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BOOK REVIEWS

Theoretical Logic in Sociology, vol. 3: *The Classical Attempt at Theoretical Synthesis: Max Weber*. BY JEFFREY C. ALEXANDER. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. Pp. xx + 242. \$25.00.*

Volume 3 of this four volume project is concerned with Max Weber, a topic which Alexander has not addressed in detail elsewhere. The volume has, in common with the two earlier volumes, the aim of giving an account of the 'presuppositional thinking' of the classical sociologists on the problem of the nature of action and the nature of social order. As with the earlier volumes, Alexander's execution of this interpretive task verges on the procrustean. The volume serves an important purpose in the development of Alexander's wider thesis: it specifies, through some relatively concrete substantive examples, what Alexander means by his central concept of 'multidimensionality'. In earlier volumes the concept of multidimensionality played a highly significant role, even though it was never explained at length. It served as the primary term of praise in volume 2. In volume 1 multidimensional synthesis was held out as the objectively superior solution to the deepest 'presuppositional' problems in sociology. Indeed, if there is one central aim to Alexander's project, it is to promote multidimensionality as the controlling evaluative criterion in theoretical sociology.

Alexander wants to go beyond textbook affirmations that the difference between Weber and Marx is that Marx gives causal analyses in terms of material interests (a concept which Alexander tends to equate with 'instrumental rationality') and Weber does so in terms of ideas (which Alexander tends to equate with 'norms') as well as just material interests. The innovation in the interpretation is in the use of the concept of multidimensionality. The term is opposed to 'reduction', which is, in this context, reduction to a single dimension. According to Alexander the appeal to ideal factors in *addition* to material factors is a preliminary step to multidimensionality. Weber makes this step in his early writings: he performs various 'one dimensional' reductions, without falling into the trap of always reducing to the same dimension. Genuine multidimensionality is something beyond this. Weber, Alexander says, makes this next step in some of his writings, but does so only intermittently and incompletely. Alexander wants him—once he makes the step of recognizing different dimensions—to 'synthesize' rather than 'reduce'. We are given several kinds of cues as to what this might mean, as when Alexander tells us what Weber should have gone on to do but did not (e.g., p. 79) and when Alexander distinguishes good substantive analyses from bad. But Weber's work did not develop in the direction Alexander wished it had, and, especially in the political writings, Alexander sees a 'retreat from multidimensionality', where Weber falls back into 'instrumental reduction' (p. 76).

This is the skeletal form of Alexander's argument. The key to the discussion is the notion of 'multidimensionality'. Alexander's most elaborate summary of the concept of multidimensionality, as it applies to Weber, depends on a distinction between a genuinely multidimensional analysis where 'every concrete element

* Professor Turner's review of vol. 1 is at 15, 1985, 77-82; and of vol. 2 at 15, 1985, 211-16.

of empirical reality is the *product* of the interaction of two [i.e., instrumental and normative] dimensions', as when 'religious ideas are produced by a complex interaction between religious obstruction and political economic pressure'; and a kind of analysis where 'the dual emphasis on instrumental and normative remains, but the two forces are no longer fused: they are separated and, by interacting as independent concrete entities, they in effect constitute self-sufficient [and, of course, reductive] explanations of the same empirical facts' (p. 59).

There is a good deal of textual evidence to support the notion that Weber wanted to avoid a grand reduction of history to some single force or set of forces. He saw that to do this would amount to making an arbitrary choice of where to make one's explanations stop. In Marxist circles, he says, 'one still finds the peculiar condition that their need for a causal explanation of an historical event is never satisfied until somewhere or somehow economic causes are shown (or seem) to be operative' (1949, p. 68). Yet, as Weber recognized, as a practical matter, explanations must come to an end. Weber's own usually came to an end with the identification of the ideal or material interests behind some historical pattern of action. Sometimes his explanations are pretty crude; sometimes they are subtle; more often, they trail off into a collection of considerations which cannot be reduced to a formula. This is poor soil for an analysis of Alexander's sort, and he has trouble with examples. Alexander claims that Weber's multi-dimensional explanation of urban middle-class ideology is 'the strongest empirical case in Weber's larger study of the normative dimension in world history' (p. 49): the explanation is normative, because it cites the Christian origins of the ideas, but it also stresses the conditionally determining influence of the distinctive economic and political conditions of this strata (pp. 45-50). 'Conditional determination', as Alexander understands it, leaves room for 'voluntarism' and for causally independent 'normative' influence. This, and his other examples—Weber's observation in 'Ancient Judaism' that the prophets arose under circumstances of political danger (p. 44) and his discussions of class and status group ideologies which show the autonomy of religious superstructure from base (p. 47)—are oddly unimpressive. They are not the explanations on which Weber's reputation rests, nor do they have a transparent explanatory structure. And Alexander does little in the way of explicating the relevant texts—he quotes a few passages, tells us where the passages appeal to norms (as, so to say, an irreducible causal category), where the passages are 'voluntaristic', where they go beyond 'instrumental definitions of rationality' and where they indicate Weber's 'presuppositional intentions' (p. 48).

