Alexander presents what he describes as a *theoretical* manuscript that introduces a new macro-sociological model of structure and process to our understanding of societies, spheres and strains. This is done through an explication of the process of 'socialization' which he illustrates through high-profile case studies. Although he begins by reminding the reader of the processes of modern capitalist economic systems, the focus of the book's concerns is not with capitalism itself, but with the underlying concept that the marketplace *is* society. Alexander counters this claim in underlining how losses to markets not only impact creditors but also civil societies. It is prescient that in a time of global crisis amid the Covid-19 pandemic, reports in the USA suggests that economic impact is of greater priority than any health or social care one (BBC News, 20/04/20). As such, this book is timely in its release.

The book therefore attempts to theorise the boundaries and challenges of balancing the two, often competing, spheres of economic and civil societies and structures. It utilises recent social crises around Church paedophilia (Chapter 4), the global financial crisis of 2008 (Chapter 5), mobile phone hacking (Chapter 6) and the #MeToo movement (Chapter 7) to illustrate how intra-institutional strains impact upon wider society at large. He asks "how do endemic, ongoing institutional strains suddenly burst their sphere-specific boundaries and become explosive scandals in society at large?" (p3) His answer is that social problems do not cause such disruptions themselves but that problems become crises when they move *beyond* their own sphere and endanger society at large. He calls this broader endangerment and its resultant effects 'societalization'.

In diligently researched case studies, Alexander takes the reader through a sequential process that begins with a hypothetical Time T_1, a period of perceived stability between civil and non-civil spheres, with imagined reciprocity, and on through a series of disruptive and fractious time periods to return once again to relative stability at T_5. Despite existing intra-sphere strains at T_1, Societalization does not occur until T_2, triggered through a 'code switch' that moves public attention from institutional to civil focus. The result is outrage, fear and alarm, followed by regulatory intervention and a 'war between spheres' as the targets of outrage respond in kind. Reflecting upon this process; from stability, through outrage, back to stability once more, and a re-imagining of a once overwhelming social crisis as, subsequently, an historic episode, conjures up notions of folk devils and moral panics (Cohen, 1972).

Through this sequential process, contextualised and visualised in his use of contemporary case study examples, Alexander demonstrates to the reader how something previously perceived as acceptable and normal is now viewed as pathological, morally polluted and socially disruptive. The argument here is that it is not social strain itself that causes societalization but how such strains are understood. Societalization, he says, is about a series of performances and counter performances by motivated parties, who he describes as 'birds of prey... itching to come in for the kill" (p12). Audiences are primed to be receptive to these civil performances because Alexander is convinced of their adherence to the discourse of civil society, a concept that is sacred and whose ideals should be protected. If they succeed, journalists and prosecutors become legendary heroes, exemplifying truth and justice. The narratives of folk and 'cult heroes' presented here conceptualise this sense of 'giant killing', of David and Goliath battles, evoking sacrality and iconography.

There is a surprising acknowledgement that socialitalization does not always emerge from these efforts at outrage at T_2. In Chapter 3 the author admits that the process of socialization in its

idealised sequence is more of an exception than the rule. He posits that elements of marginalisation and polarisation restrict the ideal environment conditions needed for societalization to occur, reasoning that audiences need to feel a shared sense of cultural meaning or conditions for the code switching that triggers societalization. With regards to the #MeToo movement, for example, he states that women's suffering could not be societalised previously because women were marginalised within the home. The contention that women would have been allowed to work outside the home had they been able to show their strength (p74) exposes an over-reliance on constructions of white feminism however. Indeed, one cannot help but notice that the cases presented share more than just societalization in common: they are demonstrative of the actions of powerful men in powerful positions. Perhaps exposing misogyny is more of a precursor for outrage.

Ultimately Alexander attempts to conceptualise the shifting status of social problems in analytic terms; as a systemic, macro-sociological process. He contends that steady states give way, not from institutional strains but from collective representation leveraged from the institution outside, triggered by a shared moral outrage. Even within a steady state, the civil sphere remains restless however, and the reader is left feeling not entirely sure why.

References:

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