BOOK REVIEW

Theoretical Logic in Sociology, Volume 4: *The Modern Reconstruction of Classical Thought: Talcott Parsons*. BY JEFFREY C. ALEXANDER. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. Pp. xxv + 530. $39.50.

In reviewing volume 1 of this work,* I commented that the project as a whole was an attempt by American sociological theory to regain the intellectual primacy it had lost to writers such as Giddens and Habermas. A sociologist more familiar than I with the *Lebenswelt* in which Alexander works remarked to me that this was less a motivation for Alexander himself than the desire to restore the status of theory in American sociology. 'Theorists' in American sociology nowadays are largely ignored and the interests of their departmental colleagues increasingly focus on problems that can be formulated and solved within the ambit of computer-based statistical techniques, which arise not so much from the traditional theoretical ambitions of the discipline as from specific policy concerns or from such *topoi* as sexism and inequality. (Such concerns are treated not as the intellectual products of problematic ideological and theoretical heritages, but as conventionalized evils in need of empirical study, just as the 'social pathologists' formerly treated divorce and other forms of 'social disorganization'.)

Parsons is certainly an appropriate starting point for an attempt to return to the *status quo ante*, for the decline in Parsons' stature is the most visible and dramatic manifestation of this change. At the peak of his influence, Parsons was not only omnipresent—it seemed as though he had a contribution in every issue of *Daedelus*, every sociology journal and every reader—he was held in a peculiar regard, which can be more easily evoked than explained. In 1967, I was a student in a class (on a standard substantive area) at a famous American sociology department. The class included graduate and undergraduate students: the undergraduates were required to take essay exams; the graduate students could do the same, but could write a thirty-page paper instead. Perhaps thirty students were present for the final exam, including most of the graduate students in the class. The exams were passed out, and the questions read. The choices of questions on the exam had been constructed in such a way that it was impossible to answer any of them without making extensive reference to one paper on the reading list, Parsons' 'The Concept of Political Power', a text of excruciating abstraction which I had myself only glanced at before passing on to more interesting readings. One or two of the students tried to write a sentence or two, then stared into space. The graduate students, one by one, collected their examination books and left—to begin the thirty-page paper. The rest of us did nothing; virtually everyone in the class went into a state of shock. No one could answer the questions, and perhaps no one had seriously attempted to make sense of this particular paper, which had only been touched on in the lectures. One of the students who had left had apparently gone up to the office of the professor to explain the situation, for after an hour and a half the professor's typist appeared, with the instruction that we were to write anything we wished that showed we had learned something from the course—in the fifteen minutes that remained in the examination period.

* **15**, 1985, 77-82; Professor Turner reviewed volume 2 at **15**, 1985, 211-16; and volume 3 at **15**, 1985, 365-68.

Other students, older, wiser and more cynical than I, must have drawn different conclusions from this episode. For me, it was a demonstration of the *mana* of Parsons—never had I seen so many clever people simultaneously stupefied—and it was *mana* in which I was determined to share. From the awe with which they were regarded, I concluded that to be a 'sociological theorist' was the means of sharing in it. This year proved also to be the high-water mark of Parsons' influence. Even then a flood of articles criticizing, improving, varying and confusing Parsons' central ideas had begun to appear. At first, the fact of this massive body of criticism preserved the awe in which Parsons was held. Four years later, after the publication of Alvin Gouldner's *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, the flood became a trickle, and it became difficult, in retrospect, to see what the fuss over Parsons had been all about. The new fashion in sociology was for causal models, i.e., econometric-style statistical constructions. These constructions, which filled the 'better' journals, dispensed with even the faintest stab at using the elaborate 'theoretical' vocabulary invented by Parsons.

Alexander was a Harvard undergraduate in 1967. In his graduate-school years, as a student of several powerful figures at Berkeley who were Parsons' students and followers, he witnessed what he calls, without irony, 'the polarization created by the charismatic period of Parsons' theorizing' (p. 485). This volume represents Alexander's own claim on the cold charisma of Parsonian theorizing.

I

Alexander spends a grand total of sixty-five pages on the 'early' and 'middle' portions of Parsons' career, including *The Structure of Social Action* and *The Social System*. The most detailed analysis in the section is given to Parsons' postwar article on reconstruction in Germany, which Alexander believes refutes critics who claim that Parsonian theory is unable to handle social conflict and change. The discussion leads up to the claim that 'the change theory of Parsons' middle period' actually 'provided the polemical basis upon which "conflict theory" was constructed' (p. 71).

