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The Antinomies of Real Utopias

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REVIEW ESSAYS

Assessing the State of the Sociology of Religion

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The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion joins several existing "handbooks" and "companions" meant to serve those in the religion subdiscipline. The stated intent of this volume is "to provide scholars with the opportunity to reflect critically on issues long discussed by sociology of religion, to introduce others long relevant but little researched, and to consider the implications for the subdiscipline of the sociology of religion of others that have begun to emerge only relatively recently" (p. 10). As an overall evaluation based on these criteria, one would have to say that the book is largely successful. However, there are areas less satisfying than others. But to the extent that books such as these accurately represent a snapshot of a subdiscipline, examining weaknesses in them provides an opportunity to assess that subdiscipline.

Peter Clarke has gathered an impressively international group of contributors. Of the nearly sixty contributors, about half are European with several others residing in Asia. Although an admittedly vague characterization, the work has a European feel in its interests and approach. Given the "handbook" title, one might expect a more applied set of entries that a social scientist could frequently reference when designing an instrument to measure religion, to refresh one's memory about key concepts to consider when examining particular phenomena, or to review key findings in a particular research area. There is no doubt that these elements are present in this handbook, but there is often more weighting to philosophical and historical issues.

The essays are organized into ten categories, which Clarke is the first to admit are "somewhat arbitrary." The first and largest section is devoted to "Theory: Classical,

The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion, edited by **Peter B. Clarke**. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011. 1,046pp. \$55.00 paper. ISBN: 9780199588961.

Modern, and Postmodern." Of the eleven essays in this section, one is dedicated to Durkheim, three to Weber, and one for Habermas, Bourdieu, and Foucault, collectively. Many of the other theoretical chapters are framed so broadly (e.g., "Religion and Power," "Culture and Religion") as to be detrimental to their authors' ability to provide distinct and in-depth contributions and/or the reader's ability to locate them. This does not mean that these chapters do not contain valuable insights. Although you would not know it from the "Religion and Modernity Worldwide" title, Robert Hefner's essay provides a nice overview and analysis of the vitality of Pentecostalism, Islam, and Hinduism.

Surprisingly, the theoretical perspective that has generated the most recent discussion and research in the past twenty years, the so-called rational choice or economic perspective of religion, receives only a chapter of "critique." In this critique, Malcolm Hamilton focuses almost exclusively on the macro-economic aspects of this theory (i.e., the relationship between pluralism and religious vitality), spending little time considering how it has shed light on more micro- and meso-level phenomena, such as religious switching and congregational commitment.

Some of the weakness of the theoretical section may be a product of chapter selection and labeling, but it is more likely a reflection of the weakness of sociological theories of

religion. If religion theories consist simply of historical individuals' names and ambiguous pseudo-concepts, then clearly this is not our strongest area.

While the theoretical section of the book suffers from the general state of "religion theory," the methodological section feels more like a lost opportunity. One of four essays in this section, Ole Preben Riis' "Methodology in the Sociology of Religion," provides a general overview that may be a bit too general, as significant portions are devoted to basic issues that most sociologists will already be familiar with. For example, in the "Quantitative Methods" portion of the essay are points like, "A regression coefficient expresses the degree of change in the dependent variable following from a unit change in an independent variable" (p. 233). Many will wish for guidance on more advanced methodological issues and their unique connection to the scientific study of religion, such as the clustering of adherents within congregations and the use of multilevel techniques to distinguish between individual and contextual effects. Still, such an overview may be of use as an assigned reading for those teaching an undergraduate sociology of religion course. The other three essays consist of an interesting but primarily philosophical essay by Jeppe Sinding Jensen on conceptual models and their use in understanding religion, a discussion of definitions of religion by André Droogers, and an oddly located critique of cognitive science explanations of religion by K. Helmut Reich.

One area that the handbook might have dedicated one or more chapters to is the issue of measurement. The empirical study of religion has grown tremendously in the past thirty years. While we used to be thrilled with one or two poorly worded questions on a national survey, there are now entire surveys devoted to religion across a wide range of populations... single nations, multiple nations, youth, congregations, congregational attendees, and so forth. Indeed, a chapter could have been devoted to discussing and evaluating the variety of data available. Despite the growth in data, we have often not been very systematic when it comes to considering what we attempt to measure, how we measure it, and what these measures really represent.

For example, how do we and how should we measure religion cross-nationally? Are there more significant concepts underlying many of our standard measures of religion that we might tap into more directly? What is "spirituality" and how do we measure it beyond asking whether individuals do yoga? What *really* distinguishes the groups that we often lump together under categories like "Conservative Protestant" from other aggregations? How do we assess religious affiliation and identity in a time when non-denominationalism and "just Christian" identities appear to be growing?

These questions have begun to be touched upon in the literature. Recent work on the importance of God images has made us start to think about the underlying cognitive structures that influence many of our more traditional measures of religion and its impact (e.g., Froese and Bader 2010). Similarly, research attempting to examine the composition and significance of the growing number of religious "nones" in the United States has forced us to think about how we measure religious affiliation and identity (Baker and Smith 2009). The "Theories, Concepts and Measures" section of The Association of Religion Data Archives' Religion Research Hub represents an effort to begin connecting actual measures to common concepts used in research and to connect those concepts to related theories (ARDA 2011). Such efforts will hopefully serve as the foundation to evaluate what works, what does not, and where we are lacking in terms of measurement. The handbook, though, does not take up these issues in any systematic manner in its methodology section. Later essays focusing on various substantive topics do touch on some of these issues. For example, an essay in the "Religious Change" section by Eva M. Hamberg discusses some of the conceptual and measurement issues surrounding spirituality and unchurched religion. Still, a more concentrated treatment of measurement in the study of religion could have been a significant contribution.

The remaining essays are grouped by various research areas, ranging from "Religion and Boundaries: Morality, Science, Irreligion, Art, and Embodiment (Trance)" to "Religion and Ecology, Health, Social Issues,

and Violence" to "Globalization, Fundamentalism, Migration, and Religious Diversity." As is bound to happen in such a far-reaching volume as this, some of these substantive sections feel a little potpourri-like.

