

Morris Ginsberg 1889–1970

MUCH OF MORRIS GINSBERG'S EARLY LIFE remains unknown, for he refused to record his memories and could be got to talk about his youth only in snatches. The following account is derived from personal knowledge as a former student and colleague at the London School of Economics, supplemented by information in the School's archives and by the published and unpublished recollections of other former students and colleagues.¹

Morris Ginsberg was born on May 14 1889, the son (but not the only child—a sister is known to have survived him) of Meyer Ginsberg, tobacco manufacturer in one of the smaller Lithuanian Jewish communities of the Russian empire. His mother tongue was Yiddish and he was educated as a Talmudic scholar in classical Hebrew. He remained entirely Yiddish speaking until he came to this country at about the age of 17. He earned his living in the business of relatives in Manchester whilst preparing himself for entry to London University. He mastered English readily enough, but mathematics was another matter. The subject had no place at all in his early education and he later declared that had never in his life worked so hard as for the mathematics papers of the London University Matriculation examination. He entered University College London in 1910 to read for a degree in Philosophy, with a modest but indispensable scholarship for which he more than once in later years expressed his profound gratitude. His first acquaintance with English society had been, he recalled, through a Hebrew translation of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (which, he insisted, read better in Hebrew). He

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¹ Obituary notices by Professors T. H. Marshall and D. G. MacRae in the *British Journal of Sociology*, December 1970 and in *The Times* newspaper of 1 and 14 September 1970 (unsigned); entries in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (A. H. Halsey) and the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (unsigned); also contributions to *A Memorial Volume for Morris Ginsberg*, ed. R. Fletcher (1974).



M. GINSBERG

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now, in 1910 at the age of 21, embarked on a transforming life-long career in British academia.

His Jewish foundations were overlaid but never suppressed. He never lost his Yiddish or his classical Hebrew (which enabled him to cope with the modern Israeli version). His style of life ceased to reflect the ritualised Judaism in which he was reared, but he was never alienated from Judaism. All religion was to him a sociological mystery and he sought within it the rational and the ethical. He and his wife Ethel (née Street), whom he married in 1931, brought up their daughter by informal adoption in the Jewish faith as practised by the unorthodox. He was actively interested in Jewish problems and was associated with the World Jewish Congress. His substantial and learned essays on *Anti-Semitism* and *The Jewish Problem* were published by the World Jewish Congress in 1944; and in 1956 he delivered the Noah Barou Memorial Lecture for the Congress: *The Jewish People Today. A Survey*. He co-edited, with the anthropologist Maurice Freedman, the *Jewish Journal of Sociology* founded in 1959, and contributed articles and reviews including, in the first issue, an essay 'On Prejudice', which he had delivered as a lecture in a memorial series for Jacques Cohen, *Über Vorurteile*, organised by Max Horkheimer.

Ginsberg was driven intellectually and emotionally to a belief in conquering rationality and the unity of mankind grounded in interconnect-edness, interdependence and moral convergence. But he was acutely aware of anti-semitism, endemic even in liberal England. He once remarked that his seniors at University College had 'treated him very fairly'—with the implicit rider 'despite my being a Jew'. Faced with the horrors of the Holocaust he evinced a characteristically Jewish *Weltschmerz*: a quiet sadness and an instinct for the worst outcome of events. T. H. Marshall recalled: 'Anyone who heard him deliver his Hobhouse Memorial Lecture on "The Unity of Mankind" will remember what a moving experience it was to listen to those closing passages, even though the nearest he got to an explicit statement of faith and hope was in the sentence: "Great as are the obstacles to human unity and deep-seated as are the antagonisms between men, we can find no justification in sociology for an attitude of fatalistic pessimism."' This was in 1949. By 1956 he was writing: 'In reviewing the development of ethical theories we cannot help being overcome by a certain feeling of despondency. The advances seem so small when viewed in relation to the terrifying problems facing mankind.' He wondered: 'Has there been a failure of ethical insight? Or is it the lack of agreement about what I have called the middle principles of morals, combined with the growing scale and complexity of the problems and our ignorance of the forces at work, that is the source of our failure? Or is it that knowledge is not enough, that evil is not entirely due to ignorance?' Despondent he

was, but not despairing. 'The grounds of hope remain. The problems facing humanity are of old standing. But they undergo continuous change, and in the character of the change there is evidence of real hope.'

