H-Net Reviews
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Kerstin Brückweh, Dirk Schumann, Richard F. Wetzell, Benjamin Ziemann. *Engineering Society: The Role of the Human and Social Sciences in Modern Societies, 1880–1980.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. 336 S., 8 SW-Abb., 1 Tabelle ISBN 978-0-230-27907-0.

Reviewed by Theodore M Porter

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This excellent volume See also the review essay by David Kuchenbuch, Verwissenschaftlichung, Ordnung und "Engineering" des Sozialen, in: H-Soz-u-Kult, 05.03.2013, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2013-1-140> (01.11.2013). originated as a workshop supported by the German Historical Institute London. Alongside the purpose implied by its title, to investigate the role of the human sciences in the shaping of modern selves and modern societies, the volume on this important historical problem mirrors the GHI's broader aim: to promote dialogue between German and Anglo-American perspectives. The introductory essay makes a case for Niklas Luhmann, whose analysis of functional differentiation in society they put on a plane with the writings of Michel Foucault. Luhmann's main works, in fact have appeared in translation, and are well-known internationally. His standing in English, however, is that of an important sociologist, not an inescapable intellectual and critic of modern knowledge forms.

On the evidence of this collection, genuflecting to Foucault is as prevalent in German scholarship as in American and British. Not even the German authors invoke Luhmann in this way. He appears in these papers only a few times by name, though more often, perhaps, silently, as the intellectual inspiration for a basic element of the project vocabulary, captured in the word "scientization" (or sometimes "scientification"). A word like scientization is hard to ignore, since its construction out of "science" by way of a double suffix is, as the editors point out, clumsy and ponderous in English. 'Verwissenschaftlichung' involves no such awkwardness in German. Benjamin Ziemann and coauthors, in two separate essays (see pp. 6–7 and 248), gloss the word in Luhmannian terms, letting it stand for the coupling of alien or "functionally differentiated" systems. Defined in this way, science stands apart from religion, law, crime, schooling, the economy, and the media, yet is more and more brought to bear on them. Scientization stands for a conception of modernity as an increasingly dense interaction of fundamentally autonomous structures.

The editors do not insist on the unique validity of this sociology, but rather on its capacity to

make sense of the resistance and incomprehension in the face of scientizing that many scholars have noticed. If, as Luhmann argued, science is a fundamentally different kind of institution and activity from law or government, then their interaction depends on a complex translation. It then makes perfect sense, they note, that the process of scientization cannot be understood as anything so simple as applying established knowledge to relevant problems. Lutz Raphael makes this clear in a framing essay, based on his keynote lecture for the original conference. Invoking Peter Wagner, he argues that knowledge is not laid out in a hierarchy of makers and users, but functions in diverse coalitions of different kinds of actors, each with their distinctive discourses.

Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that religion, with its focus on God and morality, or law with its codes and statues, had no idea of knowledge until there arose functionally-differentiated institutions of science. The acquisition and transmission of social knowledge were never restricted to the academy, but are typical also of institutions and practices whose purposes extend well beyond the human sciences. These would include medicine, law, administration and regulation, local and national politics, labor organizations, engineering, reform, journalism, even novel-writing. The editors have chosen 1880 as the beginning date because the decade of the 1880s marks, by common consent, the beginnings of institutionalized social science as a university subject, notably in America. But there was no clean break, and even to the extent that university professors took the lead role, most did not conceive research as sharply distinct from engagement with practical problems.

The editors, nevertheless, are surely right to see deep tensions at work in the uses of social science, and the inclination of academic authors often to situate themselves rhetorically as objective commentators, above the fray of politics, has created its own problems. Rarely can they live up to so strenuous an ideal. In practice, as the various authors in this volume show, "science" typically has stood for particular sorts of interventions. Raphael sums this up in a fourfold periodization that begins with "social reform" in the decades up to the Great War, "social engineering" associated with the two world wars and the Depression, "planned modernization", in the early postwar period, as a capitalist answer to the allure of Soviet centralization, and an "age of therapy" beginning about 1970. I find this quite cogent, and would only complain of the last of these period markers – not because I think an age of therapy is groundless in its own terms, but because the turn it implies from the more public realm of economy, society, and politics to the more inward one of psychology and psychiatry, appears to me misleading. Raphael suggests in an aside that economists do not really belong in the volume because contemporary economics fails to acknowledge anything like "social reality". But this holds also, perhaps even more decisively, for psychology and psychiatry. A book cannot cover everything, and it is perfectly acceptable to emphasize other fields than economics, but "the role of the economic sciences in modern societies" would involve a quite similar set of problems to those emphasized here.

The more focused papers in the volume are arrayed in three main sections, the first on insurance, criminology, and social functions of state, the second on "diagnosis and therapy", and the last on "polling, marketing and organization". Each section spreads over the whole period from 1880 to 1980 and beyond, demonstrating the impossibility of a clean periodization, yet in a broad sense they support Raphael's proposal. At the same time, the works of these diverse authors fit together unusually well. The book displays just the right balance between focus and generality in its three sections, each of which could serve as a scholarly introduction to its topic. The work in part III on the diverse uses of social surveys and sampling technologies is particularly welcome, since its significance has only just begun to be ap-

preciated by historians. The book supplies also a number of valuable introductions in English to important scholarship that has appeared previously in books written in German (or, in one case, Dutch). Yet every paper explores a somewhat new direction or goes beyond what its author has previously published. This volume is a model for edited collections of scholarly writing.