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A CHICAGO SCHOOL SYMPOSIUM ON EDWARD A. ROSS

Edward Alsworth Ross in Chicago

Michael R. Hill, EDITOR

THE NAMES “Edward A. Ross” and “Chicago sociology” are not usually linked today in sociological accounts of the discipline, but the connections are nonetheless tangible. Ross’s work at Stanford, Nebraska, and Wisconsin is, perhaps, better known (Hertzler 1951; Hill forthcoming; Hinkle 1980; Howard 1988; Keith 1988; Weinberg 1972) and has overshadowed Ross’ ties to Chicago. The “symposium” presented below in this issue of **SOCIOLOGICAL ORIGINS** celebrates Ross’ place in Chicago sociology.

The record shows that Ross taught briefly in 1896 as a Visiting Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, lectured informally to the University of Chicago Sociological Club, and served as an Advisory Editor of the *American Journal of Sociology* (from 1895 onward) at the invitation of Albion W. Small. Further, Ross frequented Hull-House, center of the active and influential women’s network of Chicago sociology (Deegan 1988: 12), and lectured at the Chicago City Club. A host of prominent Chicago sociologists, faculty as well as former University of Chicago students, including Emory S. Bogardus (1923), Earl S. Johnson (1933), Robert Park (1928), E.B. Reuter (1938), Albion W. Small (1904, 1905, 1908, 1920), and George E. Vincent (1909), reviewed Ross’ books in the influential pages of the *American Journal of Sociology*.

Edward Alsworth Ross was no stranger to Chicago sociology. He enjoyed his Chicago connections and the opportunity to teach at the University of Chicago in the summer of 1896, while on leave from his regular post at Stanford University. He recalled:

In October, 1895, Small, head of the sociology department in the University of Chicago, having heard of my *Social Control* project from Ward, invited me to contribute a series of papers to the *American Journal of Sociology*, so for six years I worked exclusively in the field of social psychology. Moreover, I became an “advisory editor” of the *Journal*. In 1896 I taught two courses in the second half of the summer quarter at the University of Chicago. Small’s letters to Ward were just out; on August 25, 1896, he wrote:

“Ross is making a strong impression on the students here this summer.” (Ross 1936: 57).

Ross related the details of his teaching during the summer term of 1896 in a letter, penned at the University of Chicago on September 3, 1896, to Lester Ward (Stern 1938:398-99).

. . . Your letter reached me about the time I was all used up by the effort to work hard during the hot spell. I came on to Chicago a week ahead with my course on Social Psychology still unorganized. In my getting it up I had to read a lot of very difficult French—Tarde, Durkheim, Le Bon *et al.*, and as the time was short I had to read them very fast. A week of this resulted in a collapse. During the first week of my lectures, August 12 to August 17, I could not work more than an hour a day in preparation of my two daily lectures 6 times a week. The purchase of a bicycle and plenty of rest in the parks braced me up rapidly, however, and last week I began to feel like myself

. . . I am astonished and delighted to find that I can completely dominate them [the students] with my Social Control. I carried them with me and instead of opposing or carping they continually bring up examples to confirm my point of view. I find every time I go over Social Control less and less that I can modify. With some parts of it I am getting pretty well satisfied. I am pleasantly disappointed at my course in Social Psychology. Although I had never worked it up before and had very little idea of how the thing would work out, it is proving as successful as the other and draws a number of visitors. It is, I think, the most interesting department of Static Sociology. I began with a study of imitation and suggestibility in animals, in children, in insane, in hypnotized subjects. Then studied in order the mob, the mob mood, the craze, the fad, fashion, conventionality, discussion, public opinion, custom, tradition. I have yet to examine the social type, education transmission etc.

Ross’ energy, dedication, integrity and enthusiasm were undoubtedly contagious. It is no wonder that he, along with Ward, Small, and others, was a motive force in the founding and rapid expansion of American sociology.

Albion Small, Chairman of the Department of Sociology and powerful editor of *The American Journal of Sociology*, wrote frequently and forthrightly in *AJS* on Ross' work. For example, Small (1905a: 129) surmised that Ross' *Foundations of Sociology* was not as impressive as *Social Control*, "It would have been a miracle . . . to follow it up so soon with another equally original book," yet found much to admire. "In my judgment, Professor Ross is as hot on the scent of the next important results in sociology as any of the men to whom we are looking for additions to knowledge" (Small 1905a: 129). As to Ross' changing and tentative "Map of the Sociological Field," Small (1905a: 131) concluded, "we can have no doubt that the frontier of discovery will be securely advanced by using this plan as a base of operations."

When Émile Durkheim (1905) criticized Ross (1903-1904) for having failed to clearly explicate the issues confronting present-day sociology, Small (1905b) quickly jumped to Ross' defense. Small suggested that Durkheim confused the tense of Ross' title, "Moot Points in Sociology," with its forward-looking intent. "We cordially recommend to our worthy friends of *L'Année sociologique* . . . that they attentively watch M. Ross, for it is not impossible that degrees of othertimeliness may presently be measured from his meridian" (Small 1905b: 133).

Albion Small (1908: 566) was clearly favorable toward Ross' *Sin and Society*, noting, "for competent persons, who are seriously interested in discerning the signs of the times, this book will perform the service of a high-power magnifying glass." Critically, Small suggested that Theodore Roosevelt's letter, which serves as the book's foreword, was not helpful: "The weakest passage in the book is from the pen of the President of the United States," but muses that Ross was not positioned to refuse such a powerful endorsement. "Of course it would have been indecorous for Professor Ross to look this gift horse in the mouth. No one will accuse him, however, of the confusion which the President's compromising commendation contains" (Small 1908: 568).¹

Small's reviews—and those of other Chicago school sociologists—offer informative insights on Ross' work. Indeed, there is much to learn from published sources concerning Ross' sociological ideas and their evaluation and extension by his colleagues and students. Further, however, there is yet more to assimilate from a closer look at unpublished materials and archival documents. The Edward A. Ross Papers at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin provide an enormous resource that is largely

¹ Interestingly, it is precisely Roosevelt's letter that draws part of the fire from Herman and Julia Schwendinger (1974) in their subsequent critique of Ross.

untapped by disciplinary historians. A comprehensive and appreciate account of Ross' sociological life is still to be written, Weinberg (1972) and Hinkle (1980) notwithstanding. In addition to archival resources, the theses and dissertations written by graduate students in the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago provide an additional source of insight on Ross' intellectual role—and the “symposium” at hand relies heavily on these previously unpublished writings.

The present “symposium” is introduced by Ross' useful statement in the *Psychological Bulletin* concerning the field of social psychology. The following articles, by some of the better-known lights in the Chicago intellectual pantheon, clearly document the fact that Ross enjoyed considerable attention at Chicago, and was an obligatory point of departure for subsequent developments in the field of social psychology. George Herbert Mead's appreciative review of *Sin and Society* is an especially shrewd and delightful analysis. Eyer Newton Simpson, Herbert Blumer, and Ethel Shanas exemplify the iterative and often critical handing of Ross' ideas from teachers to students in the process of writing graduate theses and dissertations. The “symposium” concludes with Ross' lively appraisal of the discipline of sociology in 1936. These remarks were, appropriately, presented to a Chicago audience of sociologists at a dinner meeting of Pi Gamma Mu, a sociology honor society, at the Palmer House hotel.

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