However, the essays falling under the "Religion and the State, the Nation, the Law" section are particularly strong and tightly-connected. Indeed, in general this area of research has proved theoretically and empirically rich in recent years as we have come to fully appreciate the complex relationships between religion and state actors across nations and the consequences of those relationships (Gill 1998; Fox 2008; Grim and Finke 2010). Phillip E. Hammond and David W. Machacek contribute an overview of different types of religion-state relationships using case-studies. Christophe Jaffrelot discusses how religion can both fuel nationalism as well as be a target of it. Similarly, James T. Richardson's essay explores the complex connections between religion and legal systems within nations, noting how religion can both influence and be constrained by the law. Finally, Enzo Pace examines the relationship between religious beliefs and the treatment of human rights. What makes this group of essays so strong is the way in which each builds upon the other by examining different aspects of the same religion-state dynamic. For those looking for an introduction to this area, brushing up on their knowledge, or teaching a course related to these issues, I would highly recommend all four essays.

Another stand-out group of essays is found in the section on "Religious Collectivities and the Status and Role of the Religious Professionals (The Clergy)." Lorne L. Dawson explores the history and future potential of church-sect-cult typologies. He concludes that, despite criticisms of such typologies, distinctions between groups based on their membership exclusivity or "mode of membership" will continue to prove useful even in international contexts, although the specific labels of church-sect-cult might be of less use. Following this point nicely is an essay by Sami Zubaida providing an over-

view of sects within Islam. This is a particularly useful entry given that Islam is sometimes presented in a fairly homogeneous manner in popular forums, and even many sociologists of religion are not fully aware of its diversity and the history of that diversity (admittedly, including this writer). Also in this section is an essay by Nancy T. Ammerman providing an excellent overview of what congregations do and how they are structured in the United States, and a companion entry by Dean R. Hoge examining research and issues concerning congregational leaders. Again, all four essays are highly recommended for anyone interested in the organizational aspects of religion, particularly in the United States.

As noted in the beginning, despite what this reviewer views as some missed opportunities to make this a true "handbook" that would have a permanent place on desks where it would become well-worn from use, this handbook on the whole successfully provides a thorough and useful exploration of the sub-discipline. I am sure that many will find it useful in both their research and teaching.

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Der Lubovitcher Rebbe: Messiah? Jewish St. Augustine?

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In 1862 Moses Hess, a German Young Hegelian, commended the Hasidic movements as practical socialism. The Hasidic *geist* echoed not Hegel but the Lurianic kabbalah, summoning Jews to struggle against the ego, so that the soul might ascend to the light of the Creator.

Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman, co-authors of *The Rebbe*, have fulsome experience of sociological research on orthodox Jewish institutions. *The Rebbe* is a biography of the Seventh ruler of the Habad Hasidic sect, one of a family of Pietist sects that emerged within Judaism in the eighteenth century. In Anthony F.C. Wallace's terms these are revitalization movements. Here is a bit of historical background. They distinguish themselves from more general Jewish orthodoxy by their emotional, even ecstatic, worship practices and by intensifying hope of messianic materialization. Their leaders have been wonder-working rabbis infused with the Divine spirit. Their prayers are healing and their amulets bring good fortune. Hasidic leaders radiate what Weber called the charisma of office, in turn, derived from *gentil* charisma of dynastic succession.

Two mystically-oriented kabbalistic movements served as test runs for Hasidism. One was Sabbateanism, led by Shabbatai Zevi, crowned as Messiah, in the mid-seventeenth century Ottoman Empire. Arrested by the Sultan for his excesses, he converted to Islam and earned a pardon (Maciejko, p. 7). Jacob Frank (1726–1791), also drawing on the Lurianic kabbalah, opened a way to Christianity (Maciejko, p. 34). A number of Frank's followers converted to Roman Catholicism while seeking to preserve their Jewish cultural identity (Maciejko, pp. 107, 127). The non-Jewish community at the time was pursuing witches in Germany and blood libels in Eastern Europe. Demonological literature was popular among Jews and Christians.

Israel ben Eliezer (1698–1760) was born in Podolia into this environment. In his

The Rebbe: The Life and Afterlife of Menachem Mendel Schneerson, by **Samuel Heilman** and **Menachem Friedman**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010. 343pp. \$29.95 cloth. ISBN: 9780691138886.

twenties he led a group of rabbis from town to town attempting to educate Jews in Judaism and planting the seeds of what would become Hasidism. He encouraged them to work the land and to study Torah. Purported magic forces could heal the sick and increase the fortunes of those he blessed. His followers cast him as the Ba'al Shem Tov, possessor of the good name, known by its acronym as the Besht. His knowledge of the Divine Names, especially the secret names of God, permitted him to call upon God for miracles. He, too, drew on the kabbalah, especially the Zohar, to channel the powers of an immanent God. Dov Ber, successor to the Ba'al Shem Tov, preached the kabbalistic annihilation of the self, the *ani* became the *ayin* (the I became nothing). Talmudically authorized rabbis were quick to condemn Hasidic rabbis for consorting with pagan gods.

Similar sectarian phenomena were occurring in Christian Europe. Jansenists called upon Christians to sense God's Grace and condemned Pelagians who would achieve Grace through their own acts. Jewish tradition is Pelagian through and through in its call to observe the commandments. Wesleyan Methodists, first in Europe and then in the American colonies, established a holiness church. They held that to be fulfilled is to be filled with the fullness of God. Hasidim certainly shared this characteristic.

Hasidic sects were structurally differentiated forms of traditional Judaism. Their leaders denounced the Sabbateans and Frankists who, in practice, crossed religious boundaries. The Hasidim shaped a separate

identity within Judaism by adopting the Lurianic prayer book, *Siddur HaAri* and by declaring that the knives used in traditional animal slaughter do not meet the standard of sharpness, among other practices. For Hasidim, animal slaughter for food also had a mystic side. Believing in reincarnation, they held that the returning souls could pass through animals which, if eaten by a *Zaddiq*, a righteous one, could cleanse the soul of the sins of its previous life (Shmeruk, p. 175).

