
Review

Reviewed Work(s): Hunger as a Factor in Human Affairs. by Pitirim A. Sorokin, Elena P. Sorokin and T. Lynn Smith

Review by: C. Peter Timmer

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for the type of sample she has chosen. Nevertheless she persists in treating her scores as though she were testing hypotheses (see chap. 3, pp. 24 ff.; chap. 4, pp. 44 ff.; chap. 5, pp. 55 ff.; chap. 6, pp. 69 ff.; chap. 7, pp. 81 ff.), as though they indexed behavioral outcomes which could be predicted on the basis of some theory which she has developed and wishes to test. Aside from the fact that no real theory informs this study (unless you are willing to accept as theory some standard notions about the variable effects of such factors as social class and religion on behavior) Duberman cannot, given the character of her sample, engage in any meaningful assessment of the impact of one variable upon another.

Finally, as far as analysis is concerned Duberman is misleading in the extreme when she treats her respondents' subjective perceptions of the behavior and attitudes of others as though she were assessing those behaviors and attitudes themselves. This is particularly problematic in chapter 6 when relationships between stepchildren are assessed solely in terms of parental reports and in chapter 7 when outsiders' attitudes toward the families are assessed solely in terms of the perceptions of these attitudes which Duberman's respondents harbor.

The book exhibits other problems, not the least of which is Duberman's sloppy conceptual sense (e.g., society—contrary to Duberman's reified usage—cannot devise formal behaviors for anything; she implies that it can [p. 3]), but it would be bad form to run up the score. Suffice it to note that after reading this book I know no more about the reconstituted family than before I read it. Unless you are asked to review it for one of the other journals purporting to keep sociologists informed about significant new works in the discipline, I suggest that you not squander your time reading this book.

Hunger as a Factor in Human Affairs. By Pitirim A. Sorokin. Translated and with a prologue by Elena P. Sorokin. Edited and with an introduction by T. Lynn Smith. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1975. Pp. xxxix+319. \$12.50.

C. Peter Timmer

Cornell University

Why should a book written during the now forgotten Russian famine of 1921–22 be published in 1975? Why should it be read? If it had been published in 1922, would it be read today? These are the obvious questions any reviewer must address when judging this book, especially in the light of the editor's introduction: "It is not too irresponsible to predict that for many years to come this book will be read and studied by people in many lands long after most of the current works in anthropology, economics, geography, political science, and sociology are almost completely forgotten" (p. xv).

A certain morbid fascination with the book is inevitable. It was written

by a starving and freezing scholar in the midst of a famine that he felt was caused by the revolution to which he was so hostile. As an exercise in intellectual history, the publishing of the book has merit. This is particularly true for the science of nutrition, because the knowledge of basic human nutrition and of the functional impact of under- and malnutrition demonstrated by Sorokin in 1921 must give pause to modern nutritional scientists concerned with generating the knowledge needed to help feed a hungry world.

The gross outlines of human nutrition were known by the time Sorokin was writing, and he was able to discuss the roles of energy, lipids, protein, and amino acids, and several of the vitamins and salts. The extraordinary aspect of the book, however, is his discussion of the functional impact of hunger and malnutrition. Hence the treatment of hunger and disease: "Particularly noticeable is the decrease in the number of white blood cells, which are protectors of the organism against bacteria (hence, during starvation, the decrease in immunity and rise of disease and of mortality)" (p. 59); of physical strength: "*The physical force of those in the well-fed strata of the population must be greater, on average, than of people of the same race, age, and sex in the strata that are ill fed*" (p. 60); of mental ability: "There is also a deformation of memory and the ability to recall in general" (p. 75); of the effects of eating meat: "It was noted that people, particularly primitive ones, who live predominantly on meat are rapacious, energetic, and aggressive. . . . Conversely, many vegetarian peoples and groups are mostly peaceful and not predatory" (p. 78); and of the impact on general productivity: "During these years [of the famine] the general productivity of labor decreased everywhere in the USSR, particularly in the centers where famine prevailed. This was true not only for the physical laborers, but also for the semi-intellectual occupations (printers, clerks, accountants, etc.). The attention, exactness, speed, energy, etc., once prevailing all disappeared" (p. 84).

It is small exaggeration to say that present nutritional science knows little more than did Sorokin, in a quantitative functional fashion, about any of these topics except the impact of meat on vigor. (The right balance of vegetable proteins can accomplish the same effect.) And it is precisely this type of functional information that is needed to justify programs aimed at improving nutritional status to economic planners allocating scarce resources in poor countries.

But it is not the treatment of these influences of hunger on the individual that raises the hope that the book will speak to the problems of today. This hope lies in the ultimate impact on society of widespread hunger. Sorokin is not troubled by the elements of sociobiology in his thesis. "A number of arrogant defenders of 'autonomy' in sociology and in some other disciplines may object to all the problems introduced here, and may consider the 'introduction' to be superfluous. My answer to this is that they are essential, as a starting point. The autonomy of biology does not preclude basing its disciplines on the facts of physics and chemistry, and biologists find this not to be shameful, but on the contrary, promote it to the

maximum. The same is true about the relationship between sociology and biology. By ignoring biology, the 'autonomists' are obliged to base their theories on fantasy. I am not a believer in such procedures" (p. 36).

Sorokin's belief in the primacy of biology must derive from his observations of a society on the bare edge of biological (nutritional) survival. Hunger and famine in such times must provide nearly the entire driving force of a society. "Hunger, or the threat of it, gives rise to war, when there are no other means of satisfying it, and war, in turn, gives rise to more hunger. These twins almost always are inseparable and they travel together all over the world" (p. 201). "When increasing starvation pinches the nutritional reflexes of a population, and when there are no other means to satisfy their hunger, starving people commit crime. . . . But when similar actions are committed by a mass of people, by a whole stratum of society . . . then it is called revolution, with the adjective 'social'" (p. 234). "As to the future, my thesis says: Other things being equal, if the satiety of the aggregates increases, statism and the role of the government in nutritional matters will decrease; contrarily, if adequacy of food supply decreases, and the danger of starvation increases (as was the case during the years of the war), the growth of the regulatory functions of the government in the economic-nutritional field will increase" (p. 301). And Sorokin's gloomy conclusion is that "nationalization, communization, and the development of statism leads to poverty, not to prosperity, and by no means do they improve the social conditions of the masses" (p. 319).

The difficulty, of course, is that neither Sorokin's casual historical empiricism nor subsequent history supports such a thesis and conclusion. The growth of statism in well-fed societies is undeniable, as is the improvement in the "social conditions of the masses" in Russia, China, and Cuba. The ultimate irony of the book is that Sorokin's own hunger must have been the major factor in his deterministic treatment of human affairs.

Planning and Organizing for Social Change. By Jack Rothman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974. Pp. xvii+628. \$20.00 (cloth); \$7.50 (paper).

Richard A. Berk

University of California, Santa Barbara

If you are the kind of person who generally concurs with the reviews of movie critics and is satisfied with the summary form in which those assessments are typically presented, you may well find much to applaud in Jack Rothman's *Planning and Organizing for Social Change*. In essence, Professor Rothman responds to the very real need to transform scattered social science findings into brief, useful, substantive conclusions with direct implications for policy. In particular, he hopes to inform the efforts of day-to-day practitioners on the front lines of community social change.

The volume is perhaps best viewed as an encyclopedia of social science