are defined as charismatic groups, then membership cannot be conceived in any other way than as psychological dependency upon the group and its leaders.

To a great extent, however, Galanter cannot be held responsible for the uncertainty of his results or any imprecision in his analysis. Cults are extremely difficult to study systematically, and despite the methodological issues that can be raised about them his questionnaires are among the very best surveys that have been done of cult members. In comparison to much of the literature on cults available to the general public, Galanter's book shines with brilliance, and he has an admirable ability to transcend his intellectual framework, frequently displaying what can only be called good judgment in evaluating alternative interpretations. Galanter's research deserves careful replication, and we can hope that he

himself will undertake even more ambitious research along the lines he has so well sketched. Scholars, therapists, clergy, and lay persons who need to understand cults or charismatic groups will benefit from Galanter's book, and his own judicious caution will help them avoid taking his word as gospel until research has better established the role that psychopathology plays in cults and determined the degree to which these novel religious movements fit the definition of charismatic group.

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Approaches to Ecology

Perspectives in Ecological Theory. JONATHAN ROUGHGARDEN, ROBERT M. MAY and SIMON A. LEVIN, Eds. Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1989. viii, 394 pp., illus. \$60; paper, \$22.50. Based on a meeting, Asilomar, CA, 1987.

It is possible for treatises on theoretical ecology to be written today with little overlap in topics covered. For some investigators, theoretical ecology is ecosystem models. For others, it is theoretical population biology. Even within population biology, some theoreticians emphasize the role of spatial structure, others evolutionary questions. There is no consensus on the correct models. The "marriage" between ecological and genetic approaches to understanding populations is still forced. The dialogue between theoreticians and experimentalists is still limited.

Is there a way for theoretical ecologists to reach a common ground? The use of "scale" as a unifying concept holds some promise, but only if some agreement can be reached on the use and meaning of the term. The recognition that any ecological question, theoretical or experimental, must be approached on the appropriate scale, temporal, spatial, or organizational, is becoming commonplace. Is this enough of a common theme for theoretical ecologists?

This diversity in ecological theory is well represented in *Perspectives in Ecological Theory*. I just used the volume as the focus of a reading group. The students were struck by the lack of common ground among the chapters. From a student's point of view, one important virtue of this work is the emphasis not just on reporting past accomplishments but on laying out directions for future work (possibly thesis topics).

Peter Kareiva addresses the problem of communication between experimentalists

and theoreticians. Using his own work on the dynamics of insects and the role of spatial structure, Kareiva asks how to "renew the dialogue between theoreticians and experimentalists" that proved so valuable in relation to the work of Lotka, Volterra, and Gause. Kareiva notes that there is little hope for general theories of population ecology. Coupled with this loss of generality, however, important theoretical insights have emerged concerning the importance of chaos, of spatial structure, of stochasticity, of diseases (as discussed in contributions to the present volume by Hassell and May and Anderson), and of age structure. These concerns have led to detailed models of particular systems such as the rocky intertidal and the interactions between ladybird beetles and aphids.

Kareiva also suggests that this work has led to a list of experiments that need to be done. He calls for more mechanistic models, using parameters that can be measured. Given that ecological (population) theory appears to be a series of special cases exhibiting the importance of different factors such as age structure and spatial structure, theoreticians need to delineate the circumstances in which these various factors are likely to be important. Empiricists need theories to test assumptions.

The need for theories is particularly clear in areas where answers are needed now and experiments cannot always be performed. The success of ecological theory in understanding the dynamics of renewable resources is discussed by Clark. Its value in conservation biology is emphasized in contributions by Ehrlich and by Pimm and Gilpin. As these authors emphasize, ecological theories, though far from perfect, are far superior to complete ignorance. This positive view of theory in conservation biology should be encouraging for theoretical ecologists. The importance of scale, particularly spatial scale, emerges in these discussions of conservation biology.

The question of scale is discussed explicitly in two chapters on aquatic systems, by Powell and Steele, and plays a vital role in many other chapters of the book. In these aquatic systems, scale can be both itself the focus of investigation and a consideration in determining the observations to be made. O'Neill approaches the question of organizational scale explicitly, applying ideas from hierarchy theory. Cohen's contribution on food webs and Levin's on ecosystems emphasize the patterns that emerge and may be theoretically understood at higher levels of organization.

The interface between ecology and genetics is discussed in contributions by Travis and Mueller, Stanley, and Feldman. The

approach of the paleontologist is very different from that of the population biologist, and this section shows the importance of temporal scale. Its most interesting parts are the suggestions for future work, since, as Feldman notes, "ecological evolutionary theory is very young." Also, work bridging ecology and genetics is still very difficult.

Not only is ecological evolutionary theory very young, most of the developments described in this book are quite recent, representing not just development of earlier approaches but really new lines of investigation. Until the late 1960s and early 1970s the models of ecology were basically extensions of the work of Lotka and Volterra, using the same framework. The last 15 years have seen an explosion of new approaches ranging from (but not limited to) an emphasis on structure, study of food webs, attempts at integrating ecology and genetics, and recognition of the importance of disease to an attempt at integrating economics and population dynamics. I agree with the editors' statement that some of the excitement of these developments comes across in this volume.

This book well demonstrates the fragmentation of ecological theory. The approaches of theoreticians at one organizational level are vastly different from those at another level. The approaches of plant population dynamics, as discussed by Pacala, are different from those used for animals, as discussed by Kareiva. In the introduction to the book the editors argue that this diversity of approaches is both desirable and necessary. It is impossible to predict which approaches will prove useful in the future.

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Molecular Rigidity

Rigid-Chain Polymers. Hydrodynamic and Optical Properties in Solution. V. N. TSVETKOV. Consultants Bureau (Plenum), New York, 1989. xxii, 490 pp., illus. \$115. Macromolecular Compounds. Translated from the Russian by E. A. Korolyova.

One of the key features of chain molecules is their flexibility (or rigidity), which controls a large number of their properties, not only in solution but also in the bulk. Thus the means to characterize the degree of rigidity and the theories to predict it are important.

Molecular rigidity may be evaluated by dilute solution measurements of viscosity, sedimentation, diffusion, light scattering,