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Sociological Analysis and Politics: The Theories of Talcott Parsons. by William C. Mitchell

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concepts, and just about all of those definitions are wooly and superficial. (see, e.g. the definition of historicism, p. 50; the statement of the "basic thesis" in evolution, p. 60; the definition of probability, p. 82; the definition of ideal type, p. 127) He often formulates an issue or opens a discussion in ways that are to me incomprehensible. For example, the opening sentence of Chapter 2, which is on "Theoretical Givens," reads: "The deepest form of overt assumption is defined as a theory's epistemology." (p. 15) Or, on the same page: "To begin at the beginning of intellectual discourse entails a consideration of the dialogue between metaphysics and positivism."

I found no grace in the book, no joy or intellectual excitement, nothing that invites one to further explorations of inherently interesting questions. As Goethe said, the mark of a master is his restraint. This book tries too much too quickly.

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Sociological Analysis and Politics: The Theories of Talcott Parsons. By WILLIAM C. MITCHELL. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967. Pp. xiv, 222. \$5.95.)

William Mitchell's critical introduction to the theories of Talcott Parsons has at least three important, distinct uses. For anyone interested in familiarizing himself with the vast body of Parsons's work, this is a concise, skillful introduction. For the methodologist who is willing to work at it, this book raises some interesting points. And the book has several possibilities as a guide for teaching and research.

Certainly few political scientists of the "behavioral" persuasion are ignorant of Parsons's contributions. But I, for one, was surprised and a little chagrined to discover how much I had *not* known about this important man's work. Mitchell provides particularly clear discussions of the concept of role, equilibrium, functional requirements, and institutions. He explores the criticism of (and confusions about) Parsons's orientation towards order and conflict, as well as the phenomena of process and change. This book is a clear introduction to structural-functional analysis.

In the past, much methodological confusion in political science stemmed from a failure to distinguish between the context of scien-

tific discovery and the context of scientific justification (validation). Today, the logic of scientific justification has been greatly clarified; the context of discovery remains mysterious. The Parsons whom Mitchell labels "an incurable theorist" emerges as a social scientist self-consciously engaged in the process of scientific discovery. And it is provocative to note that, in his discovery role, Parsons abandons the "logico-deductive" methodology of scientific justification in favor of functional (teleological) explanation. Since Parsons regards this latter approach as temporary and "second best," one is led to infer that its adoption is a strategy of discovery. There is enough material in Mitchell's book to permit extensive speculation about strategies of scientific discovery. But this will require some methodological sophistication on the part of the reader, for Parsons simply is not a good methodologist. If Mitchell points us toward such speculation, he stops short of explaining these matters, perhaps because he has not adopted a deliberately thematic approach in this heavily reportive text.

Scientific discovery, of course, really can never be divorced from research and/or teaching. Throughout this book Professor Mitchell is at some pains to explain the relevance of Parsonian theory for political science. I should think the potential relevance is clear enough; what is difficult is to close the gap between Parsonian theory and actual empirical research. Mitchell often points up the difficulty in trying to operationalize Parsonian concepts, which is a requirement for empirical research. This difficulty, however, can be traced to Parsons's attitudes about emergent properties and reductionism; and those views, I believe, inhere in his chosen strategy for scientific discovery. Nevertheless—and usually in the face of operationalization difficulties—Mitchell discusses research areas of considerable theoretical significance, among them a clear, good, discussion of legitimacy and socialization.

It should be reiterated that Professor Mitchell's book serves as a clear, useful, introduction to Talcott Parsons. But in addition, for the political scientist who is willing to apply his training and effort to it, the book is pregnant with research possibilities and methodological issues of major importance.

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