

Impulses in Sociological Thought

American Sociology. Worldly Rejections of Religion and Their Directions. ARTHUR J. VIDICH and STANFORD M. LYMAN. Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 1985. xiv, 380 pp. \$30.

Following the Second World War, when American sociology began single-mindedly imitating the methods and goals of natural science, the history of the discipline became to it what the history of chemistry had become to life in the lab. Practitioners were expected to absorb some cloudy notion of the field's beginnings (Saint-Simon, Comte, Quetelet, Spencer), but serious study of early "errors," considered corrected by the 1950's, became rare. It was believed that the growth of science does not depend on perpetual contemplation of origins. As long as rigorously scientific research, most of it quantified, was the discipline's grail, history vanished. This was an odd development, because between 1936 and 1951 important sociologists (among them Floyd House, L. L. and Jessie Bernard, Howard P. Becker, Harry Elmer Barnes, and Howard Odum) had made available a small shelf of sturdy histories treating sociology's theories, methods, and institutional growth. But after that major sociologists became far too busy "doing sociology," as the phrase went, to investigate the past. Only in the 1970's when what the British call the "orthodox consensus" within American sociology were very thin did study of history again become acceptable as a sociological specialty. If social science has truly moved from the natural science model of explanation to "an interpretive turn" (as was recently reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*), one would indeed expect more diligent historiography to surface.

Even though funding for such research remains scarce and many feel that concentrating on the past signifies an uncertain present—which it probably does—works have slowly appeared that explain how sociology came to its present condition. The opening blast was Herman and Julia Schwendinger's *The Sociologists of the Chair: A Radical Analysis of the Formative Years of North American So-*

ciology, 1883–1922 (Basic Books, 1974), which was poorly received, partly owing to its left-wing interpretation of the facts. The book had a strong thesis and paid for it. Other worthy books of history have appeared since then, but Vidich and Lyman's *American Sociology* is the first by senior scholars that attempts to rewrite the discipline's first century by putting forth a powerful thesis. The authors do not write from a predominantly political angle. Rather, they have taken an idea from Max Weber's sociology of religion (best known outside the discipline by the fragment *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [1904–05]) and tried to show that sociology, until very recently, was religion by another name.

This claim will not surprise those who can remember when sociology's ranks were filled with ministers and their sons, but it does strain the historical record, as does any reinterpretation of received wisdom. Whereas sociologists for some time, at least since the 1920's, have insistently distanced themselves from religious reform movements, social work, and other types of meliorative political action, mostly to preserve their claim to "science as a vocation" (Weber), this book argues that the religious strain held sway until Herbert Blumer in the 1950's and Erving Goffman in the next decade finally dismissed religious impulses from sociological thought. The authors believe that utter secularization was not achieved until the 1970's, and even then Protestantism contributed an "enduring legacy" to sociology's way of conceptualizing social life. It is this basic charge, that a purely judgmental ("normative") force worked its wiles on influential American sociologists even as they formally denied it access to their theories and substantive problems, that historians of the field may question. It will surely seem odd to hardy social researchers who owe much of their self-esteem, as well as their funding, to the National Science Foundation. But since there are far fewer officially sponsored "scientific" sociologists today than there were 15 years ago, perhaps Vidich and Lyman's perspective will seem more plausible now than it would have then.

The book's 18 chapters fall into the familiar pattern of each handling a major figure or school, beginning with the Mississippi Comtean Henry Hughes, killed in the Civil War, and ending with a summary treatment of today's sociological scene. Most of the authors' efforts concern writers long dead and mostly forgotten. What separates this book from a score of past works that have covered similar ground is the rhetoric or vocabulary of concepts. In an intriguing acknowledgement (though nowhere in the text put to explicit use), the literary critic M. H. Abrams is noted for his *Natural Supernaturalism* (Norton, 1971), a study of Romantic poetry, 19th-century philosophy, and the place of Christian beliefs in each (p. xii). Vidich and Lyman insert a set of organizing images into their historiography that does indeed bespeak criticism more often applied to literary texts than to sociological writing. In itself this is but one more indication that Richard Rorty and others are right when they claim that the humanities and social sciences (excluding economics perhaps) are converging on an identical frame of reference and a particular vocabulary, much of it originating in philosophy. My objection to the specific way this useful strategy is played out in *American Sociology* concerns the imprecision of the key words and their usage when applied to social thought. Certainly the pivotal term is "sociodicy":

In the early decades of the twentieth century, American sociology began to separate itself from its most visible religious orientations. Substituting sociodicy—a vindication of the ways of society to man—for the theodicy that had originally inspired them, American sociologists retained the original spirit of Protestant world Salvation. They substituted a language of science for the rhetoric of religion [p. 1].

