Encompassing the Sciences of Human Affairs

International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. DAVID L. SILLS, Ed. Macmillan and Free Press, New York, 1968. 17 vols., approx. 9000 pp., illus. $495.

One does not read an encyclopedia; one lives with it. Since no one but the editor is likely to have read every page, a commentator must limit himself to the items he has sampled, and he must in honesty use the first person singular. The present encyclopedia was preceded by the 15-volume *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, edited by Alvin Johnson and published from 1930 to 1935. For more than 30 years I lived with those volumes. They never collected dust, and I think they are still worth consulting. When the decision was made [see D. L. Sills, *Science* **163**, 1169 (1969)—ED.] not to revise the original set but to compile a completely new encyclopedia, some of us were opposed. (When it came down to brass tacks, what we wanted to retain was one article by John Dewey; beyond this the agreement was very loose.) Anyway, having lived with the 17 new volumes for more than a year, I now think that the editors were wise in their decision to do a completely new job. The *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* is fresh and contemporary. It has been meticulously edited, with an excellent index and a most conscientious system of cross-referencing. Anyone who wishes to know something about the contemporary state of anthropology, economics, geography, history, law, political science, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, and statistics will find this encyclopedia a useful source. For a quick search for a name or a date the *Britannica* (or even the one-volume *Columbia Encyclopedia*) is more satisfactory, but this encyclopedia, with its alphabetical list of topics and its elaborate cross-references, makes it easy for anyone to track down some acute comments about almost any contemporary social problem. David Sills is to be congratulated on having accomplished an almost superhuman task.

I have, naturally, looked with special interest at the treatment of the fields of my own competence, and I do not necessarily approve the selection of contributors; but, granting a few differences of opinion, I have been impressed by the honesty of the authors' efforts to present a balanced picture. To be specific, I can without serious qualms recommend to the nonpsychologist the articles on the various aspects of psychology. This makes me feel more comfortable about the articles from which I hope to draw new information. One can read with the confidence that one is not being seriously misled. Assuming that this judgment is correct, the encyclopedia will be an invaluable aid, not only to the student who wishes to make a preliminary excursion into a field, but also to the general reader who wishes to broaden his knowledge without immersing himself in details.

Let me now ask two questions, neither of which is intended as unfriendly: How international is the *International Encyclopedia*? And what sort of picture does it give of social science?

1) The *International Encyclopedia* is in only a limited sense international. The editors report that more than 30 countries are represented. I do not challenge this figure. The Editorial Advisory Board, listed in volume 1, contains names from all parts of the world, and it is clear that an honest effort was made to secure international collaboration. This effort was apparently not successful. My own count (of every fifth page of the long list of contributors) yields approximately the following percentages: 84 percent American; 11 percent non-American but English-speaking; 5 percent from non-English-speaking countries. The charitable conclusion is that Americans are more willing than non-Americans to contribute articles. There would be no harm in this if American writers were prepared to report what is being written in other countries. I did another tedious count, this time of the references listed in the four articles on the psychology of language—three by psychologists, one by a linguist (all Americans). The linguist was more international than the psychologists (one of whom referred to nothing that had not been published in the United States). Together, the four articles append 66 references, only six of which are from non-English publications, all of which are available in English translation. This may not be a fair sample, but my guess is that the English reader who wishes to be introduced to the non-English literature will not receive the best of guidance from the encyclopedia.

The biographies yield a somewhat different story. The editors, wisely perhaps, have reduced the number of biographies to about 600 (there were approximately 4000 in the earlier encyclopedia). I sampled the biographies listed under Economics, History, General Psychology, and Statistics. There is a good deal of overlap, but the approximate distribution is 21 percent American and 79 percent non-American. This might be interpreted as a recognition on the part of Americans of their debt to non-Americans. When one contrasts this, however, with the percentage of non-American citations, one begins to wonder. I am never sure that I can draw a line between parochial and provincial, or between provincial and national. I am quite sure that this encyclopedia is U.S.-national; whether it is provincial or parochial remains to be decided. Remember, though, that the authors were taking their cues from the editors, and that the editorial policy may have been decided in a smog-filled room.

2) Is this a correct picture of contemporary social science? I regret to say that it is, and I am not happy about it. Contemporary social science *is* predominantly American. In quantitative terms Americans have written, and are writing, more words than have all the students of society during the past 25 centuries. Blame it on the affluent society, or on an academic system that rewards sheer quantity of publication, or even on the availability of a Xerox machine; the fact remains that the English-reading public is being deluged. Let me suggest a few points, all of which are stimulated by the encyclopedia, and all of which are debatable:

a) American social scientists are eager to be recognized as scientists. In the best Newtonian tradition they don the white coat of the laboratory and pretend that they are measuring accurately. Apparently not all of them have grasped the difference between a *science*, in the British and French tradition, and the broader German conception of *Wissenschaft*. The students of society can rightly claim to be *Wissenschaftler*, but they may be deluding themselves if they think they are conforming to the canons of *science*. The recent successes (since Newton) of the natural sciences have been linked to the growth of mathematics: greater precision of observation, new and better mathematical models, more reliable prediction. A mathematical model is always open to the charge that, however great its predictive power may be, it may have silently excluded the

phenomena that cannot be fitted into the model. The history of physical science provides some good examples; on the whole, however, the physicists have succeeded in keeping their models as tools, revising or discarding them as new facts have been discovered.

