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Paul van Seters (ed.)

The Anthem Companion to Philip Selznick. London; New York: Anthem Press, 2021. ISBN-13: 978-1-78527-825-9 (Hbk).

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Several of the towering figures of American sociology in the first decades after the Second World War have in the last years become the subject matter of intense biographical contextualization and serious scholarly debate. Robert Bellah, the great sociologist of religion, is a case in point, as is his long-time Berkeley colleague Philip Selznick, one of the crucial contributors to the sociology of law and organization. In the latter case it may seem difficult to go beyond the magisterial monograph on him published by the Australian legal theorist Martin Krygier in 2012 (see also my review: Joas, 2015). But the present collection makes quite a successful attempt to re-evaluate Selznick's work in the light of changes—both in society and in the social sciences—that have occurred after the publication of Selznick's major works or after Krygier's study.

The uninitiated should perhaps begin studying this volume with the two “bookends,” namely chapters 1 and 10. They will encounter a young New York leftist in the late 1930s and early 1940s with a Jewish (non-religious) background, struggling to develop a non-Marxist form of democratic socialism—in close connection with friends whose list reads like a “Who-is-who?” of postwar sociology (Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Alvin Gouldner, among them). As the author of chapter 1 and editor of the volume, the Dutch legal scholar Paul van Seters (p. 8), convincingly argues, however, “the most important source of inspiration and guidance for Selznick personally and for his work in sociology” was none other than the great pragmatist philosopher and public intellectual John Dewey. It was from Dewey that Selznick derived his life-long interest in the combination of a naturalistic understanding of the human mind with a fervent plea for democratic values and a sober understanding of the conditions for their emergence and stability. Krygier coined the term “Hobbesian idealism” for Selznick, to grasp a seemingly paradoxical combination of ambitious ideals with a realism of power; Selznick's own self-characterization was “humanistic naturalism.” This combination was also constitutive for Selznick's—and Bellah's—understanding of the role of the social sciences in the public sphere, and in a particularly illuminating passage Van Seters (pp. 16–18) contrasts their project with Michael Burawoy's contemporary “public sociology.” Bellah's and Selznick's ambition was certainly less restricted to the immediate present

and more sophisticated with regard to the complex interplay of fact and value, empirical study and philosophical reflection.

Given the great importance of Dewey for Selznick it makes sense that Kenneth Winston (pp. 23–43) brings them into dialogue in chapter 2 of the volume. This is all the more welcome since the historiography of disciplines often makes crucial interdisciplinary interactions invisible. In books on the history of pragmatism as a philosophy, Selznick's name does not appear, although Winston demonstrates not only the continuities, but also the departures of Selznick from Dewey's political theory. They are mostly two. On the one hand "in taming the corporate exercise of power, Selznick gives more importance to law than to democracy. His focus is on what we could call constitutional ideals in a well-ordered society"—whereas Dewey "kept politics, not law, at the center of his analysis" (p. 32). On the other hand, Selznick clearly went beyond Dewey's somewhat idealized image of science and scientists and his predilection for social engineering. This is not to say that Dewey had not been aware of the dangers of an expertocracy, but that we have to go further than he and even Selznick did in becoming aware of the sources of bias among experts.

Five of the chapters, all written by highly competent authors, deal with Selznick's main writings in the sociology of law and organizations. Calvin Morrill (p. 45) demonstrates the theoretical unity of Selznick's views on organizations and institutions. Lauren Edelman (p. 67) focuses on Selznick's 1969 book *Law, Society, and Industrial Justice*, reconsidering its argument in the light of the so-called "new institutionalism" and offering a plea "for a rapprochement between the old and new institutionalisms in the study of organizations, institutions, and law." Sanne Taekema (p. 111) discusses the "rule of law" as an ideal on the one hand, a "baseline" on the other, comparing Selznick with Lon Fuller and offering an interesting illustration for what happens when the legal system shows a "complete lack of responsiveness to the needs of a part of the citizenry that depends on government support"—a scandal that rocked the Netherlands in the last years and that "shows, in line with Selznick's ideas, that disregard of the effects of rule application can pervert the observance of baseline rule of law requirements" (p. 124). Bryan Turner (p. 129) connects Selznick's sociology of law with his own long-standing interests in democratic theory and touches upon Selznick's spectacular sociological re-evaluation of the natural law tradition, a tradition that did not have a high reputation when Selznick (1961) published his classic piece. Much more could, of course, be said on this specific aspect of Selznick's work (see Lacey, 2002).