Hasidic communities have emerged around individual rabbinic scholars facilitated by the agreement that a properly ordained rabbi could be a decider of law. Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745–1812), a Russian town, was so designated. Beyond his rabbinic education he also studied mathematics and science and kabbalah. His *Tanya* was an effort to apply kabbalistic concepts to everyday life. He was the founder of Habad. Other Hasidic dynastic founders included Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav (1772–1810), a town in the Ukraine, for whom faith trumped intellect. He preached relying on instinct and intuition rather than the subtle dialectics of study. Isaac Meir Rothenburg (1799–1866) was the first leader of the Gerer Hasidim, named for a town near Warsaw. He eschewed miracles and preached that Jews should become self supporting through work and called for them to settle the land in Palestine (Rabinowicz, pp. 227ff). The Satmar Hasidim, named for a town in Hungary, trace their beginnings to Rabbi Moses Teitelbaum (1759–1841). In principle they avoid as much contact as possible with the secular world.

Now let us open the book. The full title of the work reviewed here is *The Rebbe: The Life and After Life of Menachem Mendel Schneerson*. It is a biography in the traditional sense. "After Life," refers to the theophanous hope that Menachem Mendel, the dead Messiah, is destined to return to repair the world. Previous biographies, the authors tell us, have been hagiographies but Heilman and Friedman promise an objective and dispassionate treatment. This promise is kept until the final pages where the authors betray their displeasure with the messianists among the followers. Otherwise the work qualifies as non-judgmental.

The book opens with a dramatic depiction of an assembly in Brooklyn of Habad emissaries from around the world. In course, they visit the grave of the Rebbe's predecessor, sing, dance, and pray. From time to time the Rebbe shares a meditation. This opening is a flashback, a literary technique in which an opening scene anticipates the closing section of the drama. The book ends with an image of the dead *Zaddiq*, righteous Rabbi, who, unlike earlier leaders of Habad, was not simply the herald of the Messiah but has, by some followers, been declared the Messiah who is in hiding, awaiting a time to reappear. This is a good opener for a tale. An academic reader, though, might miss the expected statement of data gathering and data analysis methods. The authors are experienced ethnographers who observe widely and, as Clifford Geertz might say, deeply. By a close examination of the notes to the volume the reader can rescue a sense of method. Both authors have interviewed a range of leaders of the movement. They must have had some framework questions when they entered the interviews and, assumedly, would probe further. They probably recorded the interviews for later analysis. None of this is shared with us.

Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902–1994), yeshiva educated, tested the world outside of the yeshiva while studying in Berlin and Paris. He married Mourissa, the daughter of Yosef Yitshaq Schneerson, the sixth leader of the Habad dynasty. When offered the role of the seventh leader of Habad, he delayed a year before responding. One longs for personality analysis here. Obviously, he was not mulling over other offers but was demonstrating seriousness about his fitness for the role.

Two devastating blows struck Habad and other Hasidic groups in Europe. The first was the indictment by the Soviet authorities for religious propaganda and the periodic jailing of the leadership. Then, the Holocaust all but eradicated the Hasidic rabbis and their followers. With outside help both Rabbis Yosef Yitshaq and Menachem Mendel were spirited out of Europe to the United States, leaving their flocks behind. Yosef Yitshaq was guilt ridden. While the Nazi invasion precipitated their flight, we do miss the day-to-day struggle for survival, the plans of

rescue developed and the hopes dashed. We know that some Hasidic leaders encouraged their men to join the partisans in the forest. How did they do as fighters? How did they relate to other Jewish fighters and to the gentile fighters?—a relation we know to have been complex.

After the death of Yosef Yitshaq, Menachem Mendel was appointed by a committee to be Rebbe of Habad in 1950. The committee did not invoke the term charisma but considered it in historical Hasidic terms as the quality of being infused with the divine presence. Apparently members of this Executive Committee were drawn from leaders of Habad institutions, schools, yeshivot, Habad embassies, and so forth.

Chapter Seven, entitled "From Resurrection to Death," is a brilliant presentation of his becoming a recognized leader in the wider world as major Israeli and American political figures beat a track to his door. Heilman and Friedman foreground those followers who identify the Rebbe as the King Messiah and suggest that, eventually, he came to accept this idea himself. The evidence for this is from several events in which some followers besought him to proclaim his messiahship. He moved his hand as if approving. To have approved would have been radically transgressive and a denial of his life as a messianic herald. At the age of 92, near the time of these events, he suffered a stroke. A psychological assessment of his condition at the time would have been helpful. He died in 1994 leaving a community divided between messianists and those who would simply carry on the work. Nowhere do the authors tell us the relative numbers in these two groups and their legitimacy in the eyes of the core group in Habad. The book overemphasizes Menachem Mendel's role as a putative Messiah.

The two important goals which Menachem Mendel pursued were the missionary program which revitalized young Jews, and the educational program which kept Habad within Orthodox Jewry. They maintain thrice daily prayer services, using a contemporary version of the *Siddur HaAri* called *Tehillat Hashem*, encouraging, indeed, insisting on, Sabbath observance, stringency in dietary laws and separating men and women during prayer. Emissaries were sent to

various locations in the Americas and the world as a whole. Some 8,000 emissaries established about 2,000 Habad houses around the world. Some Habad houses are on college campuses. Others are in places such as Russia and the Far East. Most are maintained by a married couple who are encouraged to seek local support. The Mitzvah Tank Corps is an outreach program in which Members of Habad approach members of the secular, or less religious, community and teach elementary observance in an experiential fashion. The military metaphor is intentional.

Habad has remained a non-Zionist group but has established Kfar Habad, a settlement of Habad Hasidim in Israel. Prior to the 1967 war, the Rebbe sent 200 emissaries to Israel to teach elementary religious observances to soldiers. Jews would be served wherever they might be.

