

## Why Not Read the Best?

*Sigmund Freud*, by ROBERT BOCOCK. New York: Tavistock Publications & Ellis Horwood Limited, 1983. 145 pp. \$11.50 cloth. \$4.50 paper.

*The Frankfurt School*, by TOM BOTTOMORE. New York: Tavistock Publications & Ellis Horwood Limited, 1984. 93 pp. \$4.50 paper.

*C. Wright Mills*, by JOHN ELDRIDGE. New York: Tavistock Publications & Ellis Horwood Limited, 1983. 128 pp. \$4.50 paper.

*Georg Simmel*, by DAVID FRISBY. New York: Tavistock Publications & Ellis Horwood Limited, 1984. 161 pp. \$11.95 cloth. \$4.50 paper.

*Talcott Parsons*, by PETER HAMILTON. New York: Tavistock Publications & Ellis Horwood Limited, 1983. 152 pp. \$11.50 cloth. \$4.50 paper.

*Karl Mannheim*, by DAVID KETTLER, VOLKER MEJA, and NICO STEHR. New York: Tavistock Publications & Ellis Horwood Limited, 1984. 169 pp. \$11.95 cloth. \$4.50 paper.

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Introductory texts on classical authors call for justification. They may clarify the master's arguments; they may, through a review of new studies, add to his findings; they may critique his conclusions. Failing at those tasks, such secondary works are probably worthless, and students should simply read the originals, which are typically profound in argument and graceful in presentation. The short books (80-150 pages) in the Tavistock Key Sociologists series reliably offer new information in the form of biography and expositions of less-known works. That much is good throughout. But the quality of individual works in the series ranges from excellent (*Talcott Parsons*, *The Frankfurt School*) to marginal (*Sigmund Freud*). The Parsons book could serve nicely in an introductory course, and the Frankfurt School book certainly merits attention by professionals. Other than these, the books reviewed here are unremarkable.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Parsons book is the best of the lot. Peter Hamilton certainly has the initial advantage of being a better stylist than Parsons himself. Starting with Parsons' early experience in Germany of the 1920s and moving through his early Harvard years—the disapproval of Pitirim Sorokin, the admiration of young students such as Robert Merton—Hamilton weaves biography and intellectual development together with the substance of Parsons' theories. He shows how Parsons developed his notion of "voluntarism" not just from exegetical studies of Weber, Marshall, and the others, but from a more philosophical concern with the issues of neo-Kantianism; Hamilton shows that Parsons was in some ways working on live issues, and not just spinning concepts from concepts, as C. Wright Mills might have us believe.

Hamilton is admittedly a partisan, ably defending Parsons against the usual charges of political conservatism (as advanced by Mills and Gouldner) and unnecessary jargon; he goes too far only when finding a "particularly clear presentation" in one of Parsons' 16-cell tables with ten arrows, eight sets of parentheses, four brackets, and two apparently extraneous wedges. Nevertheless, this book—explaining Parsons' arguments better than the original does, and with sharp commentary besides—could be invaluable for the introductory course.

Admittedly selective in its discussion, and deliberately unsympathetic, Bottomore's book—or essay, really, running only eighty-five pages including footnotes—is less an introductory text than a focused critique of the Frankfurt School and its development. Bottomore sees the School as a runaway offspring of Marxism which, following Max Horkheimer's promotion to director of the Institute for Social Research in 1930, rapidly abandoned the traditional Marxist reliance on historical and economic research and degenerated into loose philosophical speculation on untested cultural theses (for prime examples of that tendency, see Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man*). Working from an easy familiarity with his material, Bottomore explains complex issues deftly and scores his points cleanly. The book is a pleasure to read.

After those two, the series goes downhill a bit. Eldridge's work on Mills has its strengths, notably in laying out the arguments of Mills' minor works such as *The New Men of Power*, *Puerto Rican Journey*, and *The Causes of World War III*, but much of the book is marred by minor mistakes that strain credibility (misspelling David Riesman's name, or

reading CIO as "Congress of Industrial Unions") and by wooden sentences. This book is largely exposition, and isn't bad as such—but Mills's books are easy to find and a joy to read.

So too with the Simmel book; Frisby is good on the minor works (*Philosophy of Money, On Social Differentiation*), but offers little new on *Sociology* itself, the work most familiar to American readers. For the scholar interested in Simmel's minor works, but put off by their length or unavailability, Frisby's presentation is convenient; I learned from it. But he is not particularly strong on the basis of Simmel's sociology, and again, introductory students could as well read Simmel's own essays.

*Karl Mannheim*, written by three authors, is the longest book of the group (150 pages), and is in large part too abstract and jargonized for undergraduates. It also assumes far too much philosophical background for the introductory student—or, for that matter, for professionals who haven't studied intellectual history. But its discussions are comprehensive, sometimes almost to the point of repeating Mannheim's books; and while it reads a little like a doctoral thesis in which the candidate tries to prove thorough knowledge of the literature, the discussions, built on the theme of Mannheim's effort to relate knowledge and policy, can be valuable to the serious student.

Finally, the Bocock book (*Sigmund Freud*)

claims that it will show Freud's applicability to sociology, but instead drifts off into apparently irrelevant discussions of several contemporary social issues—gay rights, for instance—with some references to Freud mixed in. There is, too, a longish discussion of Lacan's work; it seems Bocock wants to discuss Lacan, and Freud is an excuse for doing this. The original works mentioned in the book—*Future of an Illusion, Three Essays on the Theory of Sex, Civilization and Its Discontents*—are more coherent, more thoughtful, better written, and, oddly enough, more directly relevant to sociology.

Certainly it is easier to improve on Parsons (as Hamilton may have done) than on Freud; perhaps only the ambitious scholar should try to introduce Freud. The Tavistock series as a whole offers some biographical information on its subjects, and expositions of the less widely available works of all of them; in this, it is valuable. But Freud, Simmel, Mills, and others of their caliber are renowned because they said more and they said it better than anyone since. Hamilton's book is good in its own right, and Bottomore's essay is excellent. Other than that, a good teacher will assign Mills's *White Collar*, or Donald Levine's edited volume on Simmel, or Mannheim's essay on "The Problem of a Sociology of Knowledge," and let the great thinkers speak for themselves. ♦