

BOOK



REVIEWS

SOCIOLOGIZING PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

Psychoanalytic Sociology: An Essay on the Interpretation of Historical Data and the Phenomena of Collective Behavior. Fred Weinstein and Gerald M. Platt. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973. 124 pp. \$8.50.

Reviewed by Gerald J. Gargiulo

Is it possible to have a psychoanalytic sociology, or should we be content with just a psychoanalytic psychology? The question is meant to be neither partisan nor academic; it recognizes that psychoanalysis has minimally a threefold identity: it is a theory of the mind, a therapeutic technique, and finally a methodology of investigation. A psychoanalytic methodology of investigation implies understanding the main corpus of theory, its present clinical application, and using whatever insights seem relevant to uncover or to deepen other areas of knowledge which might have lain fallow were it not for the perspective which analysis brings. To cross-breed a discipline, as it were, and to give birth to a psychoanalytic sociology, for example, requires not only a breadth of knowledge, but a fund of originality if violence is not to be done to either of the parenting theories. In the present work, violence has been done, and it is psychoanalysis which is the victim. It falls victim not to an aggressive attack or to a philosophical dispute; the violence is of a more subtle nature. The target that is hit is essentially a straw man, evidenced in such approaches as a primitive reading of libido theory; the line of attack is to foster a false dichotomy between early and later (topographical and structural) theories of the mind and, while doing this, to virtually ignore the other metapsychological assumptions. The purported goal is to establish the autonomy of the historical moment and the independence of cultural currents, particularly in our understanding of revolutions and revolutionaries. The primary casualty here, however, is the family in the life of human beings, with all the import that childhood sexuality and aggression have on the evolving psyche and its interaction with as well as organization of society.

The reason for my prolonging such imagery is that the violence done to psychoanalysis in this work does not come from antagonistic sources. Quite the contrary: the authors seem genuinely dedicated to formulating a psychoanalytic sociology and, to this end, they have read and quoted voluminously in this work of modest size. Nor can one, nor do I wish to, quarrel with some of their conclusions on the breadth of perspectives needed to understand creative individuals who channel revolutionary movements and the danger of reductionistic psychoanalytic readings of such persons. But in pursuing these ends, the authors have written a *tour de force* which, because of the magnitude of their sources and the perceptive formulations of accepted conclusions, can give the impression of being a definitive reading of contemporary psychoanalytic theory. In short, violence from friendly sources, invoking all the native gods, is the most dangerous of all.

We read, for example, of "immutable drives"; further on we are told of the psychoanalytic standpoint explaining man's relationship to the world in terms of "one unchanging psychic reality." And in this same vein we are definitively informed that,

First *all* (italics mine) behavior examined in the context Freud presents must be interpreted as regressive behavior; and, second, all attacks against authority must appear to be 'illegitimate' attacks, attacks based on the eruption of instinctual forces and not on responses to real events in the external world.

To make an obvious, but needed, point, there are at least three approaches we must keep in mind if we would understand the meaning contained in Freud's thought. First, one should be able to appreciate and evaluate the particular historical context in which a given work may appear; secondly, one should be familiar with the prevailing theoretical concepts which Freud was speaking within; thirdly, one should be familiar with the contemporary reading of Freud's thought. In view of these observations, I wonder where in Freud's thought the ideas alluded to above—and many others throughout the text—are supported? The drives are *not* immutable but constant; they undergo many vicissitudes, as Freud's famous essay indicates, among which alternatives we can list sublimation, a concept not even examined in the present work. Furthermore, there is no such entity as an unchanging psychic reality. The dynamic psychology Freud introduced allows us to look at processes from a variety of perspectives at once. In his early works, Freud wrote about the unconscious being open to influences from conscious sources; later, in his structural theory, he reiterates that id, ego, and superego are ways of approaching and analyzing a given pattern of behavior. Going further, we have to note that Freud prior to 1923 was particularly concerned with uncovering and bringing into conscious focus the genetic aspects of personality. Therefore, all behavior has historical unconscious roots—this is Freud's contention. That *all* behavior is regressive is not only misleading but nonsense. Furthermore, anyone familiar with the thrust of Freud's contribution must know that Freud does not cast himself into the role of referee for those who wish to attack authority, i.e., legitimate vs. illegitimate. The central issue, and