The main argument of the book deals with something less familiar, Parsons' concept of interchange—curiously enough, the focus of the puzzling essay on political power mentioned earlier—and opens with a long list of denunciations of interpretations that have misunderstood the concept and thus failed to see that it represents the attempted completion of Parsonian theory and the fulfillment of its aims. 'Interchange', Alexander says, 'is Parsons' final and most significant approach to theoretical ecumenicism, to his hope of producing a multidimensional and synthetic sociological theory' (p. 74). Alexander has one central point to make about interchange. The famous AGIL Schema, the 'four functions paradigm', is *not*, he argues, a functionalist *model* of society, as some have supposed, but *presuppositional*.

In contrast to Parsons' own earlier discussions of the 'unit act' (in which the *explanans*, means-ends relations, linked only two dimensions, and in a linear way), 'systems' or 'interchange' questions force us to look at interrelations between levels and between subsystems (which are not linear but cybernetic).

> Political institutions, for example, are viewed as the product of independent political action interacting with values, norms and facilities.... Yet each of these latter dimensions, the normative, for example, in turn depends on inputs from the others, one of which is politics itself.... The analysis of any single subsystem, in other words, cannot be isolated from the analysis of any other, and it is impossible to simplify social causality in a one-dimensional way. [p. 82.]

On the face of it, as model-building advice, this is not a very exciting claim. But if we treat it as Alexander says Parsons meant for us to, as a generalized analytic feature of social science model building, interchange provides a basic framework in which the various explanations of social science, such as economic explanations of institutions, have a place as partial elements of a total interchange analysis. Alexander says that this in turn 'solves' the 'presuppositional problem' of the conflict between instrumental and normative explanations, because 'Parsons' multidimensional position demands the *interrelation* of instrumental and normative exigencies' (p. 85, emphasis added). If we accept this presuppositional solution—interrelation rather than reduction and interrelation as interchange—we can see why he attached so much importance to the problem of 'media theory'.

The problem media theory aims to solve is thus the 'presuppositional' *pons asinorum* of Parsons' thought, and it is questionable whether Parsons himself succeeded in crossing it; surely, as Alexander is correct to say, his interpreters have had trouble with it. In a paper like 'The Concept of Political Power', the interchange relations are symbolized by arrows drawn between boxes, representing AGIL subsystems. The question one comes to with this symbolization scheme is, 'What can all those arrows which Parsons draws between subsystems be cashed out into?' Parsons says they represent generalized media of exchange, and that there are different kinds of media, money, power, influence and so forth. His own descriptions of these relations depend on complicated analogies with other 'systems', such as input-output analysis in economics and thermodynamic transformations of forces. The difficulty with these analogies was that if one were to draw 'arrows' in these cases, one could do so by virtue of the existence of laws or quasi-laws, which had their own, autonomous explanatory force. If one asks for the same thing from Parsons' arrows, one comes away empty. Mill somewhere remarks that explanation is the substitution of one mystery for another. For many of Parsons' readers, including myself, this particular line of explication seemed more like substituting the *same mystery*, for rather than getting an answer, we were getting yet another abstract classification.

Alexander's claim is that media theory does not end up reducing the processes represented by the arrows either to the 'instrumental' or the 'normative' (p. 116). But this is a negative achievement, and does not tell us what the arrows *do* represent. Alexander notices that there is a problem here, when he observes that 'Luhmann insists at one point that "we should try to link the concept of generalized media more directly to the central problem of the subjective contingency of orientation and choice"'. Alexander comments that this is done 'partly at the expense of the multidimensional and systemic potential of Parsons' original work' (p. 398), a point to which we shall return.

The example of the application of interchange which Alexander explicates is the centrepiece of Parsons' later work, 'differentiation theory', which is his reformulation of classical theories of social evolution. 'Differentiation', Alexander explains,

> is a master term that indicates movement away from functional fusion with kinship in every sphere—from clan-based worship in religion, from family-based guilds in economic life, from patriarchy and lineage-based kinship in politics, from clan justice and caste particularism in the integrative sphere. [p. 149.]

