

BOOK REVIEWS

Contemporary Social Problems and Issues: Focus on the Philippines, by Custodiosa Ancheta Sanchez and Fe A. Barbado Agpaoa. Manila: National Book Store, 1979, 210 pp.

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According to the blurb on its cover, this volume takes a "sociological approach" to the topic of Philippine social problems. For their part, the authors state that the book was "deliberately designed to convey thoughts with the least possible interference from technical language or forms." The bad news for those of us who are still waiting for good Philippine-based sociology texts is that neither of these two worthy objectives is very well met by *Contemporary Social Problems and Issues*.

How, in fact, does the book fail to present the sociological view of social problems? Let me count the ways. First, it is largely atheoretical; as a result, purely technical and legal solutions to the various problems discussed in the text are stressed. Second, the *structural* underpinnings of social problems are largely ignored, leading on the one hand to a sort of psychological reductionism, and on the

other to an unfortunate tendency to equate social problems with deviance. Thus the reader is treated at various points in the book to discussions of the psychological problems of unwed mothers, the "personality traits of a drug abuser," the "mental-emotional symptoms of alcoholism," and the like, while the initial discussion of social problems as a field of study makes the grievous error of affirming that "*all* social problems turn out to be problems of personal and social controls" (emphasis mine). Poverty and exploitation, culturally-based norms which encourage high fertility, covert support for the prostitution industry by government and business leaders — all such topics are beyond the pale in *Contemporary Social Problems and Issues* since they do not fit easily into the book's individualistic viewpoint.

A third problem is an apparent middle-class squeamishness on the part of the authors.

Slums are populated by "economic and social failures," prostitutes eventually come to "look like witches," and "a mendicant does not realize that begging takes away his dignity." In a similar vein, prostitution and divorce are viewed, respectively, as "much more serious" and "monumental" social problems, while nothing is said of white collar crime, government repression, unjust treatment of the tribal minorities, the tenancy problem, or the like. The general impact of this orientation is to identify the locus of contemporary social problems as lying among poor persons and deviants, without simultaneously showing the connections which may exist between these problems and the more affluent and respectable members of the community.

An indication of the book's non-sociological emphasis can be obtained from an examination of the chapter bibliographies. Few reputable social science journals are cited, especially those which are published in the Philippines. *Philippine Sociological Review* is footnoted only once (a 1963 article by the psychologist Jaime Bulatao), while such periodicals as *Reader's Digest*, *Home Life*

Magazine, *Plain Truth*, and *Mod* are each cited more frequently.

Nor is the book as clear an introduction to the beginning student as could have been hoped. Numerous undigested "facts" are presented in the text, along with a number of example-less (i.e., confusing) definitions and occasional lapses into only faintly comprehensible "sociologese." And if the population chapter — the content of which happens to fall within this reviewer's field of competence — is any indication, the book appears to contain a number of errors, both of commission and of omission.

In short, *Contemporary Social Problems and Issues* has a number of serious drawbacks which tend to offset the advantages posed by its ease of availability and low price. Used with discretion, and in conjunction with additional readings of a more sociological character, *Contemporary Social Problems and Issues* can be of limited help, perhaps, for social problems courses. It is not recommended, however, that the book be used as the major — and certainly not as the sole — text for such courses.