

must go barefoot through the world, like Pico, preaching against the vegetative and sensual errors of the time."

In 1956, Kirk's more inimical critics guffawed at the idea of an American professor going barefoot anywhere. The mocking literalism was ill-placed. Kirk's symbolic language here indicates, of course, recognition of the proper humility necessary to a man who sets himself up against error. It also stands in contrast to that symbol of the powerful forces Russell Kirk has spent his life fighting, the jackboot.

How typical of the Age of Gluttony that, scarcely a dozen years after World War II, liberal critics would have missed the implied comparison altogether.

Explanations Analyzed

GRANT MORRISON

Culture, Structure, or Choice?:

Essays in the Interpretation of the British Experience, by Paul V.

Warwick, New York: Agathon Press, 1990. xiv + 251 pp. \$36.00.

THIS STUDY examines different perspectives on how "social, economic, and political phenomena are to be explained." According to political scientist Paul V. Warwick, there are at present three major competing types of "social science explanation," which are indicated in the book's title. One is "culturalist," and assumes that "shared values, norms, and orientations are widespread and relatively enduring features of human collectivities, and at least partially independent causes of human behavior." A second is "structuralist," of the Marxist variety, which holds that values and attitudes are imposed by the structure of class domination. A third is "rationalist" or rational-choice theory, for which the

model is the market and individuals are assumed to adopt values as means to rationally chosen ends.

Warwick maintains that until "about the mid-1970s" culturalism was broadly accepted in explanations of human affairs, for until then rational-choice theory was not sufficiently developed, and Marxist interpretations "tended to be relegated to the lunatic fringe of social science." Anyone with memories of the academic world before the mid-1970s may recollect that time differently, with Marxism's influence being recalled as scarcely so marginal. Nevertheless, Warwick insists that since the mid-1970s "Marxist theories have become ever more provocative, stimulating, and politically acceptable." As this book was published in 1990 and thus presumably researched and written, or at least put into final shape, in the second half of the 1980s, when Communism's death rattle became audible to the whole world, this might seem an odd point of view, and indeed, in any place other than Western universities, it would be. Warwick does detail flaws in Marxist theory, though as we shall see he borrows arguments and assumptions from Marxists in putting together his own interpretation. He also carefully examines rational-choice theory, which he says has become "a major growth area" in the past fifteen or twenty years. His chief aim is to show how the culturalist interpretation can be saved, for this mode of explanation typically suffers, he says, from a certain "squishiness" or lack of rigor in its formulations; it offers vapid concepts and untestable hypotheses, and "lacks causal specificity."

Warwick tests each of the three perspectives on issues in British history, at times looking at France by way of comparison. He ranges widely but focuses on the last two-hundred years, and though he has a good bit to say about Britain's rise to economic supremacy his real interest is its decline,

marked by that puzzling phenomenon, the rise of anticapitalist and anti-technical values in the very birthplace of industrial capitalism. The nineteenth-century British capitalist class turned away from attitudes and practices that had fostered its own and the nation's economic success and sought to become gentlemen, pursuing aristocratic interests. In the homeland of economic liberalism, of Smith, Bentham, and Ricardo, a new élite, which blended the old aristocracy with the prosperous middle class, displayed a disdain for industrialism and an enthusiasm for country houses, the classics, and running an empire.

The British experience was not repeated in France, Germany, or the United States, and in light of Britain's ongoing economic decline is a matter of no small moment. It has evoked a number of sound scholarly inquiries, among them Martin Wiener's excellent *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (1981). Wiener describes a waning zeal for production and profits and technological innovation, as capitalists turned to more fascinating pursuits, such as spending several months of every year shooting in Scotland or following the hounds in Cheshire. Warwick sees Wiener's and other culturalist interpretations as usually revealing shortcomings which he will improve upon with more "causal specificity" and so forth. Whether he satisfies this claim is another question.

Whereas culturalism in Warwick's view has tended toward vagueness, Marxism has been too simplistic. One prominent school of British Marxists maintains that the old landed aristocracy never did lose its dominance, even during Britain's industrial ascent, and thus what seems an important cultural shift was "no more than a reflection of the continuing control of a certain elite," an answer whose inad-

equacy Warwick makes clear. He is especially good in his analysis of rational-choice theory, with its world of "rational actors" weighing costs and benefits, guided by a principle of "utility maximization" which facilitates a "preference ordering" of their goals. When rational-choice theorists venture into political explanations the result is likely to be of a superficiality almost eerie, as may be inferred from Warwick's summary of one such work: "The basic premise of the thesis is that the individual citizen accords support or legitimacy to a political system if it is rational from his standpoint to do so."

Rational-choice theorists tend either to ignore norms and values or see them as existing simply because it serves the interests of individuals or groups to propagate them, a position, Warwick notes, "not all that dissimilar from the Marxist one." Addressing the British question, a leading rational-choice scholar badly misreads the historical record and argues that the aristocracy sought to acquire the skills of the bourgeoisie, just as the latter did those of the former. Warwick correctly observes that "the landed elite of that period, rather than equipping itself to the fullest possible extent with bourgeois skills to ensure its survival, viewed the acquisition of such skills as a matter of considerable repugnance." According to the principles of rational-choice theory, this behavior must be perceived as nothing less than suicidal. Yet the landed élite and its values survived.

Warwick is thorough in his analyses of the three modes of explanation and their practitioners. Sometimes too thorough, for his approach is so doggedly that of academic social science, so full of cautious formulations followed immediately by qualifications, with constant summaries of scholars' theses including many quotations (within

the text), that the book suffers from prolonged spells of aridity. Still, he has mastered the literature and over the first half of the book deals fairly with each of the three modes. He believes that each has not only weaknesses but also strengths.