The movement away from functional fusion is taken to be the core of social evolution and other theories, such as Weber's account of rationalization processes, can be reformulated in terms of differentiation. As Alexander quotes

Parsons and Smelser in *Economy and Society*, 'We should like to reformulate the process of rationalization... as the tendency of social systems to develop progressively higher levels of structural differentiation' (p. 147). This, Alexander says, 'is precisely what Parsons accomplished' (p. 147). Weber's initially multidimensional account had turned into a reduction to the processes of instrumental rationalization, which Weber had taken to be a threat to freedom. With differentiation theory in hand, Parsons saw that

> far from indicating the triumph of the iron cage, the ascendance of bureaucracy may be viewed as reflecting the need to coordinate functions that have actually grown increasingly autonomous. As such, bureaucratization can contribute to an expansion of individual freedom rather than to its reduction. [p. 148.]

Parsons argued that 'psychological autonomy is directly related to the social and cultural distance an individual travels away from his family of origin and from its diffuse, ascriptive character of parental authority' (p. 140). To escape from this particularism was to enter into the more universal values of 'citizenship'. Parsons

> could thus understand, in a way Weber could not, that autonomy requires a sustained process of normative socialization, that it depends upon a web of internalizations which Weber's instrumentalized view of modern life could not sustain. [p. 149.]

In terms of interchange theory, Weber had failed to see the arrow from socialization to political values, and saw only the arrow, marking bureaucratic constraint, from instrumentally rational bureaucratic structures to the individual.

This is only one of several examples Alexander gives. The analysis supports the claim that interchange theory, as Alexander explains it, is a significant achievement, going beyond and integrating, in a nonreductionist, multidimensional way, the achievements of such culture heroes as Weber and Freud, and establishing Parsons in his own niche in the same Pantheon. One of the great strengths of Alexander's discussion is that it captures some of the epic character of Parsons' quest, and thus makes sense of the excitement it originally generated and the reasons it seemed to be what it presented itself as—the inevitable conclusion of the history of social-scientific thought.

II

What ultimately occurred was, of course, different. On second glance, the attraction of differentiation theory, its power to subsume, comes to be suspicious in itself. What Parsons does is to identify various trends that seem to have had a long historical run, and link them together with one another with *ad hoc* analyses—sometimes functional, sometimes causal, sometimes borrowed from some famous personage, sometimes made up on the spot—which can be depicted with arrows, called 'inputs' and 'outputs', and then classified by content—the task of 'media theory'. A cynic might observe that when Parsons and the Parsonians perform these analyses, they generally start with glittering generalities which they restate, jacking them up to new levels of abstraction and putting them into vaguer terms. The method allows them to flatter themselves with their profundity and at the same time to insert a great many bits of arbitrarily selected factual trivia which fit with the generalities, allowing them to flatter themselves about the 'empirical relevance' of their analyses.

One point at which the magic wears thin is when the generalities become time-worn. In the sixties, when the universities were riding high, Parsons could argue that 'contemporary morality, expressive values, even religion itself can now be accepted only if they are cognitively legitimated' (p. 249) and that 'it is because of its role in establishing these new cognitive standards that the university has such pervasive integrative significance in the modern world, and, conversely, why instability in the university has such powerful social reverberations' (p. 249). In today's world, with Falwell, Thatcher, Silicon Valley and students whose expressed aim in life is 'to make a lot of money', these statements seem as ludicrous and ephemeral as other products of the sixties.

The defects go deeper than a few bad predictions. To take a simple example, at one point the rise of meritocracy looked like a trend, and it could be neatly fit into the story of the decline of particularism, one of Parsons' pet themes. Today the 'yuppies' have rediscovered friendship and patronage, which they call networking and mentoring, in the midst of a supposedly rational, meritocratic, bureaucratic world of large corporations. Nowadays, indeed, executives marry one another—so much for the movement away from functional fusion with kinship in every sphere. But the crucial conceptual feature of these explanations is their marvellous vagueness. A good Parsonian would have no problem in defining these exceptions away, in an *ad hoc* way. The absorptive capacity of the theory depends on the studied vagueness of the concepts.

The problem extends to the *ad hoc* character of the whole structure of explanation, and therefore to the power of the interchange model to 'subsume'. The interchange arguments Alexander himself cites are sometimes functional (e.g., p. 135), sometimes causal. Alexander would perhaps say that to select a subset of kosher explanatory forms would be to make a commitment on some other level than the presuppositional one, perhaps the 'model' level. On this selection, presuppositional thinking is necessarily silent, although perhaps he would say by analogy that a selection of some set of favoured explanatory forms is a 'reductive' approach and therefore inferior to a synthetic and ecumenical approach.

