

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is an attempt to apply the general thesis and framework I first suggested in *The American Ideology* (London, Boston, 1977), and developed further in *Tradition and Innovation* (London, Boston, 1984). Articles and monographs written between the period prior to publication of the first book and the present (1986) have also attempted to formulate and develop this thesis and framework, and occasionally to apply it as well.

The present effort has required me to address some of the most important concerns that bear on men, women and children in advanced industrial societies. I have done so in the belief that while much in current discourse is worthwhile, it needs to be integrated into a framework that will at one and the same time "hold" it, and provide for both consistency and flexibility in its application. Theory and the frameworks that organize and express it must be capable of responding to changes in the structure of reality that made them possible in the first place, while yet being able to maintain a basic structural integrity as a reflection of particular life forms that are not transitory, but that endure for generations, if not centuries.

The problems and issues with which this book is concerned hover uneasily between politics, scholarship, "research", journalism and the commonsense conceptions of everyday life, where many have all-too-often been treated, for better or worse, as the preserve or monopoly of feminism and womens' studies. My effort at theoretical integration, alongside a consistent yet flexible application, should therefore be construed as a determination to recognize these matters as ones in urgent need of an analysis which begins with and in Society itself as a central problematic. From this standpoint, it is consistent with the books and other published materials cited above, in the sense that all constitute an attempt to bring critical, rather than traditional, theory to bear on the analysis of modern and contemporary institutions, practices, ideas and values in advanced industrial societies.

Another reason for seeking theoretical integration in and through a framework which permits its consistent, yet flexible, application to these issues and problems bears on the relation between theory and practice itself, and particularly the role of thought and reflection as an indispensable moment in the effort to realize practical improvements. Far from advocating either integration or consistency and/or flexibility "for their own sake", such a posture on my part points to the need *not* to short-circuit the indispensable tie between thought and reflection, disciplined observation, and the commonsense rationality of daily life that is necessary if improvement is to occur, and if the risk of regression is to be minimized in the process. I shall argue in what follows that it is precisely the

disembodiment of disciplined observation, and the corollary emergence of a conception of "intervention" which relies on others in Society's division of labour, that is responsible for short-circuiting the relationship between these three forms of human being in a collective setting. While this concern is apparent throughout the book, it is addressed as a problem of citizenship and politics in the final chapter, which also summarizes some key aspects of my argument in *Political Management* (Berlin and New York, 1985).

Inspiration for this study, apart from the works cited and the numerous references to others therein, comes from the work of a number of individuals—scholars, researchers, journalists, graduate and undergraduate students, and other citizens—who have written and commented on the institutions, practices, ideas and values that this study addresses, as well as those addressed within it. Of particular importance has been the work of Hannah Arendt, Ivan Illich, Michel Foucault, Mircea Eliade, Mary Douglas, Barbara Ehrenreich, Lloyd De Mause and my friend and colleague John O'Neill, particularly his most recently published book *Five Bodies* (Ithaca, 1985). O'Neill's perspective on and treatment of the body and its phenomenological and social, as well its physiological and organic, constitution is thoroughly complementary to my concern with the institutions and practices that both impinge upon and socially define, often in conflicting ways, its reality.

Wittgenstein counselled the careful student always to seek the sense and meaning of extant institutions and practices before attempting anything else, and this is what I have tried to do off and on throughout this book. Sex and gender, in the event, becomes the key distinction which I use to mobilize and define the range of problems with which I am concerned. This will, I hope, be evident in the parallel concepts which I have produced out of each "side" of this distinction—individualism, civil society (Society) and "civilization" in the case of sex, and bodies, family and culture in the case of gender. Dichotomies and distinctions are not, however, viewed one-dimensionally as "descriptions" of reality in what follows, but rather as ways of addressing a reality which includes any and all claims they may make to descriptive status. Neither should gender and the parallel concepts produced out of it be viewed as regressive and/or nostalgic reversions to "traditional" forms, for reasons which I hope will be apparent throughout the book.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Marion Hayden Pirie* for a careful reading, and for suggestions for improvement that I could not ignore. John O'Neill has also contributed to the study with his incisive comments, as well as in the other ways indicated above. I am grateful to both of them, and to numerous others, particularly graduate students, even though I am solely responsible for what follows.

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The manuscript was typed with speed, accuracy and astonishing good will—given her other duties and responsibilities—by Mrs. Victoria Rambert-Perot. I am particularly appreciative of her efforts because manuscript typing is not supposed to be at the top of her list of priorities but always seemed to be. Finally, I want to thank McLaughlin College, as always, for the best possible working conditions, and for support of every conceivable kind.

November 1986.

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