The most intriguing piece for me in this middle section of the volume is the essay by Ruth Dukes and the prominent German sociologist Wolfgang Streeck (pp. 91–110), "Post-Industrial Justice? Normativity and Empiricism in a Changing World of Work." While they (p. 91) call the book *Law, Society, and Industrial Justice* "postwar American sociology at its best," their main interest is to use it as a foil that allows them to make the fundamental changes visible that have occurred since "the shareholder value revolution of the 1980s and the subsequent fissuring and fracturing of postwar systems of labor law and industrial relations." The question that cannot be avoided clearly is whether empirically Selznick's world with the assumption of an ongoing civilizing process in the direction of industrial democracy and citizenship has completely

disappeared so that his work as a reflection of it is only of historical interest today, or whether it can inspire contemporary attempts “to seek out latent values in currently existing social arrangements” (p. 92) that might develop, despite all obstacles, in the direction of industrial justice. Based on ethnographic studies of occupational communities they (p. 92) argue that “even under the precarious working conditions characteristic of the postindustrial economy, social identities and ideas of social justice form around work and employment relations” and that it remains a primary task for law to “facilitate the transformation of informal social norms into formally binding legal rules.” While this chapter can be criticized—as Krygier (p. 207) does in chapter 10—for almost identifying Selznick’s theory with that of Talcott Parsons, it certainly is an important creative re-evaluation of a part of Selznick’s work.

The following chapters are less focused on the sociology of law and organization and more on Selznick’s “communitarian thinking.” Among the sociologists, Selznick certainly was the most important contributor to that intellectual movement next to Amitai Etzioni. Roger Cotterrell (p. 149) discusses Selznick’s understanding of culture and community, contrasting it with Durkheim’s views that have been canonized in parts of the sociological discipline and opening up a series of questions for which a dialogue with parallel philosophical debates would be desirable. The volume does not contain a serious study of Selznick’s late magnum opus, *The Moral Commonwealth*. The symposium from an “Author Meets Critics” session of the American Sociological Association in 1993 has the advantage of containing a response from Selznick in which he defends himself quite forcefully against frequent misunderstandings. But it is exactly because of the misunderstandings that this symposium cannot compensate for the deficiency that this collection thus leaves an important part of Selznick’s lifework more or less without a serious re-evaluation.

The final chapter, as already mentioned, is a particularly well-written attempt by Martin Krygier (p. 192) to characterize Selznick’s style of thinking, his “distinctive combination of explanatory theory, empirical research, philosophical awareness, and normative attention and engagement.” Based on his earlier biography and on taped interviews with Selznick he (p. 192) characterizes the “ecumenical sensibility” of the great sociologist with an emphasis on the difficult position Selznick had between disciplines, especially between sociology, law, and philosophy. Krygier (p. 194) is right in emphasizing that Selznick never was an advocate of “undisciplined” thinking and that his openness to philosophy and legal theory courted suspicion from other sociologists without being “balanced by a welcome embrace from those in other disciplines, whose own writings and traditions he drew upon, and to which he had much to contribute.” Selznick remained a sociologist to the core, but tried to make his discipline useful for the solution of philosophical problems like the balance between primary and secondary moral obligations or the relationship between the empirical study of values and their re-interpretation in changing circumstances. Krygier (p. 198) even rightly mentions that Selznick felt intellectual affinity with Hilary Putnam’s philosophical work—without, however, elaborating this important point.

In sum, this useful collection is a welcome addition to the literature on a great scholar who paved a way from pragmatism to sociology that has not been taken by many. It

remains blocked as long as the disciplinary separations prevent us from seeing how creative the achievements of this scholar have been.

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