When Luhmann suggested that the links that figure in this model be made in some particular way, he was also suggesting that this capacity for the theory to absorb virtually any kind of link be eliminated, a step that would collapse Parsons' theory into a particular form of systems analysis, based on this particular type of linkage. When Alexander resists this, he preserves the capacity without solving the problem. So Alexander's treatment leaves the interchange theory, understood as a coherent account of societal processes, as elusive as ever. As we shall see, this is by design.

Alexander has a dramatic and complex answer to these worries, an answer that transcends Parsons' positivistic self-understanding, shows much of his work to be meaningless formalism, yet salvages the Parsons who understands the autonomous character of theory. The answer amounts to abandoning the notion of Parsonian theory as an attempt at a coherent understanding of societal processes. Alexander's defence of his metatheoretical reinterpretation of Parsons, together with his treatment of Parsons' presuppositional error of falling into idealism, constitute the bulk of the book and together are the key to the entire four-volume project, and to Alexander's own claim to originality. As in volume I, this argument depends on a particular understanding of the implications of postpositivism, an understanding that is so peculiar that one needs an explanation to understand what Alexander thinks he means.

III

As I suggested in my review of volume I, and as others have pointed out, Alexander has latched on to a strangely self-contradictory interpretation of

Kuhn *et al*. He embraces the idea that facts and theories are inseparable, and at the same time seizes the idea that theory is somehow 'independent' of the 'empirical level'. Alexander's thesis is that Parsons was fundamentally confused about the purport of his theoretical constructions; Parsons' mistake turns out to be that he does not consistently separate his commitments on different levels: he 'conflates' them. A way of understanding Alexander on this point might be this: like Kuhn, he believes that some large set of scientifically relevant choices are 'commitments', but he rejects 'holism', the idea that all these commitments make up a package that stands or falls as a whole. For Alexander, the commitments one makes at various levels are independent of one another. One can consistently be a voluntarist-fascist-anti-positivist-causalist, for example, or a determinist-Communist-positivist-functionalist. This means that it is an error to conflate one's commitments, i.e., assume that a commitment on one level entails a particular commitment on another.

What gets lost in the shuffle here is what holism retained, in one sense or another, the idea that the package as a whole could 'stand or fall'. It is just not clear what Alexander thinks about truth and falsity. Sometimes he talks like an archrelativist, but in his discussions of the presuppositional level he thinks relativism can be transcended. Not only does he think that multidimensionality is the best presuppositional stance, he presumes that this can be established by arguments that are independent of ideology, empirical reality or methodological considerations. So he does not think, as holists often have, that 'ideals of natural order' and the like are in some sense warranted by their integral place in a *particular* 'total theory'; he seems to want to say that postpositivism has legitimated the idea that presuppositional ideals have an integral role in science, and to leap to the idea that there is a more or less autonomous 'level' on which one thinks about them.

Parsons said a good many baffling things on the subject of what kind of epistemic objects his theories were and how they related to 'empirical' theories. But from the morass of his sayings one may extract, as Alexander does, the notion that constructing a conceptual framework was a task all its own, *separate* from the ordinary business of testing theories. One can also see how the idea that physical theory presupposes a conceptual framework (Koyré is one source of this notion) can be stretched into the idea that there is a distinct *task* of constructing a conceptual framework: the phenomenology of Husserl might be given as an instance of this. Yet, as Alexander notices, Parsons did two things that are at odds with this notion of an autonomous task of constructing a conceptual framework. First, he routinely ran several of Alexander's 'levels' together in his own analyses (as though he were a Quinean holist and he were constructing a personal 'synthesis'). Second, he justified his framework-constructing on the grounds that these particular constructions were a preliminary stage on the road to a physics-like social science, which, at least in 1945, he thought would be made up of propositions expressed in differential equations, and which would dispense with his conceptual framework in its details.