In keeping with this approach, "covenant," "warranteeism," "stewardship," and "transvaluation" (of religious into secular words or ideas) play major roles in the book. The authors have fixed on a hypothesis and found a battery of phrases with which to soften up and transform familiar historical data into something different. What seems odd, though, is that they never consider the main period of their interest, between 1870 and 1930, as a cultural epoch in which any intellectual speaking to the public or to others of his (*sic*) caste about social life quite naturally exploited religious imagery and rhetoric. Rockefeller's philanthropy, the founding of the University of Chicago and the Social Science Research Council, which they cover, are incomprehensible unless Rockefeller's own words are taken seri-

ously: "God gave me my money" (p. 132). When Max Weber toured the United States in 1904, he was astounded at the religiosity he found both formally and substantively extant and contrasted it with the skepticism and areligious ethics of northern Europe. This was a time of serious religious life, and intellectuals, major and minor, had to contend with it. Its rhetoric was the *lingua franca*.

Perhaps because this cultural situation is downplayed in the book, some jarring formulations appear:

[George Herbert Mead] excised the Presbyterian-Pauline Christian synthesis that [Josiah] Royce had constructed and returned the sociology of the self and the community to the inner-worldly pragmatism that had earlier transvalued a de-Catholicized Calvinistic Puritanism [p. 271].

In one of Christopher Hill's many books on Puritanism, he begins by insisting that the concept itself is useless because "a" Puritanism never existed in anything like the form we (thanks perhaps to Weber and other sociologists interested above all in generalizing) think of. But this aside, even if one can disentangle Vidich and Lyman's sentence, and even if Royce and Mead did what the authors say they did, it is hard to see what has been gained in understanding the history of sociological thinking. Royce is not a forefather of sociology even if he did teach Mead, and Mead's work is as secular as one can imagine, so why translate and condense their interaction via this special vocabulary?

In another instance Robert Park's ideas receive careful scrutiny, especially with reference to what he called a "single world religion." The authors conclude,

Religion ultimately could provide a moral foundation for a world brotherhood of humankind [p. 202].

But the key reference for this section is a preface Park wrote in 1924 to a book by one Maurice Price, *Christian Missions and Oriental Civilizations*, privately published in Shanghai. It is not unusual for Vidich and Lyman to mine for major ideas the minor works of the men in question. There is apparently little concern for where a piece of quotable writing fits into an author's lifework, no weighing of significance. A major criterion for commentary is apparently whether the text referred to religion or used theological imagery. The rules of classical hermeneutics hold that the importance of an idea in a corpus of writing is a function of its specific location in a lifework. A quotation from *Doctor Faustus* means more, literally, than one from

Buddenbrooks if one's goal is to understand Mann's intellectual and artistic growth. This is not a point of view often exemplified in *American Sociology*.

Another trouble with the book surrounds the choice of authors considered. Twenty-eight writers receive more than passing treatment, most within several pages, but others (Henry Hughes, Lester Ward, William Sumner, Franklin Giddings, Robert Park, and Blumer) received from 10 to 23 pages of attention. By my reckoning, seven of these 28 continue to be viewed today as important to the growth and current condition of sociology (though few are read very much): Sumner, Talcott Parsons, William Ogburn, Park, Blumer, Mead, and Goffman. Other authors who conformed to Vidich and Lyman's hypothesis about the transformation of religious into sociological rhetoric, but who have no place in contemporary awareness, include Francis Peabody, Edward Cummings, Thomas Nixon Carter, Hugo Munsterberg, Richard Ely, L. L. Bernard, Joseph LeConte, Frederick Teggart, and Royce. All of these are given serious study in the book, and some—like LeConte, Teggart, and Munsterberg—figure as important "sociologists" for the first time in a history of the field that is not encyclopedic.