The common complaint against the social scientists, with which I tend to agree, is that in their zeal for quantification and model-building they have oversimplified some of the most important phenomena of man and society.

b) To what extent is the new encyclopedia guilty of this sin? The verdict of some of its critics has been severe, but I cannot endorse all the invectives. The editors and authors are guilty only in the sense that they have represented social science not as it ought to be but as it actually is (in America). This may have been a mistake in policy; but the motivation was honest. The common criticism is that the new encyclopedia neglects the "humanistic" approaches to social science. This is not true of the biographies, which include most of the important "humanists." It is probably true of the substantive articles, which are heavily loaded with what pass for "empirical" contributions. But, again, can we challenge the good faith of editors and authors who are attempting to represent the contemporary scene? We may deplore, as I do, premature quantification and the worship of mathematical models, but the fact is that this is a correct picture of contemporary (American) social science.

c) Should an encyclopedia attempt to be contemporary? My own feeling is that the editors have overemphasized contemporaneity. Many of the articles are now as out-of-date as are the chapters of a new textbook, and many of the references will quickly fade out of history. A record of current excitements will be of interest to the future historian, but the excitements of any year can be gleaned from the evanescent periodicals or from such publications as the *Annual Reviews*. One thinks wistfully of the famous ninth edition of the *Britannica* (1886), which can still be consulted with profit. I am not suggesting that there is nothing of enduring value in this encyclopedia. The biographies, the historical articles, and many of the discussions of basic theory may even grow in importance with the passage of years. Too many of the special articles, however, competent as they are, read as though they were written for a current periodical.

d) Have we a circumscribed field or set of fields which can properly be called "the social sciences"? I consider this a fruitless question. The labeling of a cluster of disciplines may be administratively necessary, but the particular label is of minor importance. (The term "behavioral science," sanctified if not invented by the Ford Foundation, has in my opinion contributed little but confusion.) One of the encouraging things about the encyclopedia is the evidence that disciplinary lines are becoming blurred. Again and again we find a topic, for example, language, being treated by authors from different disciplines but with such catholicity that one has to check the index to discover their formal affiliations. This is a healthy sign.

e) Social problems are researchable. This is perhaps the most important lesson that natural scientists may learn from social scientists. Facts may be difficult to establish, methods may be inadequate; but there is still the faith that even in the realm of human affairs there is a place for careful observation and close reasoning. This encyclopedia gives us some encouragement.

Balancing the pros and cons, I find my assessment of the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* definitely on the plus side. It is not truly international, nor is it truly encyclopedic; it is essentially American, and the biases of the editorial consultants are revealed in the selection of topics and authors; it will probably not live as long as has its predecessor. Nevertheless it is a magnificent achievement, 17 volumes of fact and wisdom, superbly edited and reasonably well written. In any given field it is certainly not a substitute for primary sources, but in fields other than one's own it provides a good orientation. And this, perhaps, is the most one can expect from an encyclopedia. In spite of the reservations noted above, I consider it worth its price and the 38 inches of shelf space it requires.

ROBERT B. MACLEOD
Department of Psychology,
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

Region and No-Man's-Lands

The Makers of Modern Geography. ROBERT E. DICKINSON. Praeger, New York, 1969. xiv + 306 pp. + plates. $7.50.

To all appearances this is a book of, by, and for geographers. As such it will be useful and controversial. It will refuel an old argument in a rather defensive and introspective profession. But its value goes beyond that. As a document, it offers insight into the way in which cultural and academic institutions influence the history of ideas. It is a demanding book. I suspect it will give students and "under 30" geographers cultural indigestion. Nongeographers will have to put up with long strings of "begats." A hundred times the book goes right to the brink of tedium, and comes up suddenly with a flash of insight into the nature of the great millennial academic procession.

Dickinson's stated purpose is to invite his fellow geographers in the English-speaking world to return to their scholarly heritage, the study of region. By examining the history of the German and French schools of thought in geography, he shows that the notion of region lies at the core of the geographic tradition. The analytic and systematic work of American geographers he sees as peripheral for the most part. "The widespread scepticism among British and American geographers means that they are, in effect, rejecting or ignoring, the best offerings of their birthright" (p. 179). He recommends the analysis and resynthesis of "region," which balances all aspects of physical environment, culture, and historical experience. An understanding of greater (world) regions must, in his view, be built up from many studies of small regions.

This controversy is chronic among geographers, and I do not believe it will ever be resolved. Dickinson's basic approach is sound, even refreshing. It is based on the notion, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Hartshorne's classic work, *The Nature of Geography,* de-