One suspects that a holistic defence of Parsons could be constructed, arguing that all these claims and practices were consistent, and that Parsons' sayings about conceptual frameworks can be understood in a holist way by considering that Parsons located himself at a particular historical point in the history of social science, at a point *after* a great deal of successful preliminary empirical and theoretical work had been done. He saw himself as having been allotted a specific task: building a conceptual framework through the logically systematic construction of an interconnected scheme of categories and levels of analysis designed to subsume the past efforts of the masters and also to subsume

research-based conceptualization relevant to the general project of theoretical sociology. In practice, this looked, to many people, like scholastic logic-chopping with no 'empirical' base. Parsons himself argued that the convergence observed in *The Structure of Social Action* 'is a very strong argument for the view that *correct observation and interpretation of the facts* constitute at least one major element in the explanation of why this particular theoretical system [i.e., "action theory"] has developed at all' (quoted p. 155, Alexander's emphasis). Because it built on concepts refined in the theoretical and 'empirical' work of the best thinkers of the previous generation, the convergence reflected and carried the epistemic weight of a great deal of successful empirical, methodological and explanatory effort. One might also conclude that the project Parsons built on this base was a fiasco, because it led nowhere, like a large, ambitious and attractive fundamental natural-science hypothesis that seemed highly plausible in the light of what was known at a given time, but which never panned out.

IV

Alexander mounts a quite different defence. He argues that the 'convergence' Parsons finds in *The Structure of Social Action* is misunderstood by Parsons. The convergence is not 'positivistic', because it is 'far from representing any new agreement on the nature of empirical reality' (p. 155), and that, indeed, 'Parsons misunderstands the nature of his great book'. Instead, the book 'is a thoroughly normative argument about the nature of "good" theory, conducted according to certain exquisitely illuminated a priori commitments' (p. 155). At the root of Parsons' self-misunderstanding is a failure to acknowledge fully 'the independence of theoretical argument' (p. 154). Alexander is able to produce some (highly equivocal) quotes in support of the idea that there is an autonomous presuppositional level. Parsons says, for example, that '"the higher order premises" in scientific theory . . . are the "primitive" concepts *which are not subject to empirical validation* but are assumed to underlie the *meaning* of the problems' (p. 156, Alexander's emphasis). These are made to represent the 'good Parsons', in the moments in which he recognizes the autonomy of theoretical logic. But we are mostly presented with the 'bad Parsons', who conflates the presuppositional level, and its "ineluctably multidimensional' (p. 231) interchange model, with other levels, e.g., empirical reality, the 'model' of social processes level, with ideology, and so forth.

As Alexander shows, Parsons went out of his way to make his later, interchange constructions fit with various ideas of scientific propriety, which Alexander associates with 'positivism'. Most of these 'positivistic' notions are actually 'systems' ideas, and Parsons' appeal to them is open to a simple interpretation.

There was a great vogue in this period for systems theory and for borrowing ideas from operations research. The same vogue helped get the U.S. into the Vietnamese mire, by deluding McNamara into believing that the laws and principles of warfare could be supplanted by a kind of manipulation of inputs and outputs for limited ends. Sociologists also were caught up in this fashion; in 1969, at a somewhat less famous but quite trendy sociology department, I was told, in a demography class, that 'in five years, with computers and systems theory, we will have a complete understanding of society'. Much of this talk was uncongenial to the Parsonian version of systems analysis, but on balance Parsons must have seen the rise of systems thinking as a kind of confirmation of his life's work. In any case, during the later period he produced an enormous number of papers

that were theoretical elaborations of earlier models, taking the form of classifications of as yet unmeasurable processes interrelating systems elements. These laundry lists might have had a value for systems theory, had it developed as it was expected to. Parsons eagerly analogized, in the fashion of the day, between thermodynamic system processes, organic system processes and these social system processes—analogies that, for the first time, lend his constructions some kind of explanatory force beyond the dubious explanatory force of functional explanation, and without the need to claim, as he had in 1945, that the reduction of sociological theory to a propositional system of differential equations was just around the corner.

Alexander sees the interchange period very differently. The 'formalism' of Parsons' papers of the period, he says, 'rests like a dense fog over the length and breadth of Parsons' work. It functions as camouflage, obscuring the theorizing that lies beneath it—the theorizing that represents the truly important aspects of Parsons' contribution' (p. 158). Alexander's mission is to rescue the contribution from this 'positivist'-induced fog. His rhetorical device in this critical analysis is the concept of conflation. He shows that, at various times, Parsons treats 'interchange' as what Alexander calls presuppositional, as what Alexander calls ideological, as what Alexander calls empirical reality, and also as constitutive of systems and therefore definitionally equivalent to the constitutive fact of system equilibrium, and to the constitutive fact of solving the four-functional 'survival' problems of systems. Bad things are held to follow from the multiplicity of uses to which the concept is put, and Alexander gives various examples of what are, in his opinion, bad consequences that arise in connection with specific 'conflations'.