Ginsberg graduated from University College London BA with first class honours in Philosophy and obtained his MA in 1915. He undertook his first teaching duties in 1914 as University Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy and made the philosophy of Malebranche his specialism. His first contribution to the Aristotelian Society (of which he became President in 1942–3) appeared in the *Proceedings* for 1916–17: 'The Nature of Knowledge as conceived by Malebranche'; and his translation of the *Entretiens* appeared in 1923: *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, with an appreciative Preface by G. Dawes Hicks and a substantial Translator's Introduction analysing and discussing Malebranche's work, in particular, his account of causation.

G. Dawes Hicks was head of the Department of Philosophy at University College London in Ginsberg's time. He was well-known as a philosophical Realist in the '80s and '90s, when the philosophy of the British Idealists was dominant at Oxford and in the English and Scottish universities generally. Ginsberg came to intellectual maturity under his auspices and imbibed a philosophical outlook compatible with the natural, and by extension the social, sciences and prepared to give full weight to them.

He came under the powerful and enduring influence of L. T. Hobhouse, 25 years his senior, who had been appointed in 1907 to the Martin White chair of Sociology at the London School of Economics. Ginsberg attended his lectures and seminars as an undergraduate from University College in preparation for the sociological requirements of the philosophy syllabus. On graduating, as well as teaching in the Department of Philosophy at University College, he participated, as Martin White scholar and research student, in the major sociological investigation on which Hobhouse was at that time engaged. Hobhouse had come to regard the scientific side of sociology as especially concerned with the problem of correlating the various aspects of social life reflected in social institutions. For the 'simpler' societies he had elaborated a method for correlating the various forms of social institution with economic status as measured by the degree of control attained over natural forces; and this led to the extensive statistical investigation in which Ginsberg collaborated. The results appeared in 1915 in the monograph *The Material Culture and Social Institutions of the Simpler Peoples. An Essay in Correlation*, attributed jointly to L. T. Hobhouse, G. C. Wheeler and M. Ginsberg.

In 1916 Ginsberg enlisted under the Derby scheme and served in France from 1917–19. At one time he was a sergeant engaged in the

dangerous business of bringing ammunition-laden mule teams up to the line on the Western Front. After demobilisation he returned to academic life in London, moving eventually from University College (of the Fellowship of which he was very proud) fully to LSE where, in due course, he became Martin White Professor of Sociology in succession to Hobhouse, who retired in 1929. He occupied the chair until 1954 and as Professor Emeritus taught actively at the School thereafter, until 1968. By his death in 1970 at the age of 81, British sociology lost one who for many years was its only professor, its master teacher and its acknowledged and widely respected spokesman.

Ginsberg wrote prolifically and authoritatively in his spare, clear style continuously throughout his career, to within two years of his death, on a range of topics all stemming from his central preoccupations: the diversity of morals; the theoretical and practical problems and prospects of a rational ethics; the philosophy, psychology and sociology of morals; the ethical aspects of social organisation; sociological theories and methods; and the processes inherent in the genesis and development of social structures. He wrote for colleagues in the professional journals read by philosophers, economists, sociologists, anthropologists, political theorists and psychologists. He wrote also for a wider, non-professional or non-specialist audience (in journals such as *Nature*, the *Rationalist Annual*, *Politics and Letters* and *Scrutiny*) on problems of interest to layman and student alike, in which questions of value and questions of fact are closely interwoven: the causes of war; national character; German views of German mentality; prejudice and anti-semitism. Whatever the occasion and whatever the audience his writing displayed those merits of scholarship, precision and attention to detail which were his hall-mark. Fifty or so papers were assembled in *Studies in Sociology* (1932), *Reason and Unreason in Society* (1947), *On the Diversity of Morals* (1956), and *Evolution and Progress* (1961).