Habad missionary activities have been directed only to Jews. From the mid-eighties, the Rebbe began to spotlight the Noachide Laws, principles which gentiles are expected to abide, such as refraining from murder, incest, and blasphemy, in order to dwell with Jews. Habad believed that gestures to gentiles would hasten the coming of the Messiah.

Heilman and Friedman have written a good biography of the Rebbe. They chronicle his life defending against political threats so that he could be an organizational engineer. His business model involved attracting and socializing people with little Jewish education and dispatching them as emissaries to attract further members, an organizational multiplier effect. A more dynamic picture could have emerged had the social environment been conceived as a more independent actor. As it is, Habad members and actors in the wider community appear from time to time as a Greek chorus conducted by the Rebbe. One reason for this neglect of context is their adherence to an ethnographic frame of reference. Ethnography is good for revealing dynamic relations among internal actors but degrades external forces.

This internalist frame of reference mutes conflicts with outside groups. Hasidism's experiencing an immanent God was challenged by rabbis whose authority rested on

the law codes. Hasidic dynasties (they have never budged from their monarchical polity) came into conflict with one another. In 2001, David Berger warned that Habad's messianism is an imminent danger to Orthodox Jewry. A Messiah returning after death is a belief contrary to the Judaic idea that the Messiah does not die (Berger, p. 30). He need not have fretted. Messianists may linger in Israel but have little future in America and Europe.

What about St. Augustine? In his *Confessions*, this inspired teacher bemoans his mis-spent youth. In his *The City of God* he is the builder of the Church. The Rebbe wandered in the modern world and returned to build a Jewish revitalization movement.

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Varieties of Assimilation

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When mass migrations occur, the question of belonging inevitably arises. Just whether the issue is to be framed in terms of "assimilation" or "integration" varies from one national context to another. However, the underlying approach is essentially the same, as conventional social science and national (that is to say, folk, native, local, call it what you will) understandings largely overlap. In scholarly and popular views, nation-states normally contain societies (as implied by the concept of "American society"), which is why both the appearance of foreigners as well as their foreign attachments are seen as anomalies expected to disappear.

Students of international migration to the United States typically understand the question as involving the remaking of the American "mainstream," the sociological majority, in which membership remains determined by origins. In so doing, they highlight the peculiarities of Americans, as opposed to commonalities shared by the United States with other rich democracies on which international migrants have converged. Americans have constructed nationhood in terms that have been both *externally* and *internally*

West Indian Immigrants: A Black Success Story?, by **Suzanne Model**. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008. 235pp. \$35.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780871546319.

From Immigrants to Americans: The Rise and Fall of Fitting In, by **Jacob L. Vigdor**. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, 2009. \$34.95 cloth. 217pp. ISBN: 9781442201361.

contrastive, excluding not just aliens but also the outsiders—most notably, African Americans—found within the territory of the state. While this combination of internal and external contrasts has parallels elsewhere, the American pattern takes a particular form: only here does one find so deep a conflict between the fundamentally liberal principles to which the American people have been committed, right from the beginning, and a contradictory, no less deeply held view, restricting legal or functional membership in people on the basis of origin and kind.

The books under review here reflect these preoccupations. For readers of this journal, Suzanne Model's *West Indian Immigrants: A Black Success Story?* will be a volume to be savored and studied. Of the recognizably black descendants of the coerced migrations from Africa that peopled the Americas, both on the mainland as well as on the relatively small islands of the Caribbeans, the immigrants from the Caribbean have had a distinctively better experience in the United States than African Americans. As racism has been part of the Caribbean encounter with the United States, the question of how to account for this persistent disparity has long attracted scholarly attention.

Every so often, enduring and fascinating social science puzzles of this sort find their Sherlock Holmes. A generation ago it was Stanley Lieberson: motivated by his dissatisfaction with prior efforts to explain why the experiences of the immigrants from south and central Europe diverged so radically from those of African Americans, Lieberson attacked the question from every possible angle, marshalling a mass of data with extraordinary precision. With this book, Suzanne Model shows herself to be Lieberson's worthy successor. Like Lieberson, Model leaves no rock unturned: rare is the relevant data set that has not been usefully ransacked. Like Lieberson, she also displays a studied neutrality in a field beset by ideological divides, scrutinizing every hypothesis with equal care. Unlike Lieberson, Model's quest leads her beyond the United States to other countries—Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France—on which Caribbean immigrants converge.

As Model notes, the literature offers a variety of explanations. The cultural hypothesis, as she labels it, points to qualities imported from the Caribbean—a greater penchant for hard work, a self-confidence born of socialization in an all-black society, or a reverence for education, part of the inheritance from the experience of British colonialism—allowing the immigrants to surmount obstacles that impede African Americans. The selectivity hypothesis contends that what helps the migrants are not so much the qualities they share with the rank and file Caribbean, but rather the traits associated with the very selective group that leaves

home in search of a better future abroad. The white favoritism hypothesis underscores the preferences and behavior of the ethnic majority, whose racist instincts are presumably mitigated when persons of African origin can play up their foreign background.

Wielding a razor-sharp scalpel, Model subjects each hypothesis to meticulous dissection, concluding that selectivity best explains the West Indian edge. For my taste, however, her assessment of the cultural hypothesis best illustrates the finesse with which she works. Thus, the argument for culture roots present-day differences in behaviors and expectations derived from deep-seated historical conditions. Under slavery, hypothesized Thomas Sowell, West Indian slave systems allowed for greater opportunity for self-provisioning, out of which may have come greater economic independence; the absence of a white working class may also have generated greater opportunities for skill acquisition. Reasonable enough, notes Model, but conditions were hardly as uniform as imagined by Sowell: Barbados provided a far less supportive environment than Jamaica; after slavery the South Carolina low countries offered distinctive opportunities for autonomous, self-provisioning black farming, much as in Jamaica. Hence, variation in historical background provides the basis for empirical tests: as Model shows, no historical legacy can be found in the comparative experience of Barbadian and Jamaican immigrants, as the latter do no better than the former in the United States; nor is that legacy to be found among black migrants from the South Carolina low countries as opposed to black migrants from elsewhere in the state. Perhaps, the West Indian advantage stems from the conditions associated with socialization in all-black society, as a result of which West Indians have a self-confidence not shared by their African American counterparts. But Model notes that this sensible sounding generalization clashes with the empirical reality: *some* West Indian societies are all-black, but *not* Trinidad or Guyana, where British imperialism brought a large, post-slavery population of migrant laborers from India. If composition is the crucial factor, the immigrants

from Trinidad and Guyana should be doing worse than other, West Indians living in the United States: again, the empirical evidence finds no such pattern. While space precludes a full summary of her no less skillful decapitation of the white favoritism hypothesis, it is one which readers will find well worth their attention.

