



Notes on New Books

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Notes on New Books*

DUMONT, LOUIS. *From Mandeville to Marx: The Genesis and Triumph of Economic Ideology*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977. Pp. ix+236. \$16.50.

Louis Dumont is a French anthropologist best known for his studies of the Indian caste system, and in particular for his major work on this subject, *Homo Hierarchicus*. *From Mandeville to Marx* is the first volume of a sequel to that work. It undertakes an examination of modern ideology, contrasting it with traditional ideology, as Dumont has come to understand it in his studies of India. The principal theoretical contention of the present work is that ideology is an integrated system of beliefs and values which, while related to events in the world (in a manner theoretically unspecified here), influences our perceptions of the world and constrains our ability to act upon it. This proposition leads Dumont to suggest further that the validity of the Western scholarly apparatus developed to comprehend society, and the validity of Western notions of social development, should be evaluated in terms of the ideological context from which they emerged. This book is a contribution to that kind of critical self-evaluation.

Dumont's characterization of the elements of modern ideology remains on the whole within the framework of the classical sociological interpretations of modern society and its origins. He contrasts the fundamental egalitarianism and individualism of modern ideology with the holistic emphasis of traditional ideology upon hierarchy and subordination as principles of social order. He suggests that modern individualism is grounded in the notion that society is based upon the productive interaction of individuals with nature rather than their social interaction with one another. This notion is in turn linked to the separation of the economic domain from politics, religion, and morality and with its ascendancy to dominance in the modern social system.

Dumont attempts to demonstrate the fundamental interdependence and interconnectedness of the elements of modern ideology through an analysis of the development of modern economic thought in the writings of Quesnay, Locke, Mandeville, Adam Smith, and Marx. In general, he finds that the study of the economy as a self-contained system and the gradual separation of the economy from other social domains in this body of thought were linked with the rebellion against traditional conceptions of hierarchy and with the assertion of the centrality of the individual in society. Much of the book is devoted to showing that even Marx, the thinker most closely associated in our minds with the elevation of community over the individual, gave first place to the individual in his analysis of society and in his vision of the future Communist society, and further, that Marx's emphasis upon the dominant role of the economy in society was in large part predicated upon his conception of the individual.

Dumont, finally, suggests some of the consequences for understanding and action which derive from the structure of our ideology. He contends that the indi-

* The notes in this issue were written by Art Diamond, Dan Howard-Greene, and Philip Stoffregen.

vidualistic and materialistic bias of modern ideology tends to obscure our understanding of traditional societies which lack similar conceptions of the autonomy of the individual and of economy. He further suggests that Western Marxist programs designed to subordinate the economy to the rest of society overlook the logically integrated structure and coherence of modern ideology, and indeed threaten to destroy the very foundations upon which individualism and egalitarianism are laid at the same time that they attempt to advance the cause of the individual.

This latter proposition is highly provocative, given the European political atmosphere in which it is advanced. It points, however, to the rather rigid character of Dumont's conception of the integration of society and of ideology, a conception whose ideological underpinnings themselves merit the kind of examination he has carried out here. Still, whatever the ultimate merits of Dumont's general theoretical conception of ideology and society, the issues posed by this work and the clarity of its analysis make it an interesting and stimulating discussion of the social and intellectual origins of modern consciousness.

HUTCHISON, T. W. *Knowledge and Ignorance in Economics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977. Pp. 186. \$12.50.

It is a truism of life that the young are idealistic and hopeful, while the old are disillusioned and pessimistic. Whatever its general accuracy, the truism is not belied in the methodological writings of T. W. Hutchison. *The Significance and Basic Postulates of Economic Theory*, written by Hutchison forty years ago, is a classic statement of the positivist view of economic methodology. In that work the author stressed the similarities between economics and natural science. The purpose of economic science, like that of other sciences, was to produce empirically significant laws on the basis of which predictions could be made that would permit us greater control over our world. Moreover, Hutchison was convinced that so long as economists worked hard and stuck with the right methodology, such laws would be forthcoming.

In his latest book he is no longer so sanguine. *Knowledge and Ignorance in Economics* is more a collection of essays than a unified argument, but the theme that runs through it is that economics has failed to live up to the expectations that Hutchison, the economics profession, and the public had for it. Given Hutchison's concern with the empirical applicability of economics, it is ironic that actual examples of economic argument and analysis appear so infrequently in his methodological work. Both his earlier and later books move on a fairly vague, general plane. His arguments are competently wrought, but are rarely novel and are seldom marshaled in defense of a bold hypothesis.

Hutchison does get more concrete in an appendix which deals with the opinions of economists concerning the devaluation of the British pound. The range of opinion is considerable, sometimes even for a single economist over a period of time. But few people will be startled today by the observation that economists disagree over many policy recommendations. It would really be interesting to attempt to test Milton Friedman's suggestion that such disagreements nearly always reflect differing

values rather than differing views of substantive economics. If Friedman's suggestion is correct, then the prognosis for economics may be brighter than Hutchison thinks.

TUSSMAN, JOSEPH. *Government and the Mind*.

New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Pp. x+175. \$8.95.

Tussman's book comes to us strongly recommended by Quine, who sees in it a long-needed antidote to "the current excess of permissiveness and civil disobedience and the absurdities proclaimed and claimed in the name of civil rights" (jacket cover). It is difficult to see how he could have been so impressed. Tussman seems to feel that his main thesis—that government has a legitimate right to some control over the minds of its subjects—is both under constant and widespread attack and is obviously and indisputably true. But nowhere does he either set out and analyze these attacks, or provide any unified argument for what he takes to be indisputably true. His general strategy seems to consist in pointing out that in the most important areas of the life of the mind, education and communication, government already has an important role, and in then asserting that no one could object to this. Thus he explicitly assumes the truth of his main thesis from the very beginning.

Much of the book is given over to rhetorical fulmination against those (whoever they are) who dispute Tussman's views. "There is a time for myth and a time to be literal, a time to accept and a time to examine, a time to be soft and a time to be tough. Confusion in timing can be disastrous, and even what is timely can be misunderstood" (p. 72). The book does contain some interesting preliminaries to an argument, in which Tussman analyzes the state of the modern university and of the media and their relation to government; but he never uses these analyses to develop either justifications for the present state of government intervention or proposals for more appropriate sorts of intervention. He merely repeats, over and over, that government does have a role in the life of the mind, and that it ought to. The book is far from being as empty or worthless as this brief summary may make it out to be, but the high ratio of rhetoric to argument makes it difficult to take Tussman seriously.