There is a great deal of appallingly bad argumentation in Parsons. But quibbling will not serve Alexander's broader purpose in the four-volume set. For this he must convict Parsons of wholesale, systematic and correctable error. In the cases in question, the consequences which Parsons draws from these arguments are consequences that he *wants* to have follow. Alexander's point is not that they do or do not follow, but that they should not follow: that 'conflation', i.e., reduction from one level to another, is erroneous in and of itself.

As I have suggested, the basic intuition behind the separation between levels is anti-holist, and is supported by the fact that one can be an X (e.g., a positivist) on one level (the methodological) and either a Y or a Y^1 (e.g., a Marxist or a liberal) on another (the ideological). Alexander does something very strange with this intuition. He treats beliefs not as a system of more or less connected ideas, as holism would, but as a kind of summation of attitudes, each of which is held independently of the others. The strangeness comes from a slide: to say that there is more than one possible combination of consistent attitudes is not to say that all or most possible combinations of attitudes are consistent. Parsons, one might say, was quite right to ask whether his political beliefs squared with his empirical knowledge, his conceptual frame and his model of society: sometimes they do not square. Obviously a great deal of the history of philosophy, indeed Western thought, has been motivated by attempts to make science square with religion, Marxism square with the empirical nonexistence of revolution and so on. The familiar experience of finding it a problem to reconcile one's commitments or claims in one area to one's commitments or claims in another is, of course, the starting point for Quinean holism, which advises us that adjustments in different areas of the 'web of belief' may save any given claim.

Alexander proceeds on a premiss that amounts to the claim that only commitments on the same level can conflict. The experience of adjusting inconsistencies between levels thus exists for Alexander only as a kind of category-mistake, a conflation, which, in the case of the level of presuppositional reasoning, fails to honour the autonomy of theory. This idea depends wholly on Alexander's distinctions between levels. Moreover, it depends on vagueness about the logic of relations between levels. Alexander says that the autonomy between levels is 'relative', and repeats, over and over, that postpositivism has abolished the theory-fact distinction. But his strictures against 'conflation', understood as the reduction between levels, depend on conflating any kind of argument that points to inconsistency between claims on different levels with 'reduction'.

'Reduction' from one level to another is one kind of sin. Parsons' other sin is reduction to one dimension within the autonomous category of theoretical presuppositional thought. The terms Alexander uses here are vaguer yet. It is a matter of 'propensity' (p. 231), 'deviation' (p. 231), 'focus' (p. 259), 'tendencies' (p. 269) and a 'reductionist strain' (p. 236). Alexander's point here is that while Parsons was not compelled by his modes of analysis, particularly the 'interchange' and 'media' devices, to be an idealist, he generally used these devices in an idealist way.

V

Reviews of these four volumes have been almost unanimously negative. Alexander's central idea of the 'autonomy' of the presuppositional level has been met with derision. Parsons said enough about the provisional character of his basic categories to make Alexander's attempt to make them autonomous, thus insulating them from criticism by defining criticisms as 'conflations', seem like a step backwards. In contrast to the other volumes, the Parsons volume does shed new light on its subject, especially in the sections on the interchange model, where Alexander's talent for exposition is used to full advantage. Yet his interpretive reach frequently exceeds its grasp, often by a wide margin, especially when he attempts to be profound. At one point he characterizes Parsons' synthetic ambitions in *The Structure of Social Action* by this:

> For all practical purposes, then, theory and fact are one and the same. If, in Kant's terms, theory reveals the synthetical a priori, Parsons claims here that theory is, simultaneously, the synthetical non-a priori. He believes that his analytic discoveries are, in the end, concrete. [p. 153.]

Lapses like these are sufficiently frequent that the accolades on the dust jacket, praising his 'enormous sophistication, lucidity, and theoretical penetration', seem comically inappropriate. But in this volume one sees why Alexander generated all this enthusiasm; it is difficult not to feel personal sympathy for and also to be caught up in Alexander's great quest, for despite (and perhaps partly because of) its ineptitude, a certain boyish charm, innocence and intellectual vigour shines through the prose.