Model homes in on a relatively small population, mainly focusing on the here and now. Jacob Vigdor looks at the broader picture, asking about the totality of the U.S. foreign-born population, with special attention to contrasts between the arrivals at the turn of the twentieth century and those of today. An economist, Vigdor bends over backward in his effort to develop an interdisciplinary perspective, one modifying his discipline's core rational action assumptions by adding insights drawn from the sociological corpus on migration and ethnicity. Mining publicly available census data from the 1850s to the present day, Vigdor relies on graphical techniques to present easily understood, descriptive statistics.

Students of American immigration will find valuable material in many of Vigdor's chapters. His chapter on "Fitting in Linguistically" begins with results that are no surprise: over time, the English skills of each cohort of contemporary immigrants improve, though the proportion arriving with no English skills at all has risen in recent years. We then learn something new as Vigdor shifts the lens back to the early twentieth century: *then* the immigrants were less likely to arrive knowing English, yet they also progressed more rapidly than their turn-of-the-twenty-first century counterparts. By contrast, the chapter on "Fitting in Officially" demonstrates that trends in naturalization show much less change: whether at the beginning of the twentieth or twenty-first centuries, immigrants acquire American citizenship at roughly the same rate, an unexpected result, since citizenship acquisition has become far more difficult over time.

Though each chapter yields interesting insights, this is a book that will satisfy neither specialists nor students. Students might have been the group most likely to have benefited from the impressive skills of this empirically-oriented labor economist who

has sought to write a non-technical book that a non-expert public might appreciate. While the book abounds with data, the text often fails to do much more than summarize the information disclosed by the graphs. As the book is concerned with a broad range of ethnic differences, the author often compares across charts; however, the salient contrasts rarely leap off the page. When differences involve just a few percentage points, detecting the contrast takes a good deal of work, and when the comparisons require one to turn the page, one has to retain a picture in one's mind and I, at least, found that hard to do.

Those closer to the subject are likely to conclude that this book is one in which the whole is much less than the sum of the parts. To begin with, the title is poorly chosen for the issues at hand: while becoming American is a matter of discarding of one national identity and attachment for another, this is a question to which little of the book—its chapter on citizenship apart—is addressed. The subtitle, "the rise and fall of fitting in," does no more good, as one never learns whether and when "fitting in," whatever that might mean, ever rose or fell, let alone why these changes may have transpired.

Though interested in the *longue durée*, Vigdor is curiously unconcerned with history, treating the comparison of the earlier migrations from Europe with the contemporary population movements from the Americas and Asia as if they were just the same. Similarities are surely to be found, but at this point in time, the underlying differences appear salient, though not for the reasons usually suggested by the literature.

Consider the contrast between the migrations from Italy and Mexico, a recurring topic in Vigdor's book. The outflow from Italy occurred in a huge, but short burst. In 1890, fewer than 200,000 Italians lived in the United States; 20 years later, the population had mushroomed to 1,300,000 and the next few years saw an even greater tide before immigration controls brought trans-Atlantic migration to a halt. While the number of Italian immigrants topped out in 1930 at 1.7 million, as a proportion of the Italian population, the U.S. contingent had already peaked at 4.4 percent a decade before. By contrast, Mexican migration

entails a variable, but continuing century-long flow. Over the past 50 years, the size of the Mexican-born population residing in the United States has grown by a factor of more than 16; at over 11,000,000, Mexicans north of the *Rio Bravo* represent 11 percent of Mexico's population, up from 1.5 percent 40 years ago. Hence the ethnic density of this immigrant population is of a scale very much unlike that encountered by the Italians many decades ago, predictably increasing the odds of in-contacts, whether looking at the interpersonal level, via intermarriage, or the community level, via neighborhood segregation. And the legacy of *past* migrations from Mexico means that the latest arrivals enter an environment whose ethnic composition further facilitates in-group encounters.

In concluding, Vigdor turns to the policy debate, proposing an "assimilation bond"

as a way of encouraging immigrants to make the changes that will allow them to fit in. While the proposal is intriguing, one has to question the root assumption: namely, that the transformation of immigrants into nationals is *really* what Americans want. Even as they wonder why the world does not stop at the water's edge, it is the Americans who keep opting for immigrants whenever they get a chance. After all, from the standpoint of growers, meatpackers, and cleaning contractors, far better are foreigners to whom one does not have to attend and whose voices will not ring in the public arena, at least in the short term. By contrast, fully assimilated, fully Americanized workers would be much harder to ignore. Hence, the question is not whether the immigrants are fitting in, but rather why so many Americans are intent on leaving them out.

Fractures

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As long as America has existed, Americans have worried about our society coming apart. Slavery, geographic expansion, immigration, and economic development have all threatened social cohesion; in 1840, Alexis de Tocqueville famously described American individualism the condition in which a person experiences the social world in bits and pieces of experience external to the self.

The distinguished Princeton historian Daniel T. Rodgers has written another chapter in the seemingly endless story of individualized America, bringing Tocqueville up to date. *Age of Fracture* focuses on the generation before our own, the era of Ronald Reagan marked by the end of the Cold War, the flourishing of the culture wars, the emergence of a new economics, and the erosion of the welfare state our grandparents knew. Rodgers is an historian of ideas, and although his recounting of late-twentieth-century America dwells on intellectuals, he makes cogent and sometimes surprising

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connections to popular beliefs. America is no longer a relatively isolated society, as it was in Tocqueville's time. Americans, in Rodgers' view, have lost the ability to understand people unlike themselves in a globalizing world. Rodgers' close reading of American writers, from novelists to sociologists, gives bite to this simple theme.

