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### Review Of "Social Control And Public Intellect: The Legacy Of Edward A. Ross" By S. H. McMahon

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Review

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chotomy is flimsy. Weidman alleges that the issue at the heart of the disagreement between Lashley and Pavlov was whether humans were improvable creatures. The allegation has little or no substance. Weidman says that Lashley's stance against the improvability of mental function derived from his argument that the brain operated as a whole and thus "all of its neurons were involved in all its reactions, and so it had literally no room for improvement" (p. 77), but there is no record of Lashley having made that argument. His principles of equipotentiality and mass action are incorrectly stated; the errors in the description of equipotentiality—"all parts of the brain are equally capable of carrying out all functions" (p. 52)—are especially egregious, as are the persistent characterizations of Lashley's position as a belief in "an equipotential brain" (e.g., p. 53) or in "whole-brain functioning" (p. 15). In short, Weidman's social constructivist account either ignores relevant data or shapes them to fit the theory. The result is a perspective in which one can have little confidence.

DARRYL BRUCE

**Sean H. McMahon.** *Social Control and Public Intellect: The Legacy of Edward A. Ross.* xiv + 199 pp., frontis., app., bibls., index. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1999. \$34.95.

Once a popular and influential sociologist, Edward A. Ross (1866–1951) is the sort of white male many contemporary academics would prefer not to see resurrected. Inordinately proud of his height and long, narrow head, he gloried in his professional triumphs no less than his Nordic ancestry. "It simply amazes me," he wrote his foster mother, "to see how wonderfully successful I am" (p. 11). Recent immigrants, in contrast, were "beaten men of beaten breeds" (p. 110).

It is thus with some courage that Sean McMahon attempts a sympathetic portrait of Ross as "modernist," "public intellectual," and source of the "social control" paradigm that shaped American sociology. Writing intellectual history rather than biography, McMahon organizes his study around five stages of Ross's career: his social activism in the 1890s, which cost him his position at Stanford; his role in the creation of a sociological canon oriented toward psychology; his contribution to the progressive creed of national efficiency; his popular books on "race suicide" and his world travels; and his legacy in historical and sociological writing.

Although claiming to have used "numerous

new sources" (p. 79), McMahon draws primarily on the Ross and Richard T. Ely Papers and on readily accessible published materials. Challenges to earlier studies, including Julius Weinberg's *Edward Alsworth Ross and the Sociology of Progressivism* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1972), are relatively minor and not entirely convincing. McMahon attributes Ross's sympathy for farmers and workers, for example, not to psychological needs but, more straightforwardly, to his rural upbringing. His dismissal at Stanford was the result neither of a personality clash with Mrs. Stanford nor of larger forces threatening academic freedom but of Ross's deliberate violation of an agreement not to take partisan positions outside his area of expertise. Turning public controversy to professional advantage, Ross timed his resignation to coincide with the publication of *Social Control* (1901).

Although McMahon offers some suggestive insights, murky conceptualizations and exaggerated claims mar his overall treatment of Ross's thought and influence. Ross's technocratic view of science may arguably be termed "modernist," although it bears no resemblance to the "aesthetic modernism" with which the term is conventionally associated (see Dorothy Ross, ed., *Modernist Impulses in the Human Sciences, 1870–1930* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994]). Ignoring the nuances of the word and concept, McMahon reduces modernism to a "quest for usable truths" (p. 5) and a "belief in the power of the self" to effect change (p. 75), conflating it with a generalized "pragmatism." McMahon fails to define the term "public intellectual," leaving his reader wondering how Ross differs from a long line of tenured academic radicals and popularizers. Although Ross popularized the term "social control," many others also focused on the problem of socialization, including Charles Horton Cooley, whose rival conception of socialization McMahon does not discuss. And by what measure was Wisconsin's sociology department, where Ross taught after 1906, the "largest" (p. 80) in the United States? Maladroit prose compounds the factual and conceptual problems. Social forces are "omniscient" (presumably "powerful" is intended); the "favorableness of *Social Control*" is the phrase McMahon uses to describe that book's positive reception (pp. 33, 57).