Weber says of the aspiring charismatic leader that he gains and retains charisma

> solely by proving his powers in practice. He must work miracles, if he wants to be a prophet. He must perform heroic deeds, if he wants to be a warlord. Most of all, his divine mission must prove itself by *bringing well-being* to his faithful followers; if they do not fare well, he obviously is not the god-sent master. [1978, p. 1114, emphasis in original.]

These volumes are not a miracle, but at their immense length they are a heroic deed. Alexander's 'designation' by Parsons' 'closest and most powerful vassals' (Weber 1978, p. 1126) certainly gives Alexander a case as Parsons' successor. All that is missing is the requisite 'acclamation by the ruled' (1978, p. 1126).

Whether this will happen is not yet clear. Despite the reviews, Alexander has become a powerful celebrity with a coterie. Criticism, at least the content of the criticisms, will do little to change this. One of Alexander's strongest arguments for the importance of Parsons is the fact that despite the fact that they were right on many details, his opponents were Lilliputians beside his great corpus, and could not comprehend the whole (p. 61). 'The more enemies, the more honor', as a saying of Roman politics puts it. The critics of Alexander, each with a somewhat different line of approach or counterargument, simply by taking the work seriously and pointing out the errors, have reproduced the relationship that earlier critics had with Parsons.

Academic warlordism—the pursuit of acclamation, vassals and the honours of fellowships and awards—will not bring back the world of 1967, with its transfixed graduate students. The consequences of the books for sociology at large are likely to be nil. By making 'metatheoretical' problems the thematic centre of the project, Alexander does legitimate a set of issues which other contemporary American sociological theorists have chosen to resolutely shut their eyes to. Unfortunately, these volumes are neither a basis for more discussion nor evidence that a circle of competent discussants may be found in the narrow community Alexander inhabits.

University of Notre Dame and
University of South Florida — STEPHEN P. TURNER

REFERENCES

Weber, Max (1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. 1, G. Roth and C. Wittich (eds.). Berkeley.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

LAKATOS AWARD IN PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

The Latsis Foundation has endowed an annual Award in memory of Imre Lakatos, to be administered by the London School of Economics. The School has appointed a Steering Committee, consisting of the Director of the School, or his deputy, as chairman, and Professors Hans Albert, Adolf Grünbaum, Alan Musgrave and John Watkins. The Committee will make the Award on the advice of an independent panel of selectors.

The Award is intended to recognize an outstanding contribution to the philosophy of science, in the form of a book (or substantial series of interrelated article), published in English. The 1986 Award will be for a contribution published during the last ten years. A preference may be given to younger scholars.

The value of the 1986 Award will be £10,000. The recipient will be expected to visit the School and while there to deliver a public lecture of interest to a general audience.

A candidate for the Lakatos Award must be nominated by at least three people of recognized professional standing. Nominations should specify the book (or series of articles) on which the nomination is based, their grounds for the nomination, and the age of their nominee. It will be a great help if two or three copies of the relevant published material are provided. Nominations should be marked 'Lakatos Award' and addressed to: The Secretary, The London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The closing date is May 15, 1986.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MORAL AND SOCIAL STUDIES

Editor: S. Wolfram, Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford

Editorial Board: T. E. Downing, University of Arizona; B. M. Levick, St. Hilda's College, Oxford; L. Sciama, Venice & Oxford; J. L. Thompson, University of La Trobe, Melbourne; A. Watson, University of Pennsylvania

FORTHCOMING ISSUES include the following contributions:

T. Druart (Georgetown), *Arabic Views on Suicide in Holy War*
L. Dumont (Ecole des Hautes Etudes), *Thomas Mann and German Culture*
T. Luhrmann (Cambridge), *Witchcraft and Magic in Contemporary London*
R. Harre (Oxford), *Is the Body a Thing?*
H. Oberdiek (Swarthmore), *Clean and Dirty Hands in Politics*
J. Overing (L.S.E.), *Men in Control?*
D. Pocock (Sussex), The Ethnography of Morals
P. Rieff (U. of Penn.), *Theories of Culture*
J. Thompson (La Trobe), *The Logic of War*
A. Watson (U. of Penn.), The Justice of the U.S. Constitution