Ginsberg wrote a small book *Psychology of Society* in 1921 which went into nine editions, the last of which (a revised edition) appeared in 1964. In 1932 his *Sociology* appeared in the Home University Library. By virtue of their brief compass, learning in the European tradition of the subjects and their succinct force, they remain classics—and implicitly reproachful reminders of the high standards of undergraduate university study once taken for granted. *On Justice in Society* appeared in 1965. Ginsberg applied himself at length and in detail to one specific problem: the relation between law and morals, illustrated with reference to the justice of educational systems, the ethics of sexual relations, types of marriage and so forth. T. H. Marshall, a sympathetic critic, remarked of this book that though in it Ginsberg 'is as wise and shrewd as ever in

his comments and criticisms, it is doubtful whether it succeeds in lifting the subject to a new level.' This is as it may be; but Ginsberg's aim was probably more modest, namely, to demonstrate the synthesis—not the fusion, he would insist—of sociology and social philosophy for the effective handling of social problems. The influence of Sidgwick is very strong. The arguments against ethical relativism are set out and the view defended that ethical judgments are genuine propositions, susceptible to truth claims, and not merely expletives, commands, commitments or expressions of subjective preferences; and there is a good statement of radical egalitarianism. The book is still read by undergraduates in the Faculty of Social Studies at Oxford.

As teacher, professor and head of the Department of Sociology at the School, Ginsberg established and fought to maintain a tradition in the subject well described by Donald MacRae as one of 'rigour, order, clarity, cosmopolitan scholarship, creative doubt and humane concern'. The going was hard: he faced not only the widely prevalent mistrust of reason, to which his students in general were not immune, but also the passion and impatience of the militantly anti-fascist and, especially, the Marxist students, among whom were many refugees from Nazism. They were out of sympathy with his scholarly preoccupations and found his lectures austere, uninspiring, overly critical and exegetical. He was not helped by the arrival at the School of Karl Mannheim, under the auspices of the Academic Assistance Council for colleagues driven out of Germany, for which he had worked untiringly. Unexpectedly (for Ginsberg knew and respected his work on *Wissenssoziologie*, had welcomed him and his wife and had put them up at home until they found somewhere to live) Mannheim came to personify for him the carelessness of the very professional standards and intellectual integrity he was dedicated to promoting among his students. He sought to limit the damage, as he saw it, by restricting Mannheim's teaching to postgraduate students and relations became very bad. He was greatly relieved when Mannheim left the School for a chair in the Sociology of Education at the London Institute of Education.

Ginsberg underrated his own influence as a teacher. It distressed him in his later years to feel that little remained to show for his efforts. He was far from regretting, still less resenting the fact that, inevitably, a great deal in British sociology came to lie outside the areas in which he worked. But he had no patience with research that seemed to him to be concerned with trivialities and to have no ulterior purpose; or with sociologists who brought psychological arguments into their explanations without having properly mastered the subject; or who undertook comparative studies without a well-grounded general knowledge of human societies, their institutions and their history.

It must be said that these criticisms were not directed at and most definitely did not apply either to his successor in the Martin White chair, Professor Donald MacRae, or to other members of the Sociology and related departments. Ginsberg foresaw and feared the threat to his conception of the subject posed by the great sociological explosion of the post-war era. His pessimism was not rooted in blind conservatism; he believed, with good reason, that without the fundamental values and virtues of the tradition that he defended, the subject would lack substance, purpose and some of the qualities essential to a science. The rapid development of the subject after 1945 and the shift of the centre of gravity from Europe to America did not, as has been suggested, pass him by. He kept himself informed; he knew what was taking place and he did not like it. He was firmly dismissive of much American sociology: ('There's nothing in it, you know!'). He regarded most of its leading exponents as verbose and pretentious and much of its empirical work as trivial. He conceded little or nothing in his teaching to the eagerness of post-war students to come to grips with American empiricism and American 'grand theory', so that his influence on those who were to help man the imminent expansion of the subject in British universities was conveyed through the style rather than the substance of his teaching. He was gentle but unassuming and intellectually assured rather than forceful in his dealings with students. At a departmental meeting not long after the end of the war the talk was of teaching methods. Some enthusiasm was expressed for the 'democratic' procedures adopted in the discussion groups for the Forces run by the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, aptly described by enthusiasts and cynics alike as 'no teaching, only learning'. Ginsberg said nothing and after a time was asked for his opinion. With a deprecating smile, 'I don't let them waste their time in talking—I tell them' he said.