One wonders why these choices were made. The best recent book on the sister topic is Robert Bierstedt's *American Sociological Theory* (Academic Press, 1981), in which lengthy treatments are accorded Charles Horton Cooley, Florian Znaniecki, Robert MacIver, Pitirim Sorokin, and Robert Merton, plus others also discussed in *American Sociology*. Not only does Bierstedt refrain from bringing in most of Vidich and Lyman's protagonists, his treatments of Sumner, Ward, Ross, and Lundberg do not hinge upon their "desacralization" motif. In fact religious sentiments seem in all cases but Parsons's quite residual. This does not mean that Vidich and Lyman's innovation is ipso facto incorrect, but it does put the burden of proof for their choices and omissions heavily upon them.

This is, however, a valuable book, for its bibliographical mining, its strong thesis, the unusually clear writing, and the scholarly gravity—especially now when sociology has reached dire straits and needs, perhaps, to look backward before mastering the future. Yet it is not about American sociology altogether. It is more a monograph that highlights the place of religious thinking and feeling in selected works of some American intellectuals, most of whom have passed into

quiet oblivion precisely because their ideas became utterly antique. It is not quite accurate to equate or merge true theodicy with today's sociodicy. The very nature of legitimation, of explaining to a subject people why their society privileges some and not others, has changed fundamentally since the *fin de siècle*, as we have learned from Jürgen Habermas. But another German, Hans Blumenberg, has raised the more serious and penetrating question of what precisely "secularization" means (*Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, MIT Press, 1983). Though his concern was principally the origin of modern science and its philosophies, his critique could work as well on the subject of Vidich and Lyman's interest. This heterodox position, that modernity and its precursors do not share a unified theological past, that modern thought is something parallel to religious aspirations but distinct from them, is worlds removed from the traditional perspective embodied in *American Sociology*.

Histories of sociology face a common problem, distinguishing between tracts of thought (like Hughes's *A Treatise on Sociology* [1854] or LeConte's *Evolution* [1897]) and sociology beyond the library. It is one thing to analyze texts and another to show whom they influenced or how they fit into context. There are some interesting sections of Vidich and Lyman's book that recount the discipline's institutionalization, but new information is not exhumed. For the most part theory is equated with the discipline at large, a mistake that dogs many such efforts. And the only writer given really sympathetic, detailed study in a fresh way is Blumer (who is acknowledged as having provided special access to his rarer works).

Which brings me to my last point. What motivated the authors to write the book the way they did? One goal seems to have been to unseat Harvard and the east in general as the locus of currently important sociological thought. Parsons is attacked repeatedly, with jabs rather than extended pummelings (for example, "Hughes's idea of a social system bears considerable resemblance to that of Talcott Parsons," p. 11; Hughes was a shameless racist, of course). Royce, Blumer, Teggart, even LeConte—all tied intellectually to California—are pitted against the east and lauded for having modernized outmoded ideas:

Royce had developed his conceptions of self, community, loyalty, and progress out of the challenge to Puritan precepts posed by California's frontier amorality. In the lineage of sociopsychological thought that descends

from Royce to Mead to Blumer and to Goffman there is documented a great transformation: The singular and binding covenant of the Protestant ethicists erodes in the face of the emergence of a plurality of worldly, nonbinding situational and personal ethics [p. 276].

It is clear that Vidich and Lyman see the future in Goffman's apotheosis of the "voracious ego" (p. 306), that furiously secular creature of the Pacific frontier. But what this might mean now for sociology, or, much more important, for society at large, *American Sociology* does not say. Perhaps as one casts aside the rhetoric of moral certainty it becomes harder to say anything at all.

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Mechanisms of Migration

The Control of Fish Migration. R. J. F. SMITH. Springer-Verlag, New York, 1985. xvi, 243 pp., illus. \$49.50. Zoophysiology, vol. 17.

Fish Migration. BRIAN A. McKEOWN. Croom Helm, London, and Timber Press, Portland, Ore., 1984 (distributor, International Specialized Book Services, Portland). x, 224 pp., illus. \$29.

