

1973-06-18a: [LIFE CHANCES] The Sociologists & Change from Traditional to Modern.

As presented by the sociologists, the change from traditional to modern society has a basic resemblance to the way that the succession of life chances will appear to have changed in this book. But the sociologists' presentation has no life to it, and save for serious efforts to penetrate an historical period au fond, as Weber's *Protestantism* (always cited by the sociologists as the way history should be written) and perhaps Smelser's work on the Industrial Revolution (which has some good press), the summary treatments of social change by sociologists almost kills the spirit rather than enlivening it. Such is perhaps always the fate of sociology.

What lacks is the unexpected twists and turns that lie in the details, which give tension to the process as it will be presented in this book. Sociologists tend to render their ideal-types as robots, programmed to do complex things that are finally controlled by a ruling intelligence--i.e., the lairs of sociology. By trying to work in the elements of security and risk that are balanced in any rational life plan, we shall try to see the limitations to being an average person according to a statistical computation. The risks can be specified, not generalized, and so made more human.

The danger in trying to swing too far away from sociological norms, in order to avoid their lifelessness, is to enter into another dangerous field, that of freely imaginative literary description. The temptation to make life-chance debates in the mind of one our ideal-types simulate Hamlet's "to-be-or-not-to-be" is going to be great, and perhaps it will be indulged in from time to time. But as a regular device, even if it could be done with acceptable style, it would soon gall to the spirit. So, between Weber and Shakespeare, we would do best to stay closest to the former.