Ronald Reagan may seem too easy a figure on which to pin the old-new individualism. Unlike presidents from Roosevelt to Kennedy who emphasized personal sacrifice for the common good, Reagan dramatized the individual unshackled from larger obligations, a "liberation" epitomized by the declaration of his comrade-in-arms, the

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that "There is no such thing as society... There are individual men and women and there are families" (p. 219). As a traditional small-government conservative, Reagan made gestures of getting government off people's backs but, as Rodgers points out, his efforts to shrink the state were often half-hearted, and inept.

Rodgers shows how in the late twentieth century, the tectonic plates of change shifted more decisively in economics than in electoral politics. *Age of Fracture* presents a clear account of how new economic ideas were put in service of the old individualism. This, he says, occurred through privileging micro-economics at the expense of macro-economics, producing a version of the market which was agent-centered and rationally-oriented, neglecting large structures and their dissonances: Milton Friedman stepped forward as John Kenneth Galbraith became a marginal figure. Economics became, in Rodgers' account, a profession smaller in human scope than in the time of Galbraith or earlier of Keynes by dwelling on, and rewarding, sheer calculation. This account is rich rather than crude, because Rodgers shows how a superficial character like Friedman embodied diverse cross-currents in other disciplines, from the legal thinker Ronald Coase to the sociologist James Coleman. "Agency" and "rational choice" in micro-economics particularly weakened the sociological imagination, dispelling the understanding of authority, lightening the recognition of personal limits, neglecting sociality.

Some sociologists will demur from taking Coleman as an emblem of individualism; more are not going to be happy with the bold move Rodgers makes by connecting "micro" in economics to "micro" in political thought. To Rodgers, figures like Michel Foucault and John Rawls are agents of intellectual fracture: Foucault, because he emphasized the "capillaries of power" at work in the smallest of daily transactions, an architecture of power built from the ground up, hard to discern in over-all shape; Rawls, because his "veil of ignorance" principle treats the social world as a blank slate and so reverts justice to the realm of choice.

Though imagining Milton Friedman, James Coleman, Michel Foucault, and John Rawls as cousins of a sort may seem an implausible family portrait, Rodgers commands the reader's serious engagement because of the way *Age of Fracture* is written. Though relentless in pursuit of its theme, the authorial voice is measured rather than heckling; Rodgers advances a proposition and invites you to think about it, which is to say the book is cooperative in spirit—a politics of writing all too rare among academics.

Rodgers occupies more familiar ground in his analysis of discourses of race and gender in the late twentieth century, since the writers he treats were themselves so conscious of intellectual fragmentation. He makes a telling contrast, for instance between Toni Morrison, whose fictions like *Beloved* emphasized the distinctive "voice" of African Americans, to the sociologist William Julius Wilson, whose *The Declining Significance of Race*, articulated the class differences that by the later twentieth century were fragmenting that shared racial "voice." Rodgers sharpens this contrast by showing its exploitation by the American right-wing throughout the 1980s in arguments for "color-blind" justice, arguments eschewing the centrality of race in American life, dwelling instead on the black poor as themselves an isolated fragment in the American mosaic.

Similarly, the supposed essentialism of feminist works like the poet Adrienne Rich's *Of Women Born*, or the psychologist Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, is set against the views of the historian Joan Scott about the construction of gender or the theorist Judith Butler's concept of gender as a performance. If I might re-phrase Rodgers' argument in other terms, racial and gender identities ceased to be narratives binding people together, becoming instead images, more particularly, collage images of identity, enacted by different people in discontinuous ways. Identities conceived as collage images rather than master narratives become, in general, vulnerable to attack from the political right, since no large, challenging claims can be advanced in the name of an oppressed group. The vulnerability is made worse when identity politics takes a liberal turn; admitting internal doubt or awareness of contingency makes for less forceful

argument than making essential claims about the human condition.

The “culture wars” as conceived in the 1980s and 1990s left out a great shift in American culture occurring at the end of the last century. That was the technological revolution in computing which transformed the landscape of social communication; Rodgers should have given this change a starring role—but technology, and science more largely, are absent from the pages of this book. When historians a generation after us look back to the late twentieth century, they may well see the technological revolution in communication as most prominently raising the issue of personalized fragmentation, which is Rodgers’ big theme. On the one hand, life on screen has produced, as Sherry Turkle argues, social isolation of a profound sort; on the other hand, the communications revolution has enabled people to bond, and to act, in equally new ways.

I also wish Rodgers had taken on board a great sociological fact about late twentieth century America. This is the stagnation of the middle classes which set in during the Age of Reagan. Stagnation occurred in the wealth share of the middle classes, in occupational mobility and in educational attainment for men, and in the attitudes of both young men and women about opportunity and possibility for their life course. Rodgers notes the sheer facts of diminished horizons but does not make much of them, yet stagnation has a profound relationship to individualism.

People who sense they are stuck are not likely to look outward or forward; they will incline instead to look backward with regret, as Americans in the 1990s began to do by contrasting their present to “the Great Generation” of their parents who flourished after World War Two. Deprivation can draw people closer to one another socially, to share in whatever resources they do have; that impulse indeed animated many poor African American and immigrant families during the Great Depression. But at the end of the last century, middle-class Americans turned inward and backward, longing for that disappearing prosperous America. As is evident in today’s Tea Party movement on the right, the impulse has withered to share, cooperate, participate, in the complex mosaic which is global America; instead, people want life to become smaller and simpler. “Smaller” is the political and social vision induced by stagnation: the small fragmentation of everyday life over which people struggle to re-assert agency and control.