McMahon deserves credit for working through Ross's quirks and prejudices to recover his substantial contribution to academic sociology and to public discourse. But he is neutral to a fault regarding Ross's sometimes vicious eth-

nic stereotyping. Indeed, at times author and subject seem almost to merge—for example, in a matter-of-fact statement that new immigrants “displayed distinct physical differences [and] learned English much more slowly or not at all” (p. 108). One closes this book feeling that a generous-spirited, intellectually ambitious young scholar deserved more rigorous editing.

ROBERT C. BANNISTER

**Mickey C. Smith.** *A Social History of the Minor Tranquilizers: The Quest for Small Comfort in the Age of Anxiety.* vii + 265 pp., illus., figs., tables, bibl., index. 1985. New York/London: Pharmaceutical Products Press, 1991. \$19.95 (paper).

From the time the “minor tranquilizers” (e.g., Librium, Valium, Xanax) were introduced, in the 1950s, and up to the mid 1980s, they were one of the most heavily prescribed classes of drugs in America. Unlike antibiotics or other wonder drugs used to treat physiological disease, the seemingly innocuous tranquilizers could be, and were, used to treat a wide range of somatic and psychological problems. This practice raised many medical, ethical, social, and regulatory questions, and Mickey Smith’s well-written history follows the “therapeutic life cycle” of the minor tranquilizers and the ways in which those questions were addressed. Therapeutic innovation, as Smith shows, is not just scientific discovery; it is deeply embedded in medical and social contexts.

Smith begins by discussing the difficulties inherent in defining and diagnosing anxiety (the primary indication for prescribing tranquilizers). Is anxiety a disease? Are its origins psychological or organic? How can we measure it or the effects of treatment on it? Should various “problems of living” be treated by physicians at all? He follows this discussion with a short section on the discovery of the first minor tranquilizers, then goes on to consider patterns of prescribing and use. The huge commercial success of the drugs prompted early criticism, along with inquiries into why so many physicians prescribed them. What roles, for example, did efficacy, safety, pharmaceutical promotion, patient requests, and gender stereotyping play in these decisions? Smith also looks at the utilization studies, many conducted during the 1970s, to assess whether those millions of prescriptions reflected legitimate treatment or “the doping of America.” A later chapter explores in more detail the medi-

cal literature on tranquilizers and the possible effects of drug advertising on prescribing.

In Chapter 5 Smith examines media coverage of tranquilizers from 1955 to 1980. The popular press at first touted minor tranquilizers as miracle drugs that were also “fun,” labeling them “Happiness Pills,” “Emotional Aspirin,” and (my own favorite) “Don’t-Give-A-Damn Pills.” But a number of writers also worried about the consequences of widespread habitual use of tranquilizers. Some objected to the drugs on moral grounds, others worried about addiction, and still others criticized tranquilizers as “social control” devices. By the 1970s journalists had begun to decry our “overmedicated” society and to vilify physicians and drug manufacturers for encouraging the practices that created it. Smith looks at some of these social criticisms in more detail several chapters later.

Tranquilizers also attracted legislative scrutiny from the late 1950s on. In the book’s final and longest chapter Smith chronicles the congressional hearings focused on minor tranquilizers and shows just how difficult it is to balance the interests of medicine, the public, and the drug industry. Tranquilizer manufacturers were repeatedly accused of false or misleading advertising that suggested (implicitly or explicitly) unproven uses for the drugs and played down possible adverse effects, including addiction. The hearings, with expert witnesses and scientific evidence marshaled on both sides, illustrate above all that traditional medical science was often incapable of justifying treatment decisions or proving the efficacy of the tranquilizers.

Throughout his book, Smith provides a masterly survey of medical, sociological, and popular literature and summarizes key findings in tables and graphs. His history would be a more effective work, however, if it were better organized. The chapters, some only slightly revised from previously published articles, often repeat the same material, and related discussions may appear several chapters apart. This disjointedness is especially marked in Smith’s treatment of physicians’ prescribing practices. More analysis would also be welcome. Smith concludes that the history of minor tranquilizers provides us with a good case study of the cultural lag phenomenon (in which technology outruns society’s ability to deal with it); he hopes we may be able to learn from it as more such drugs are discovered and marketed (e.g., Prozac). He could, however, have set his conclusions in the broader context of the histories of other licit and illicit psychoactive drugs, again using the concept of the therapeutic life cycle. Nonetheless, Smith’s