This is not enough to carry the point. Consider one passage that Alexander discusses as an example of the appropriate type of explanation. Urban traders and artisans, Weber says, often have religious ideas which involve the themes of salvation, sacramental grace and redemption. This Weber simply takes as a given. To the extent that he 'explains' the beliefs of this strata the explanations take the form of notions of cognitive congeniality or affinity (especially in *Economy and Society*, where these affinity or congeniality arguments are a major leitmotif). Weber typically uses these congeniality arguments as a device to patch his way through an analysis which has another, larger, point: it is as though he knows they are not much as explanations, but are nevertheless about all he is going to get, so they will have to do. Rarely does he put much weight on them, and when they are formulated to apply broadly to a variety of historical contexts, they are always elaborately hedged and qualified. In one of the essays Alexander quotes, the argument proceeds by the iteration of 'congeniality' arguments, as when he notes that the themes of salvation and redemption are

congenial to prophetic appeals of an 'ethical' sort, and when these religious themes are conjoined with the image of a wrathful, forgiving, personal God, are congenial to prophets who are presented as emissaries from God. In these contexts, congeniality arguments suffice and convince primarily because they are not far removed from ordinary conceptual reasoning—one can see why it is difficult to have a personal emissary from an impersonal, static, Eastern God, or why an ethical prophetic message can only convey certain kinds of ethical ideas. But these are iterations of 'one-dimensional' arguments. None of them lives up to Alexander's vague notion of a 'fusion' of instrumental and normative considerations.

In his concluding discussion of Weber's politics, Alexander believes himself to be contradicting the Dahrendorf, 'conflict sociology', picture of Weber, and extending Parsons' 'normative' interpretation. He thinks he is one up on Parsons and Bendix by recognizing the 'ambiguity' of Weber's position (p. 82). As Alexander is aware, Weber pays little attention to these 'normative' aspects in his analyses of political history. He argues that Weber 'certainly knew better, as shown by the multidimensionality of other parts of his work, but that 'when confined to the [instrumental] presuppositions of his political sociology this understanding could not be articulated. Theoretical logic sets inexorable limitations' (p. 96). These limitations account for the defects in Weber's discussion of democracy.

Personally committed to democratic ends and the liberalization of the German state, Weber produced a political theory in which the value-oriented rationality of democratic behavior, its commitment to universalistic ethics and the rights of the individual, has very little empirical role. [P. 107.]

Alexander does not come to grips with the possibility that Weber was not a 'democrat' after all.

The discussion of Weber's politics is similar to much of what Alexander writes. It is ambitious in that the problems are well worn, there is an extensive and difficult literature on the subject and it is not easy to say anything novel about them. Alexander does say something, and shows that he has mastered the literature. Indeed, he seems to be at his best when paraphrasing texts or summarizing conventional wisdom—at his worst when he articulates his own position. In his discussion of politics he goes to the edge, looks over, but hangs on to a view which is banal, 'correct' and naive.

The paradox of the project as a whole is that Alexander's historical understanding of Marx, Durkheim and Weber is largely derivative: the originality of the interpretations depends on his general framework of 'presuppositional problems'. But to the extent that the interpretations are forced into the framework, the discussion no longer bears on the standard literature. Weber considered himself to be conducting intellectual warfare against collective concepts—one of his most famous papers was an attempt to show how concepts like the state can be reduced to individual beliefs and expectations. When Alexander insists that in his own 'presuppositional terms, Weber was certainly a collectivist' (p. 151), one is inclined to wonder whether one can say anything with terms that stretch so far.

Despite its visible flaws, there is something compelling about the project, and this something is still there at the end of volume 3. In part it is the Ahab-like intensity of Alexander's quest. In part, it is the quixotic charm of a quest his peers have abandoned as pointless. In large part, it is the professional drama of a career in the making. In contrast to the *Gemeinschaft* of professional philosophy, where the professional reputation of, say, an important ethical theorist will be based not only on the opinions of other writers on ethics but on the opinions of

other philosophers who have read and judged the quality of his arguments, and perhaps have even seen the theorist defending himself on his feet, in the *Gesellschaft* of professional sociology, reputations are to a significant extent a matter of the opinions of persons in other specialities who have never read the texts nor seen the authors, and have little direct basis for their opinions beyond the endorsements of the profession's 'great birds of prey'. In this world, the theatre of career making quickly becomes detached from the substance of the work, sponsorship becomes king-making, and the side-play, such as the question of whether the king-makers still have power to make careers, comes to upstage the question of intellectual merit. The Alexander story has all this drama, and too often it threatens to upstage the intellectual issues. Alexander is as guilty as anyone of playing up this theme—he often indicates which authorities he intends to supplant, and his intentions are rarely modest. The ambitions are so enormous that even their partial fulfillment would be an achievement, and the fulfillment is partial indeed; nevertheless, he has, in the two middle volumes, provided enough intellectual substance to repay a reading.

