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### Stephen K. Sanderson. *Social Evolutionsim, A Critical History*

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cerned with examples of how history and geography can be joined in happy marriage, or are concerned with the specific topics mentioned, will attend to this book post haste. The editors are to be commended for their labors.

Laurence G. Wolf

Stephen K. Sanderson. *Social Evolutionism, A Critical History*. Blackwell, 1990, paperback, pp. 228, references, index.

This is a work that is properly titled. I have run across many that are not; titles which promise the world for contents which cover a village or two. This book actually is a critical history of an approach to the study of human society that has been traveling under the label "evolution" for quite some time. As the author states in the preface, he "will survey the broad range of evolutionary theories in the social sciences, compare and contrast them to each other, and critically examine their logical and epistemological foundations" (xvii), and that is indeed what he has accomplished. Evolutionary ideas were present at the beginnings of modern sociology and anthropology and are still important sources of insight and contention in those disciplines and are of import to civilizationists as well.

Inquiry into so broad a subject is replete with pitfalls in methodology and conceptualization. One sooner or later is confronted with such questions as teleology/directionless history, endogeny/exogeny, objectivity/subjectivity, determinism/voluntarism, or determinism/probabilism, gradualism/punctuationism (or evolution/revolution), continuity/discontinuity, unilinearity/multilinearity, harmony/conflict, biologism/culturalism, materialism/ideationism, and even further dichotomies and polarities.

Sanderson deals well with many such and with several others besides, as he takes us thru several chapters in an historical sequence. Our journey starts with Classical Evolutionism (Spencer, Morgan and Tyler), the Antievolutionary Reaction (mostly Boas), Marxism (which comes across as a sort of mixed bag on several issues, The Evolutionary Revival (starring Childe, White and Steward), followed by the Neoevolutionists from Parsons and Smelser to Sahlins, Service, Carneiro, Lenski and Harris. There follows a goodly discussion of biological evolutionary thinking and its relationship to ideas of social evolution. The book closes with a presentation of his own views which is appropriately brief, for, with his mastery of his predecessor's problems and contributions, we need a separate book devoted to "Sanderson on Evolution."

If I may put in my own two-cents-worth, I think Sanderson and several others go overboard with the idea that the individual is a change-agent, the  
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actor, the decider. Not quite so. Yes, I too have objected to "the working class did thus-and-so" and "Germany attacked Russia," for these are not operational entities, they are merely concepts. "History" and "society" and "the working-class" and even "Germany" have never *done* anything. However, a very large proportion of the decisions which affect the course of human events are not made by individuals acting alone, but in concert with others. The decisions arrived at as members of a board, council, committee, or some such collectivity are not the decisions of individuals. These collectivities are operational units and not merely reified concepts. It is surprising that a sociologist should overlook this.

Among the anti-evolutionists discussed by Sanderson is Anthony Giddens, whose writings I have found quite stimulating. Sanderson at one point writes "it is difficult to resist the conclusion that what Giddens has essentially done is invent a novel and pretentious language to re-describe processes long familiar to many social evolutionists." (P. 222, footnote.) I suspect he has scored a point there!

With a reluctance that comes of life-long habits of thought, I have to accede to Sanderson's insistence that evolution is not a synonym for progress. For instance, societies can evolve into cul-de-sacs. Progress is, nevertheless, an important concept. It is a synonym for improvement. Whether some aspect of a society has improved over the ages or not must be measured by means of a criterion or set of criteria. The evaluator has to choose among criteria. The choice is subjective, but its application can be objective. Nowhere in these studies of social evolutionary thought are we dealing with scholars so highly opinionated that they have not been trying to be objective, trying to assemble an empirical basis for their views. Contemporary discussions of scholarly objectivity have been emphasizing objectivity's inevitable shortcomings, but, flawed as is any human effort to be objective, such efforts are a far cry from what I would call "pure," uninformed, thoughtless subjectivity, which abounds in civil life, and is, alas, not entirely absent even among academicians. Be that as it may, progress pertains to specifics, it is not some transcendent, teleological force, nor is it inevitable.

I shall not comment on whether Sanderson has done justice to each of the theoreticians to whom he has attended, but will only note that he does attend to changes in viewpoint during a scholar's lifetime when they have occurred, and does a great deal of comparative analysis, not only of contrary viewpoints, but of mentors and disciplines as well. For whomever is interested in societal evolutionism, its proponents and opponents, and the intellectual problems this school of thought faces, Sanderson has provided a very useful book.

Book-jacket blurbs are not usually fit material for inclusion in book review, but I shall depart from custom in this case. The Times Higher Education Supplement (date not given) is quoted: "Sanderson writes with admirable clarity and with a relaxed, easy-going (yet unpatronizing) style. There is none of the

jargon and intellectual pomposity that afflict so much writing in sociological and anthropological theory." Indeed he has, and I'm richer for it.

Laurence G. Wolf

John W. Verano and Douglas H. Ubelaker. *Disease and Demography in the Americas*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.

From the perspective of a civilizationist, the demographic aspects of the book seems puzzling. How can the range of demographic estimate be so vast?

In 1991 Robert Riordan gave a paper at an IS CSC meeting in which he estimated the population of Mississippian Culture at 12– 18 million. Ever since, it has been possible to say, in hallway conversation, that had it not been for disease, Europeans would never have conquered the Mississippians, and today there would be three countries occupying the territory of the United States: an English speaking East and a Spanish speaking West separated by a Muskogean speaking Indigenous culture.

But clearly the range of demographic estimates varies, and most of them for all of North America in the Verano–Ubelaker volume seem to be in the range of one to three million. How can this be? One of the editors, Ubelaker, provides an explanation. First he gives a table (p. 171) presenting the discrepancy as it developed chronologically. Before the 1960's, no one had estimated Pre–Columbian North American population over two and a half million. Then came Henry F. Dobyns in 1966 with an estimate of 10 million, raised to 18 million in 1983. Only Robert Thornton at 7 million (1987) came close to that. Others, including Ubelaker himself as recently as 1988, still were estimating the population at under four million.

For the Western hemisphere the estimates are equally wide, varying from eight to 100 million. Dobyns and William Borah in the Sixties tended toward the high estimate, the low coming from the 1940's. More recent estimates, including one from Thornton, fall within a range of 43–72 million.

The higher estimates of Borah and Dobyns, according to Ubelaker, do not come from new discoveries of graveyards, but from a new perspective on population that emphasized "the catastrophic effect of disease on a resistance–free" population. Using projection techniques, and inferring death rates from situations in which catastrophic death rates were known, they escalated population estimates.

This catastrophic approach has received some acceptance, according to Ubelaker, but there is "little agreement on the magnitude of early population