But the latter part of the book is less successful, when Warwick offers his own interpretation, which is culturalist but aims to be a "synthesis," a "valid unifying interpretation" which will provide culturalism with "a more substantial foundation" than its hitherto "squishy" underpinning permits. Unfortunately, his aim falls short.

In addressing the question of why British capitalists abandoned industrial values Warwick returns to the argument of the British Marxists whose main theme, as noted above, he had found wanting, but which "makes its most telling point" in linking the reaction against economic liberalism "with a concern over lower-class unrest." The changes wrought by capitalism "were arousing the sleeping lion of discontent," frightening both aristocracy and bourgeoisie. The consequence? "Acquisitiveness began to lose its appeal as the ultimate human motivation." One had anticipated something less familiar after the suggestion that a new synthesis would be forthcoming. But Warwick apparently thinks he does achieve this, and does ground his position more firmly than previous culturalist explanations such as Wiener's, by proceeding to discussion that links "societal types and their associated value complexes with basic human motivations." This draws him into a dubious explanatory enterprise.

He offers "some assumptions about human nature" which he has taken, quite uncritically, from Barrington Moore's book *Injustice* (1978). He is attracted by "a conception of innate human nature," among whose elements "Moore singles out for special notice the

desire for distinction, which he feels is universal." What Moore's "desire for distinction" amounts to is not mere status or prestige but "control over human beings," which is "universally valued" as a "source of distinction for those who possess it." This creates "the need for purposeful human coordination of society," which may be "legitimated more readily" by "hierarchies" than by "markets."

He has drifted into the kind of vapidness he imputed to culturalism. Moreover, why he unquestioningly accepts Barrington Moore's opinions about what constitutes human nature remains obscure. (Incidentally, this reviewer recalls that, in the late sixties and early seventies, Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* [1966] was widely acclaimed and required reading by many professors. Whether Moore may more precisely be called a Marxist or a "neo-Marxist," as Christopher Lasch refers to him in *The True and Only Heaven* [1991], his general orientation has never been in doubt. And whether the high praise of a quarter-century ago, or the more modest estimate now, is a surer valuation of the book's worth, its former fame belies Warwick's depiction of Marxist theory dwelling at that time only on the "lunatic fringe" of academe.)

Warwick's remarks on Moore's view of human nature glide from one careless assumption to another. "Distinction" slips into "control over human beings," and assertions about "social coordination," "stable expectations" and the like are made without substantiation. Why this is regarded as a persuasive explanation for what happened in Britain never becomes clear. "Innate human nature," after all, suggests universal manifestations. In the United States, to cite but one example, "lower-class unrest" also occurred, later in the nineteenth century, in the form of labor radicalism and the Populist movement, and although these certainly got

the attention of American élites, the response of the latter was nothing remotely like a rejection of acquisitive and technological values. Warwick's reflections here do not help him to explain why Britain was ultimately drawn more powerfully by the appeal of "hierarchies" than "markets," for any satisfactory explanation he could offer was already available, to be found within his discussion of British history and culture, and was not advanced by these conjectures. One is led to conclude that Warwick wished to find what he considered a convincing theoretical basis for fulfilling his ambition of rigor in "social science explanation," lacking which he would be left with an argument pretty close to the old culturalism.

What the book offers is a conscientiously researched study which usefully surveys several approaches to social, political, and economic problems. Warwick's effort to go beyond this and provide a unifying interpretation does not come off as well, or contain much that is original. But this is not fatal to his work. He aims for both "analysis" and "synthesis," and does a good job of the former. He also includes a number of relevant observations, such as that the British aristocracy, unlike the French, never completely isolated itself from the rest of society, and that the task of managing an empire greatly influenced the resurgence of the aristocratic ethos. He notes that although twentieth-century Britain has seen "the slow unraveling of the nineteenth-century compact," the very slowness is testimony to the compact's continuing appeal. He believes that "man is a profoundly social animal" who "obeys authority more often than not," and remarks astutely: "Usually unwilling to participate in general strikes, he seldom hesitates to participate in wars, where he has a great deal more to lose."

In fact, Warwick's basic position resembles good culturalist explanations of the past. He seems to have a fairly clear

idea of how and why the British got to where they did. Near the end of the book he says that "the more organic and hierarchical values represented by the aristocracy possessed an appeal unmatched by acquisitive individualism," and adds: "Those values were not created anew; they had been around for a very long time."

A Burkean conservative could hardly have said it better.

Victims on the March

JOHN ATTARIAN

A Nation of Victims: The Decay of the American Character, by Charles J. Sykes, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. xiv + 290 pp. \$22.95.

A MAN WITH A 60-INCH WAIST threatens to sue a McDonald's restaurant, claiming discrimination because its seats cannot accommodate him. Fired for embezzling \$2,000 from the government and then gambling it away, an F.B.I. agent is reinstated after a court rules his flair for gambling a "handicap" protected by law. Such episodes seem so grotesque that only a satirist could invent them, but they are real, part of the national mania for victimism witheringly criticized in Charles J. Sykes's timely book. The quest for victim status and the benefits it confers is absorbing more and more Americans who have collapsed from self-reliant pioneers and yeomen into self-pitying "victims" whining that "it's not my fault." As Sykes observes:

Paradoxically, this don't-blame-me permissiveness is applied only to the self, not to others; it is compatible with an ideological puritanism that is notable for its shrill