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## Book Notes

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## BOOK NOTES

Calvin J. Larson. *Pure and Applied Sociological Theory: Problems and Issues*. Chicago, IL: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1993. \$28 hardcover.

The idea that sociological investigation should be dedicated to the improvement of society is as old as the discipline itself, but it has not been universally accepted. Most academic sociologists have endorsed the view that sociology ought to be a pure social science. Advocates of applied sociology have not only been in a minority, but have often been criticized by their colleagues for somehow contaminating the discipline's integrity.

Today, this situation has changed. Many more sociologists are employed in non-academic fields, and student demand for courses with a vocational orientation has intensified. In the academic setting, the involvement of sociologists in applied contract research has also increased. Today, few sociologists question the appropriateness of these trends. While many continue to believe in the virtues of a pure rather than applied sociology, few vociferously oppose the practical application of sociological knowledge.

Larson's book is a useful introduction to the field of applied sociology. Although its attempt to differentiate between pure and applied sociology from a theoretical perspective somewhat dilutes its impact, the book contains useful chapters on the history of applied sociology, the issue of ethics and values in sociological investigation and the role of sociology in social policy. Noticeably absent is a discussion of the relationship between applied sociology and social work, a subject which has historically been closely associated with sociology even though this is seldom acknowledged.

Stephen Crook, Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters. *Postmodernization: Change in Advanced Society*. London: Sage Publications, 1992. \$ 17.95.

Theoretical enterprise in sociology (and the social sciences generally) is usually a tortured affair. The language of speculation is invariably obscure, ambiguity frequently clouds the

theorist's meaning and often the creators of theoretical imagery delight in enigmatic discourse. Consequently, it is often necessary that new theoretical approaches be interpreted and clarified by sociological commentators before they come into general usage.

The current vogue for post-modernism is no exception. While nearly everybody has a general idea of what post-modernism entails, few can define it or describe its features with confidence. Crook, Pakulski and Waters are among the first to offer a definitive and helpful commentary on the post-modernist conception of society. The authors identify six major areas of social life which have been extensively influenced by post-modernist forces. These are the collapse of traditional culture; the erosion of the state; the fragmentation of the family; the decline of traditional political organizations and their replacement with new social movements; the emergence of new arrangements for labor utilization; and a declining faith in science and technology. Each of these topics is discussed in separate chapters which are readable and comprehensive. The book will be an essential reference not only for social scientists but for anyone who is interested in knowing more about the claim that the post-modern era has arrived.

James W. Russell. *Introduction to Macrosociology*. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1992. \$ 15.50 papercover.

It has been claimed that sociology is not an integrated disciplinary field but a loose aggregation of scientific knowledge about different aspects of social life. This is manifested in the existence of discreet specialisms in the subject such as the sociology of the family, deviance, demography, organizational sociology and similar sub-fields. Following economics, sociology may also be sub-divided into micro and macro-specialisms. While the former deals with individual action, or the interactions of individuals in small social systems, the latter focuses on societies and their large scale structures, divisions, and institutions.

Russell's book is intended to serve as an introductory textbook to the field of macro-sociology but it is not clear how an introduction of this kind differs from a general introductory

textbook. Nor is it certain that introductory texts on macro-sociology (as distinct from general sociology) are needed. Indeed, the book is similar in many respects to a general introductory text. It contains chapters which are not specifically focused on macro-sociological issues and which will be found in all introductory texts. These chapters deal with topics such as the nature of sociology as a social science, the family and social research. The book also contains a chapter dealing with micro-sociological issues (including the self, roles, status, and norms) without specifying their relation to the book's overall macro-sociological perspective. Nevertheless, this is a well written book which will be helpful to students seeking general insights into key concepts and theoretical perspectives in the macro-field.

Henry Etzkowitz and Ronald M. Glassman. *The Renaissance of Sociological Theory*. Itasca, IL: F.E. Peacock, 1991. \$ 42.00 hardcover.

Whether sociological theory is today experiencing a renaissance is a matter for academic conjecture. Some will question whether theoretical enterprise in the discipline has ever been in abeyance, and others will argue that the sociological imagination has always been vital and innovative. However, it would be fair to say that the influence of ideas from other countries and from non-sociological fields such as philosophy, literature and the arts is greater than ever before. This has indeed resulted in an explosion of speculative endeavor, and in an exponential increase in the corpus of theoretical knowledge about human behavior, social relationships and society in general. In this climate, it is very difficult for any except the most dedicated to keep abreast with the ever changing and novel insights of creative theorists.

Etzkowitz and Glassman have rendered a useful service by bringing together a collection of introductory articles on recent trends in sociological theory. These articles offer a readable and helpful account for the non-specialist, but do so at a level of sophistication which credits the reader's intelligence. The book contains valuable summaries of developments in structuralism, feminism, critical theory, neo-functionalism, socio-biology, neo-Marxism and many more conceptual fields. The articles are

preceded by an excellent introduction by the editors. A major omission is the post-modernist perspective which is rapidly becoming a cardinal topic for debate in theoretical circles. This apart, this useful book should be read by all social scientist interested in current theoretical debates.

Philip Manning. *Erving Goffman and Modern Sociology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992. \$39.95 hardcover; \$14.95 papercover.

Biographies of sociologists are rare; good biographies are even rarer. This is understandable since it is difficult to combine readable accounts of the personal lives of scholarly subjects with rigorous assessments of their academic work. Few popular biographers have the academic background to explain and evaluate a scholar's scientific contribution, and few academic authors have the literary skills to summarize a scientist's life and work within the rubric of a good story.

Philip Manning has written an interesting book about Erving Goffman and his influence on sociology's theoretical development. Although the book is not primarily intended to be a biography, its exposition of Goffman's ideas and evaluation of his work is remarkable for its ability to combine scholarly assessment with personalized narrative. Goffman is always present, a real human being whose life extends beyond the introductory biographic chapter and pervades Manning's scientific account. While analyzing and elucidating Goffman's work, Manning tells a good story. His book is highly recommended for anyone who wants to know more about Erving Goffman, his life and work.

Hans Joas. *Pragmatism and Social Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1993. \$16.95 papercover.

The American pragmatic philosophical tradition, which characterized the writings of Dewey, James and others, has not been fully integrated into sociological thought. Commentaries on sociological theory seldom make any reference to the pragmatic approach, and its relevance to sociological inquiry has not been properly assessed.

However, as Joas shows in this collection of essays, pragmatism has been a recurrent theme both in American and European sociology. In the introductory chapter, Joas traces the influence of pragmatism on the writings of George Herbert Mead and the empiricists of the Chicago School of urban sociology during the early decades of the century. Even though the influence of pragmatism is seldom recognized, Joas contends that it has continued to influence sociological work today. Both micro-sociological and large scale empiricist tendencies in current American sociology can be traced directly to the dominance of pragmatism at Chicago.

Joas observes that the influence of pragmatism can also be discerned in the writings of Durkheim and other continental sociologists. In several interesting although disconnected articles, Joas discusses the influence of pragmatism on Durkheim's work; examines the relation between German social thought and American pragmatism/ and reviews the significance of critical theory, Giddens's structuration thesis and the writings of Cornelius Castoriadis.

While this is a sophisticated collection of articles, they do not constitute a coherent treatise on pragmatism in sociology. Many of the articles have been published previously, and some deal tangentially with the book's central theme. Joas has, however, demonstrated the need for a more systematic treatment of the subject, and it is to be hoped that he or some equally accomplished scholar will produce it.



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