Age of Fracture will call forth many other responses. It invites discussion by the gravity of its subject, its intelligence, its sometimes surprising associations, and the openness of its prose. Daniel Rodgers could have framed his argument as a call for a renewal of nationalism and patriotism; he has instead done something harder, and finer. He asks his readers to reflect on the thinking which has shaped this generation, to find a different way of thinking about a world which our country no longer dominates.

The Antinomies of Real Utopias

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Left social theory has long faced a complicated set of unresolved dualisms: reform versus revolution? Social reproduction versus crisis? Democracy versus planning? Civil society versus the state? The tensions around these divides are palpable. On one side are the attractions of liberalism, market efficiencies, and freedom versus the dangers of compromise and retreat; on the other, the

Envisioning Real Utopias, by Erik Olin Wright. London, UK: Verso Books, 2010. 394pp. \$26.95 paper. ISBN: 9781844676170.

promise of certainty, coherence, and consistency but the dangers of determinism and

irrelevance. In those contexts where left political strength is significant (or at least appears so to intellectuals), the attractions of liberalism are regularly denounced in favor of uncompromising positions of social transformation. In such contexts, rhetorics of state-smashing and proletarian dictatorships appear romantic, not nightmarish. By contrast, periods of weakness make reformism (or retreat, as some would have it) the dominant position. Former revolutionaries and their offspring settle for programs of modest social change if they remain committed to egalitarianism at all. More than a century of sectarian name-calling has done little to resolve the underlying issues.

To be sure, since Marx many creative thinkers on the left have attempted to provide a bridge across these core tensions. The most successful among them, such as Gramsci, acknowledge and embrace them in all their messy detail while still seeking some kind of transcendence. Done well, with a kind of Millsian cool or Habermasian erudition, the inherent conflicts of radical thought are obscured by the promise of theoretical novelty. But these rarely come with any kind of programmatic or strategic specificity that has produced any theoretical momentum toward a fundamental reorientation of the historic project of the left.

Perhaps the most politically significant of the recent attempts at transcendence comes from work on what has come to be known as "radical democracy." Central to the early New Left, only to be washed away by more orthodox urges in the post-1968 surge, the reemergence of radical democracy was popularized—if "popularization" can be applied to a body of work that most find impenetrable—by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in the mid-1980s. Here, the underlying problems of "socialist strategy" in an age in which command central planning no longer seems a plausible route to emancipation are solved by seeking social spaces in which discourse, uncontaminated by economic power, can occur. Through discursive practice, in such spaces citizens will presumably discover their inner-socialist, egalitarian selves. The triumph of socialism may be blocked from above, but through democratic practice from below

the possibilities of a radical "post-Marxist" breakthrough are still possible.

The basic premises of radical democracy as a political strategy for citizen empowerment start from a surprising position of strength. Small-d "democracy" is perhaps the one idea that all social scientists to the left of public choice theory can agree upon as inherently preferable to any existing alternative. Efforts to get more citizens involved and participating in planning processes at the local level can be found all over the world, and a growing social science literature on the democratization of social life in many arenas has begun to appear. The most popular model of modern organizational management is the development of "flattened" hierarchies and "participatory management." Much of the motivation in the latter case may be efficiency and increased profitability. But because capitalist interests are, at least potentially, threatened by too much democracy, radical democracy has a kind of anti-capitalist veneer that makes the "radical" part appear at least plausible. If this is a bad time for socialism, it is, at least in some respects, a good time for democracy.

In his new work, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (henceforth *ERU*), Erik Olin Wright seeks to reinvigorate the radical democracy movement by explicitly (re-)attaching it to an anti-capitalist socialist agenda, albeit a form of socialism that is decidedly "non-statist" in character. Wright starts from the premise that socialism as central planning is no longer politically feasible or desirable as an economic alternative to capitalism. Instead, he envisions a future defined by "radical democratic egalitarianism," in which citizens and civil society will find and use democratic means to achieve egalitarian ends. The task of "emancipatory social science" is to "generate scientific knowledge relevant to the collective project of challenging various forms of human oppression" (p. 10) and to make one or another of the radical democracy projects Wright describes convincing to an audience of disillusioned social scientists, as well as newcomers to the debates in search of a road map.

ERU is long book, building upon a 15-year project Wright has been organizing, in collaboration with Verso books and his research

center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, to hold conferences and publish volumes examining “utopian” proposals infusing classical left visions with fresh ideas. One immediately asks, why utopia? Especially in dark times when left-wing utopias seem ever so far from the possible, and the gains of the left in the twentieth century are under enormous threat? Wright asserts that projecting viable utopias is necessary to counter “a cynicism about the human capacity to realize [left] values on a substantial scale” (p. 8). He makes the very good point that right-wing thinkers have no hesitation in promoting ideals of radical free-market utopias and being taken seriously, so why not the left as well?

Fair enough.

Wright argues that “real” utopias, and the emancipatory social science which is to undergird it, require three steps: (1) elaborating a plausible critique of the existing social order, (2) envisioning a “viable” set of alternatives, and (3) outlining a strategy for getting there. The argument of the book unfolds in three parts that correspond roughly to this agenda. Part One provides an extended fifty-page analysis of what he thinks is wrong with capitalism. Part Two describes the various alternatives Wright has in mind, divided into two sections: one involving how exactly civil society might gain democratic control over the state, and the other how the economy might be reorganized along more “democratic” lines. The final part turns to an examination of the factors that maintain capitalism, and strategies for its demise.

It is impossible not to appreciate the sharpness of Wright’s theoretical mind, his passion and willingness to engage grand themes otherwise so out of fashion these days, and his very open and pluralistic account. Yet I find much of *ERU* to be disappointing. In spite of its claims to be a contribution to scientific inquiry, to interrogate “real” utopias, the examination of actually existing alternative institutions is entirely superficial. For example, a discussion of the participatory budgeting in the Brazilian city of Porto Alegre centers on a formal description of how it works but offers no good evidence that “better” outcomes are achieved elsewhere. If there has been more

investment in poor neighborhoods and reduced tax avoidance since 1989 (when the participatory budgeting begun), claims of success that have been challenged by some analysts generally ignored by Wright, how do we know this is not the result of the end of the military dictatorship and the coming to power of center-left national and regional governments as opposed to local participatory budgeting? Further, how do we know Porto Alegre has done better than other Brazilian cities in this same period?