one which the authors continually wish to deny, is that every child has a history with love and authority and his later responses to authority are *rooted* firmly in his childhood. One is embarrassed to remind the authors, particularly in a work with such surface psychoanalytic sophistication, that even classical Freudians know that trees, for example, have more than roots. But if we do not focus on childhood roots first, as it were, and concentrate our attention on the appropriateness of a particular revolutionary movement, for example, we risk losing any appreciation of a dynamic unconscious and its influence even upon the most rational of acts, revolutionary or not. To abandon that perspective is quite simply to abandon psychoanalysis. To claim, as the authors do, that they do not intend to use psychoanalytic propositions in the "established way" is certainly acceptable. Frequently, however, throughout the text we are not exposed to psychoanalytic propositions used in an original way; we are exposed to psychoanalytic words, but the concepts have been done away with. At times, the authors are just superficial; note for example: "But personality is not a static entity and, as ego and superego develop, so too do needs and ambitions, and areas of activity evolve and expand." This sentence, and others of the same calibre, is used to warn us of the dangers of stressing childhood factors in the evolution of the adult personality. The inter/intra-psychic defensive and adaptive structures which affect the processes of internalization and identification, which the authors make so much of, and ultimately which affect the elements in the external world that will be made emotionally real for the individual—all of these primal formative factors, cursorily mentioned here, are all underplayed in the service of an ever evolving rational control.

Early childhood experience is both normative and formative because it not only supplies the child with the rudiments of socialization, as the authors indicate; it not only gives the child a primary model in terms of how his parents dealt with the world, but the interaction between parent and child shapes the child's psyche so that if, for example, massive narcissistic damage is done in the earliest years, very little of later developmental socialization, without therapeutic intervention, will affect the person. Psychic defense systems mean ultimately that consciousness itself, as it were, is shaped and that shape affects the experience and personal meaning of all later experience. To bring a new shape to consciousness is certainly one of the goals of psychoanalysis; to give the impression that somehow this new shape of consciousness is par for the course in the normal process of expanding socialization is certainly an appealing concept, but clinical evidence does not support it.

As indicated above, one does not get the impression throughout the text that the authors are hostile to analytic concepts; rather they fall victim to a surface reading of them combined with some misleading dichotomies. They ultimately, therefore, wind up with something of a parody of analysis. The implications for sociology of a psychoanalytic reading and vice-versa are unquestionably worthwhile; a marriage of necessity, however, does neither party any good—particularly the child. And so we read that,

... we will emphasize those aspects of (psychoanalytic) theory which are either inherently sociological or are more amenable to sociological definition. Thus, we will stress the theory of object relations more heavily than the classical libido theory. This means in particular that, no matter how each person is affected by the internal patterns of impulse, conflict and defense, in the larger sense personality is built up and organized on the basis of identification with and internalization of, patterns of behavior transmitted by emotionally significant figures. These figures have a temporal priority which enables them to impress on the individuals the effective subsequent priority of symbolic codes (i.e., culturally and socially defined standards and expectations).

But, as we have indicated above, the way each person relates to others (object relations) is intimately related to their own patterns of impulse, conflict and defense. Ego psychology, particularly Eriksonian ego psychology, has given us a broader reading of this inter-relationship without having to drop one of the points of reference because it might not fit in with a preconceived theory. Identification and internalization, moreover, are not one-dimensional concepts; they signify related but different processes at different developmental psychic stages. And to try to use these concepts as catchalls because they are more inherently sociological is a disservice to the complexity of the psychoanalytic theory of the mind. Finally, to simplify parental inter-action with children in terms of the parents as cultural ritualizers, a theme again which Erikson has developed with a sophistication not evident in the present work, is to reduce depth psychology to a calm and helpful tributary to the presumed ocean, as it were, of consciousness.

In view of the above criticisms, I do not wish to give the impression that I view culture as if it were a projection of men's psyches, since I quite agree with the authors that man is *par excellence* the symbolic creature which both his mind and his society reflect and that we must consider both society and the individual as somewhat inter-dependent action systems. Thus there is a real need for a psychoanalytic sociology in this furthering quest of finding out who we are. But I must note in conclusion that Erikson has articulated what, in fact, personal analysis enables one to come to terms with: the necessity of accepting the inevitable, given one's individual childhood, in order to achieve any real, growing autonomy in adulthood. It is the apparent lack of awareness of this concept, and all that it entails, which lessens the value, and in fact affects the whole tone, of the present work.

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