University of South Florida

STEPHEN P. TURNER

Popper and After: Four Modern Irrationalists. BY DAVID STOVE. New York: Pergamon Press, 1981. Pp. viii + 116. \$9.50 paper.

To The Managing Editor: Many thanks for letting me look at David Stove's new book on Karl Popper and his alleged disciples, Thomas S. Kuhn, Imre Lakatos and Paul Feyerabend. I find the book fascinating yet barely readable. It is short—some one hundred pages—extremely clear and lively, and though a defence of the established philosophy of science it is in many ways most remarkable, particularly in its extremely aggressive style. I am in a quandary here, since I think the book both important to notice and quite unreviewable. Hence I can recommend neither a review nor a return of your copy to the publisher. In lieu of a recommendation allow me an explanation.

The established style of philosophy of science is an imitation of that of the natural sciences, and so calls for the avoidance of personal attacks as much as possible and at least for the toning down of all personal elements. When leading figures of the logical positivist establishment dissected metaphysical texts in order to find them empty they performed their operations with rubber gloves in disinfected, well-lit operating rooms. When C. E. M. Joad protested and declared this to contain a fascist element he received the cold shoulder from established A. J. Ayer and the matter dropped into oblivion. David Stove now argues from the establishment position, using freely vituperative language and aggressive tone—'hostility' is a favourite word with him. This would be quite refreshing had it combined some intellectual force, some interesting ideas, with its colourful presentation.

Stove says, for example, that Rudolf Carnap and Carl Hempel are the all-time giants of the philosophy of science despite the fact that Karl Popper's strictures against their works are all possibly quite correct. I find this claim quite intriguing and would love to hear it argued, backed by some explanation of what its author has in mind. I regret I found no elaboration on the claim. On the whole, I find in the book no elaboration that is not useless and fraught with very obvious errors. Let me, then, give what I think are Stove's two major contentions.

First, science has progressed through the growth of the stock of scientific knowledge. Now Popper denies this obvious fact, since he denies the very

existence of any knowledge, as he must since he is a sceptic. Second, Stove thinks that every philosopher of science not sincerely hoping to see the problem of induction solved and dedicating himself to help perform this task is not a good philosopher of science. Everyone who dissents from that, he declares, as a matter of course, is an irrationalist. Even more, he ends his book saying almost no philosopher of science alive is utterly free of this charge of irrationalism.

So much as to the main points of the book. I need not say that they are almost entirely established views. It seems to me, however, that the parts of the book which may be deemed arguments and expansions of these themes are so poorly reasoned as to qualify more as rhetoric than as argumentation. The establishment view is that reason and rhetoric do not mix. This book regrettably does not constitute refuting evidence of this (false) establishment view.

This then explains, I hope, why I can advise neither reviewing the book nor ignoring it altogether.

York University

JOSEPH AGASSI

Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. BY MICHEL FOUCAULT. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980. Pp. 240. \$5.95.

Reviews are short cuts to books. At times, reviews are also part of the critical literature about a book. Suppose there were a book that was a short cut to the entire library of humanity. Would the review of this book be a short cut to the short cut? Would this review be part of the library and, so, describe itself?

The editor of this selection of essays intimates that it encapsulates the entire corpus of Foucault. If so, does this review, which is at least a synopsis of this selection of essays, thereby provide a synopsis of the entire corpus of Foucault? If so, would reading this review make reading the book it reviews an exercise in redundancy? Putting it the other way around, is a selection of essays that no more than encapsulates an author's entire corpus redundant? And, is a review of a redundant selection of essays also redundant?

These Borgesian paradoxes about self-reference and redundancy form the central problems addressed by Foucault in these essays:

... if we make a book which tells of all the others, would it or would it not be a book itself? Must it tell its own story as if it were a book among others? And if it does not tell its story, what could it possibly be since its objective was to be a book? Why should it omit its own story, since it is required to speak of every book? [P. 67.]

The customary edge of such paradoxes is to shatter the rationalist dream of discovering the fundamental axioms and definitions from which all truths could be deduced. However, with the rise of the cult of language (i.e., Language = Being), such paradoxes have a new force. The limitations of language, including the limitations of formalizability, are ultimate. Not only do the limitations of language impose limitations upon knowledge, but they also reveal the limitations of reality itself. The other side of the coin is that knowing the limitations of language, and knowing what we have and could have said in language, is identical to knowing all that there is to know. The cult of language where reality is identified with language is the bibliophile's dream. His nightmare is that there will be discovered one book that contains all other books and, thereby, reading that book will make reading all other books redundant.

Is Foucault a member of this cult? Yes. Is this cult harmless? No.

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