Or consider another example. Wikipedia is invoked by Wright as an example of how a non-capitalist cooperative venture could take on and achieve comparable results in terms of quality in for-profit encyclopedias, using the voluntarily labor of large numbers of citizens around the world. Wikipedia is indeed intriguing. But what is its larger significance? Perhaps it shows that collectively-run organizations can work as well as hierarchical organizations, but it is also possible that this is a one-off context in which people drawn to intellectual life find it pleasurable to spend time on the dissemination of knowledge (their own and others) that makes this venture work. If that is true, it may have no relevance for building houses or collecting garbage. It is frustrating that in the “real world” examples Wright points to, there is little systematic effort to sort through the issues and even pose the questions that need to be answered before serious readers might be convinced.

Modern social science has the analytical tools to investigate rigorously such questions: evaluation research with quasi-experimental is a flourishing subfield. If the feasibility of radical utopia is to be advanced one inch by existing examples, it is incumbent to test it using some of these tools. But none of that is on display here. It is possible to compare whether workers prefer working for a firm in which they have an ownership interest and elect their managers, or whether such firms are more efficient. In fact, there are literatures on these questions, and they are by no means uniformly favorable to worker cooperatives. What is discussed in the book raises plenty of doubts. For example, Wright (somewhat sheepishly) notes the fact that the famous worker-owned Mondragon cooperatives in northern Spain

now have a majority of non-owner employees, and that the worker-owners have often been reluctant to let the new workers become owners and sometimes have opposed unions for the regular employees. Kudos to Wright for forthrightly discussing it, but it brings sharply into focus some of the potentially non-egalitarian consequences of democratic processes even in the existing "best case" scenarios.

Wright's faith in forms of direct democracy, and criticisms of the limitations of existing forms of representative democracy, are also untested with any systematic evidence. Many questions need to be addressed here. "All power to the Soviets" proved rather difficult to implement in practice. Representative democracy may be flawed in many ways, but multi-party electoral systems with more or less equal resources and access to the media have proved remarkably robust. Most importantly, representative democracy is the most realistic vehicle (compared to any existing alternative) for communicating *all* citizens' preferences (not just those of activists) to elected officials. Further, many hard questions have been posed in the democracy literature that are not fully answered or even considered in *ERU*. For example, participation itself always has the potential to introduce new inequalities. The book reports that eight percent of the citizens of Porto Alegre participate in budget planning. Does this small group make it a more representative process than having elected city council members (chosen by all voters) decide? Perhaps. But not everybody is available for endless meetings, and not everybody has the tools to participate successfully even if they do.

Wright's assertions about the lack of "human flourishing" under capitalism is the bedrock claim of the book, the foundation for the argument that we should seek to go beyond capitalism as it exists today. Is this convincing? One problem is that much of the discussion of "capitalism" that Wright provides is far too abstract and general to test specifically the proposition. In spite of Wright's theoretical (but highly abstract) insistence that no social system is unitary in its logic, his discussion of capitalism rarely acknowledges or seems capable of appreciating its empirical varieties. A huge

gulf has opened between a neo-classical model of capitalism or the model currently practiced in the United States versus the "social market economies" that have evolved in Western Europe over the past 50 years. The existence of SMEs suggests that market capitalism can co-exist with empowered workers in strong unions, dramatically reduced (although still not trivial) levels of income and wealth inequality, reduced working hours, and declining racial and gender inequality. In the SMEs working hours have fallen and citizens have more time to pursue "human flourishing." Capitalism has not proven, in short, universally incapable of improving the prospects for human flourishing, and for all we know that may continue for the indefinite future. Failing to examine systematically the wide varieties of actually existing capitalisms around the world, Wright's critique leaves open the questions of just how far or how much better radical democracy might be.

Turning to the alternative institutional designs proposed in Part Two of the book, we find that Wright's discussion is admirably pluralistic, but vague. Readers seeking a blueprint of any kind will be sorely disappointed. In abandoning the classical pathways to socialism via public ownership and central planning in favor of radical democracy, he leaves indeterminate exactly how a radically democratic society might start to reduce the power of private investment in market economies without central planning. Few truly concrete policy agendas are endorsed in the book, with the exception of universal basic income grants (which are mentioned but not discussed in any detail as to how many grants might be provided, what kinds of existing government programs would be replaced by the grants, and so forth). The devil here lies in the details.

My biggest concerns about the book come in Part Three, where the political conditions for the "social reproduction" of capitalism are treated, along with three strategies of transition: rupture, building up alternative non-capitalist institutions, and finding models where workers' and capitalists' interests overlap. The discussion of social reproduction takes us back to an "oldies but goodies" 1970s literature on ideology and constraint,

but largely ignores the vast literatures since then on how citizens and mass publics reason about political questions, and why, ultimately, the vision of democratic egalitarianism postulated in the entire book may be unpersuasive. The strategic discussion in Part Three is unsatisfying for a different reason. Wright argues that the three pathways are supposed to reinforce each other—important developments either within capitalism or institutional developments outside of it open up possibilities in the other, with rupture strategically invoked but only vague examples offered.

Social scientists today have, I think, largely abandoned utopian visions not because they have lost hope or concern for social change, or because equality has gone out of

style, but rather because they are generally and appropriately skeptical that social science models exist (or can be found) in favor of any version of radical utopia. Further, there is a good deal more appreciation for the varieties of capitalisms and the equality-generating improvements represented by the rise of social market economies than there was a few decades ago. In an era of retrenchment, where welfare states are under attack, the challenge of simply maintaining and defending existing achievements, or building upon and incrementally improving them, has become the main priority. For all of these reasons, and in spite of its challenging erudition, I fear *ERU* will not be likely to motivate action in a different direction.