Book Reviews

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SOCIAL DEVIANCE. By S. Giora Shoham. New York: Halstead Press. Pp. 163. 1976. $13.95.

In this brief and expensive dissertation, S. Giora Shoham, Professor of Law and Criminology at Tel Aviv University, has given us a sometimes obscure, but often illuminating, analysis of the many facets of social deviance from a psycho-sociological perspective. The author attempts a synthesis of multiple perspectives on deviance, ranging from the mystical to the sociological to the existential, with the result that the book is rather difficult to read. Pockets of lucidity are jarringly juxtaposed with seams of abstruse exposition. Also contributing to the unevenness are the differing levels of sophistication the author brings to his analysis; while his discourse on the sociological theories of deviance bears the stamp of a master, his knowledge of psychoanalytic theory is sketchy. Perhaps this book would better be regarded as a pastiche of scholarly insights on a complex subject drawn from a number of disciplines, rather than a synthesis of existing knowledge into a single, coherent frame of reference from which one can approach and hopefully understand the subject.

In his introduction Shoham reviews the sociological schools of thought on deviance from Durkheim through the conflict theorists to Sartre. He discusses the relativity of deviance, pointing out the fact that practically every behavior now regarded as deviant was praised as virtuous in other times, places, and contexts. He provides us with an interesting treatment of the labeling process, but his section on mental disease as social deviance is anchored in the outdated Sullivanian notion that those who suffer from mental illness are not qualitatively different from the rest of us. There is no appreciation here of the growing body of data in support of the catecholamine and dopamine hypotheses which now mount a serious challenge to the concept of functional psychosis.

In Chapter 2 the author discusses the ways in which social norms are transmitted and received as well as the efficacy of such norms in governing conduct. Describing social deviance as "infringement of social norms," he distinguishes between various norms such as those enforced by ostracism as opposed to those enforced by legal sanction. Drawing from Rommetveit's schema, he discusses the transmission of norms as requiring both a statement of the desired behavior and a statement of the consequences for failure to comply. The "most crucial phase of norm transmission is the application of sanctions: punishment for noncompliance, and rewards for compliance." Because sanctions are often inconsistent, overly punitive, or absent, socialization is considerably less effective than it might be. He notes that the excessive number of norms which seem to characterize today's society defies our efforts to master them and causes resulting unwillingness to act. Shoham seems to suggest the currently popular notion that the prevalence of white collar crime has a devastating effect on the willingness of the lower classes to adhere to norms proscribing crimes against the person. However, since the norms proscribing white collar criminal conduct are not nearly so strong, this notion may be only a rationalization employed by those accused of violent crimes. He also cites the

effect of the "fix" and the low rate of detection of offenses as instrumental in limiting the efficacy of the norm sending process. In this connection it should be noted that a recent article in the New York Times suggests that the "clearance rate" for that most fearsome offense (homicide) has dropped from over 90% to 50%. He concludes with a discussion of several factors affecting the degree to which any norm is internalized by the individual; *i.e.*, becomes a part of his own behavioral code.

In his third chapter Shoham constructs a phenomenological model of deviance ("self-concept + value deviance + deviant behavior + social stigma + transcendental convictions → social deviance"). He goes on to analyze each component of the model with an eye toward explaining the contribution of each to the resulting end product, *viz.* acts of social deviance. Particularly interesting is his use of Genet to depict the development of a deviant self concept. He arranges deviant behavior on a continuum from inwardly directed (toward the deviant individual himself) to outwardly directed (toward the group and its social institutions). Again, his description of a chronic, regressed schizophrenic's behavior as a withdrawal from painful reality is oversimplified and does not take into account current concepts of such behavior as biologically determined at least in part. As is the case elsewhere in the book, his review of the sociological explanations of deviant behavior is on more solid ground. At several points in the book the author takes note of the turmoil of adolescence and the increased vulnerability during those years to the assumption of deviant roles: *e.g.*, "maturity is the ability to reconcile the contradictory postulates of culture, and to develop a selective attitude toward various groups. Adolescence, on the other hand, is characterized by a yearning for absolute values and a desire for sharply defined roles." The author's analysis of social stigma as a driving force in initiating and re-enforcing deviant behavior is particularly interesting. He points a finger at us all in our achievement-obsessed culture by underscoring the fact that any can "achieve by branding others derogatorily." He says, "in the last analysis, a criminal, a deviant, or an antisocial person is one who is branded and treated as such by a group or an individual with the power to do so."

In the fourth chapter Shoham undertakes a functional analysis of deviance as a movement away from either an ideal norm (*e.g.*, as set by religious ideologies) or the model behavior of a group. This chapter has as its central thesis man's need for a congruous state of mind. This is best achieved by adhering to the golden mean which prescribes "nothing in excess". Those who deviate from this norm, *i.e.* those guilty of *hubris*, have paid terrible penalties throughout history. The point of view of those who would regard any deviation from the mean as dysfunctional is contrasted with the view of those who see disruption as a necessary phase in the dialectic movement toward an improved state. Psychiatry is delivered a low blow from an advocate of the latter position (Artaud): "a lunatic is a man who preferred to become what is socially understood as mad rather than forfeit a certain superior idea of human honor. A vicious society has invented psychiatry to defend itself from the investigations of certain superior, lucid minds whose intuitive powers were disturbing to it." Finally, the author analyses the phenomenon of culture-conflict (*i.e.*, the clash between two opposing conduct norms) in discussing the genesis of deviant attitudes and the subsequent perpetuation of deviant behavior.

In the fifth chapter the author attempts to provide us with some insights into the causes of social deviance. He sets forth a causal model which takes into account the personality characteristics of the deviant, the social factors raising the probability for deviant behavior, and the dynamic processes linking these two factors. Again, his description of the psychological forces involved in personality formation is wooden and bland. He aptly quotes Freud to illustrate the universal attraction of institutionalized religion as balm for our bruised self-esteem and the uncertainties of our existence. On the other hand, his analysis of the social factors predisposing toward deviant behavior is lucid and compelling. He reviews the effects of the family unit, ecological and economic

factors, culture conflicts, social disorganization, and anomie. In his review of the dynamic processes linking the causative psychological and social factors he contrasts a historical approach with an analysis of situational factors. This latter approach "attempts to explain the deviant act in terms of the criminal-victim relationship" and seems to shed far more light on the matter than our traditional efforts to determine where the individual deviant went wrong. He goes on to analyze theories on deviant sub-culture formation which attempt to explain why those psychologically and socially predisposed first stray.

In the final chapter Professor Shoham seems to come down firmly on the side of the conflict theorists, extolling the value of deviance in all its forms for social progress. He points to those responsible for the lion's share of such progress, the innovators, as prime examples of those regarded as deviant by the rest of us and, as such, earning little more than our bitter condemnation during their lifetimes. He talks of the criminal's many contributions to social order, seeming to suggest that if we didn't have him, we'd have to invent him. His description of the deviant as "the social glue which unites a whole group" epitomizes his view of the utilitarian nature of deviance. As in other chapters, he treads heavily on the thin ice of psychoanalytic metapsychology, shedding little light on the deviant's contribution to our psychological well-being. He concludes with an interesting historical analysis of scapegoating, demonstrating again that the primary contribution he has made in this work is to place the study of social deviance in historical perspective by reviewing the development of various concepts of deviance from the broad vantage point of the sociologist.

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