

*Authority*. By Richard Sennett. New York: Vintage Books, 1981. Pp. 206. \$4.95.

John H. Schaar

*University of California, Santa Cruz*

Richard Sennett describes *Authority* as "the first of four related essays on the emotional bonds of modern society" (p. 3). The other three will treat solitude, fraternity, and ritual.

We all have some intuitive sense of what "an authority" is: Sennett asks us to imagine a Monteux or a Toscanini conducting a symphony orchestra. The qualities possessed by such authorities are "assurance, superior judgment, the ability to impose discipline, the capacity to inspire . . . both fear and awe" (pp. 17-18). Beyond such obvious cases, the difficulties of definition begin, difficulties rooted in understanding the kind of strength on which authority is based. When we leave orchestra conductors and go to parents and bosses and politicians, then we are no longer sure that the strengths which give these figures authority are in the service of any ideal other than domination.

And that is Sennett's theme. He is convinced that "the dilemma of authority in our time . . . is that *we feel attracted to strong figures we do not believe to be legitimate*" (p. 26), figures who will use their hold over people for selfish and destructive ends.

Sennett then analyzes two characteristic modes of modern authority, paternalism and "autonomous" authority. The first claims to care for the persons subject to it, but in fact its professions of nurturance are revealed as hollow whenever the interests of the authority clash with those of the subjects. The second professes no care for the subjects at all but claims only to aid them in advancing their own interests while, of course, still keeping power and exercising control. The first is false care, the second no care. Both bewilder and deprive their victims. Both also make it extremely difficult for the subjects to see the falsity of the authority's claims, thus making liberating responses unlikely.

About half of Sennett's work is devoted to an analysis of these malignant bonds of authority, and here, I think, are found the strength and richness of the book. The author moves with easy assurance between the private and the public, the psychological and the sociological, the historical and the contemporary. The result is as enlightening a treatment of its topics as any known to me. Sennett is particularly good at showing how in our very efforts to reject paternalistic and autonomous authorities of the modern kind we end up tied even more closely, trapped even more tightly, by that which we struggle to negate.

Then, with some help from personal case studies and the writings of Hegel on master and bondsman, Sennett asks how we might begin to make authority less malignant and more nurturing, less concealed and more "legible and visible" (p. 168). He proposes five methods for "disrupting the

chain of command," for doing something to right the imbalance of will between those who command and those who obey. In summary form, the five are: require authorities to identify themselves by name and speak in the active voice; engage authorities in open discourse about the categories they use in making and applying rules; argue for the legitimacy of a variety of obedient responses to directives; practice role exchange; and permit subjects to make open, direct claims for nurturance to their authorities. Sennett proposes these techniques for rattling the cages of large-scale authority because, he argues, they are the methods that work on the small scale, in the personal and intimate settings where one struggles to understand, to expose, and to overcome illegitimate authority.

The book has many virtues. It is lucid and thoughtful. Sennett moves with assurance through modern social theory. No wild calls for total transformation are made, but neither does the author wallow in cynicism and passivity. The scholarship is both broad and solid and always fair-minded.

And yet I must say that the book seems to me off center. Are paternalistic and autonomous authority really the typical, characteristic forms and structures in which malignant authority appears in modern society? What about the legions of technical and scientific experts who authoritatively set so much of the direction and content of modern life with their canon of efficiency and their subservience to profit and power? What about the huge military, police, and spy forces which claim to defend us against our enemies, open and hidden? What about the apparatus of the "helping professions," with their claims to manage larger and larger groups of people as deviants and problems? The idols of the mass entertainment world? And would not a rightly focused discussion of paternalistic authority deal not with George Pullman and his company town but with, say, the politicians and trade union leaders who claim to care and speak for the workers and the poor, or with some of the more strident and self-righteous leaders of the Moral Majority?

Had the book dealt with *these* false authorities it would have come closer to the center of the problems of malignant authority than it has. And at that center, thought must address political, economic, and moral questions the emerge only in blurred shapes and at the periphery of this book.

*Varieties of Civil Religion.* By Robert N. Bellah and Phillip E. Hammond. New York: Harper & Row, 1980. Pp. xv+208. \$14.95.

Roland Robertson  
*University of Pittsburgh*

*Varieties of Civil Religion* consists of five independently written chapters on civil religion by each of the authors, Robert Bellah and Phillip Hammond. The essays focus on America: comparisons of Japan and America, on the one hand, and of Mexico and America, on the other; new religious