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Bibliography. Book review

Charles H. Cooley: bases para una teoría comunicativa de lo social

Esteban López-Escobar

Published by EUNSA, Pamplona, 2022, 370 pp.

A doctoral thesis usually marks the beginning of an academic career. Therefore, it may come as a surprise that a well-known professor would choose to conclude his career by undertaking this initial academic exercise. However, it is entirely consistent for a professor like Esteban, whose role as a mentor and thesis supervisor has been one of his most widely recognized intellectual contributions. Under his guidance, a significant number of prominent scholars have been trained.

As one delves into the book, the first thing that becomes apparent is the tremendous amount of work behind it. The care with which ideas are presented, the meticulous use of sources, the quality of the writing—everything contributes to the creation of an exquisite work. Without a doubt, the author has skillfully combined his vast experience into a cornucopia of style and expertise, making this text an exemplary model of an outstanding doctoral thesis.

As he explains in the introduction, this work is part of his own intellectual journey, and of the endeavor he has undertaken and developed throughout his career. He understood early on, with remarkable foresight, that in order to build a science of communication, it was necessary to place communication theory at the center of the field, so that it could serve as the foundation for other disciplinary approaches. He believed that, in this way, it would be possible to achieve a coherent and focused development, preventing the vitality of our field from dissolving into nothingness—like a frenzied rider galloping wildly in all directions (pp. 20–21).

His deepening engagement with the subject also led him to the conviction that communication theory should serve as the foundation for social science, since communication is, in fact, the basic constitutive element of society. Therefore, what needed to be developed was, in his terms, a communicative theory of the social.

This intellectual pursuit led him to investigate the early stages of social science. Among other lines of inquiry, he examined the Chicago School and its authors, as well as phenomenological social constructionism, ultimately engaging with the work of Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929). In the American scholar, he identified pioneering ideas that placed communication at the core of society—as the essential condition for all that is social (p. 250).

Cooley carried out his entire academic career in connection with the University of Michigan. Known for concepts such as the looking-glass self and primary groups, his initial intellectual pursuit was communication. Despite this, few studies highlight his theoretical contributions to the field of communication—and it is precisely here that one of the major contributions of this work lies.

Structurally, the book is divided into two main parts. The first explores Cooley's life and personality. The second addresses his intellectual influences, his academic relationships, his approach to communication, and the development of his thought. The book opens with a rich



introduction in which Professor López-Escobar recounts his own intellectual journey and presents the work. The conclusions, in the form of an epilogue, bring the second part to a close.

The text is complemented by a bibliographic essay that reviews Cooley's writings as well as works related to him and his context that the author has employed in carrying out the study. Special attention is given to the use of the diaries Cooley kept throughout his life. This bibliographic essay demonstrates the high level of source management: the most comprehensive compilation of Cooley's publications to date.

The author presents Cooley in a way that shows how his person and ideas are closely intertwined, particularly in the areas of communication, organic theory, the theory of the looking-glass self, primary groups, public opinion, and democracy. He frames Cooley's thought as key to understanding the need to develop a communicative theory of the social, rather than building a sociology of communication.

The book reveals the intellectual influences Cooley received, initially from Ralph Waldo Emerson, later from Albert Schäffle—especially evident in his doctoral thesis—and subsequently from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. The work points out that European influences on Cooley—who spent three periods of time in Europe—are more substantial than previously recognized by scholars.

Also of great interest is the interpretation regarding Cooley's connection to the Chicago School. After analyzing his relationships with John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, the author presents evidence showing that Cooley was not part of the Chicago School. Although the author tries from the outset to position himself "without polemical intent" on the matter, he is very clear about what he ultimately labels an "academic legend." To justify this claim, he reviews the works of major contemporary authors, highlighting how they assume this connection out of mere tradition, without having critically examined it.

In this review of Cooley's relations with Chicago School authors, the pioneering nature of Cooley's thought becomes even more evident and is duly emphasized. He was the first to develop an understanding of communication as a central element of the social well before John Dewey.

Professor López-Escobar has always been a great source of inspiration: all his works are peppered with stimulating ideas. With this book, he reminds us that wisdom remains the noble aspiration of a scholar and that it is within reach. But achieving it is a lifelong task... May he rest in peace.