The study of animal migration in general and fish migration in particular has produced a literature of impressive proportions. Despite the theoretical basis provided by F. R. Harden Jones in 1968 with the publication of *Fish Migration*, progress in this field has been sporadic, with little evidence of the emergence of a conceptually complete framework for the further study of fish migration. The abundant yet disparate literature has, since 1978, included a number of books reviewing the field that in general have failed to contribute more than summary of what has already been documented. Some of the exceptions to this generalization are the contributions of R. R. Baker (1978, 1982) on the general subject of animal migration and the collection of papers assembled by J. D. McCleave and coeditors (1984) concerning migratory orientation in fish. We now have two more books in what appears to be a renaissance of interest in fish migration.

Smith's *The Control of Fish Migration* is presented as a summary of representative experimental studies illustrating the mechanisms used by fish to guide and time their migrations. Studies of distribution and migratory routes and of physiological adjustments required of migrants are excluded. The author thus

places little emphasis on a major contemporary issue in fish migration research, that is, the interaction between the physiological state of a migrant, its environmental preferences, and ocean dynamics as a mechanism of directional movement. Although this issue is alluded to, it is subordinated to the traditional approach of discussing migration in terms of major sign stimuli (light, odors, magnetic stimuli, and so on) and their respective sense organs. Although there is nothing wrong with this approach, the end product is a conventional and routine paper-by-paper review that repeats the same ideas and findings that have dominated our thinking over the last two decades. For the uninitiated, the book is a convenient introduction to part of the literature concerning migratory orientation. For the initiated, it provides no significant new insights or concepts.

In contrast, McKeown's *Fish Migration* presents a compact, up-to-date, overview of the field including migration patterns, mechanisms of orientation, bioenergetics, physiology, ecology, and evolution. The major contribution of this work is the author's effort to establish research in bioenergetics and physiology as equal partners of orientation research in the study of fish migration. This equilibrium is rarely achieved in collective works dealing with the proximate regulation and the ultimate causes of fish migration.

Much of the review of bioenergetics and physiology deals with fundamental principles that some physiologists might consider too basic for a specialty book. However, as a nonphysiologist in need of a review, I found these chapters informative. The only shortcoming I noted was the absence of discussion of mathematical models dealing with the hydro-mechanics of fish swimming. Such models provide explanations of certain behavioral and morphological adaptations based on assumptions of least costly travel strategies. Such research is worthy of consideration in any study of migratory bioenergetics.

The final chapter, dealing with the ecology and evolution of fish migration, is dominated by Baker's ideas concerning lifetime tracks. The utility of this concept is not always obvious. It is easy to state that the characteristics of an animal's lifetime track or migration are determined by its morphology, physiology, and behavior; the challenge is to define how these phenomena are related. Under what set of conditions is the optimization of physiological state sufficient to explain migratory patterns without precise orientation? Under what set of

circumstances is precise orientation obligatory? What are the physiological links between bioenergetics and behavior? What is the course of ontogeny in orienting ability and to what extent can physiological events (critical periods) and learning modify it? The possibility of formulating a unifying theory of fish migration lies in the answers to these questions, and the task demands a global appreciation of all the topics touched on in McKeown's book. This book provides a readable and complete introduction for all those who wish to know why and how fish migrate. The next step is to formulate key questions and testable hypotheses concerning these diverse phenomena. What we do not need, for the time being, is another review of the subject.

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Developmental Neurobiology

Molecular Bases of Neural Development. GERALD M. EDELMAN, W. EINAR GALL, and W. MAXWELL COWAN, Eds. Wiley, New York, 1985. x, 606 pp., illus. \$85. A Neurosciences Institute Publication.

Recent advances in molecular biology, immunology, and biophysics have provided tools adequate for addressing in molecular terms some of the most interesting issues in developmental neurobiology. The influx into neuroscience research of a new generation of scientists trained in these molecular techniques has brought neuroscience back into the mainstream of biology. Biologists who want to see how both classical and modern approaches are being used to address previously unapproachable questions, or simply to learn what some of the most interesting issues are in this transformed field, should find *Molecular Bases of Neural Development* interesting reading.

The book contains reports from a conference sponsored by the Neuroscience Institute. The objective of the organizers appears to have been to provide in-depth samplings of the finest research being done on a few selected subjects and not to provide a comprehensive overview of developmental neurobiology.

Overall the quality of the chapters is quite high. The authors are an outstanding set of scientists, and the book contains the best overviews of recent work by many of them. Only a few papers repeat recent reviews or are out-of-date.

The best section of the book describes