Ginsberg professed a suspect subject but in his hands it could not attract the conventional slights and he himself was widely admired and much honoured. He held honorary degrees from the universities of London, Glasgow and Birmingham and was an honorary Fellow of University College London, and of the London School of Economics. He was Frazer lecturer in 1944, Conway Memorial lecturer in 1952, Clarke Hall lecturer in 1953, in which year he was elected to the Fellowship of the British Academy, received the Huxley medal and gave the Huxley Memorial lecture. In 1956 he gave the Comte Memorial Lecture at the LSE and in 1958 the Herbert Spencer lecture at Oxford.

In his Introduction to the first of the three volumes of his collected essays, *On the Diversity of Morals*, published in 1956, Ginsberg explained that the main aims of his work on the side of philosophy were to explore the possibilities of a rational ethic and to bring out the importance of the

distinction between facts and values. On the sociological side he aimed to maintain and exemplify the view of sociology as concerned with the structure of societies, their genesis and development.

In ethical matters he took a non-naturalist view of moral judgments. 'I do not believe that the moral can be elicited or constructed from the non-moral, or that psychology or sociology can ever take the place of ethics.' On the other hand, it is within the field of social and psychological facts that moral rules have their application and here he argued *naturwissenschaftlich* procedures were appropriate. Ginsberg therefore worked, so to say, on two fronts—as philosopher and as sociologist. He proceeded on the assumption that a rational ethic is possible, and in the belief that the building up of a rational ethics turns to a large extent on questions of psychological and sociological fact: 'on knowledge of human needs and potentialities and of the ways in which the means available for their fulfilment, including the mode of their distribution, are likely to affect the ends and ideals aimed at.'

As philosopher, he took for granted the unity of human reason and the possibility of a rational ethics. He therefore rejected any relativistic view of either knowledge or morals. He argued that there is no necessary connection between the diversity and the relativity of morals: the diversities are not arbitrary and lend no support to ethical relativism in any of its forms. The comparative study of moral codes reveals a fundamental similarity of content 'due to the circumstance that human needs and impulses are much the same everywhere'. 'At one point or another we must assume primary valuations which are not further reducible.' The concept of 'ideal' is essential to the understanding of moral development. Moral values take shape as ideals which transcend, though they arise from and are related to, fundamental human needs. The ideals differ because they are coloured by historical processes and contemporary situations and are marked by confused and irrational thoughts. The task of reason is to clear from them the accretions that have gathered round them. That the subjection of ethics to this kind of rational analysis would reduce the diversity in the unanalysed situation is certain. But 'whether any fundamental divergences in moral outlook will remain when the facts have been clarified and the ideals elucidated remains to be seen.'

Apart from differences in content and the possibility of residual differences in outlook, there are actual differences of structure: differences in the clarity with which principles of conduct are elicited and examined; in the ways in which they are balanced and contribute to the total order or way of life; and in the detail of their application. 'Looked at in this way, the diversities are far from arbitrary and they lend no support to subjectivist or emotionalist interpretations of morals.' They do, however,

imply differences in the level of moral development. 'It seems to me that no-one seriously believes that all cultures are "equally valid", though what we mean by differences of level is a very difficult question.'

By a rational ethics, Ginsberg meant one that is based on a knowledge of human needs and potentialities and of the principles of justice: that is, principles designed to exclude arbitrary power and to secure an equitable distribution of the conditions of well-being. He argued that when we speak of a movement from lower to higher levels in moral development we have in mind such criteria as comprehensiveness, coherence and articulation of principles and assumptions; objectivity and disinterestedness; and the range of persons to whom moral rules are applied. It is true that in this we are influenced by the view of morals prevailing in the 'higher' societies and are allowing these societies to be judges in their own cause. It is they that decide that they are 'higher' and that moral development is synonymous with moral progress, or progress in morals: 'But I fear this cannot be helped'. Ginsberg dismissed what is today regarded as the deep and worrying interpretive problem of being inexorably caught up in a hermeneutic circle. He would have been unmoved by the criticism of, say, Max Gluckman's study of Barotse jurisprudence or Richard Brandt's study of Hopi ethics, that they consist in cross-cultural investigations of the extent to which the Barotse or the Hopi accept principles like our own.

The expanding role of rationality, Ginsberg argued, is the main operative factor in the development from a lower to a higher level in human affairs generally. This is obvious in the case of knowledge, science and technology and can be demonstrated as true also of morals. Insofar as it can be shown to be true of law, this is evidence for the reality—in a broad sense—of social progress. 'The movement from unreflective custom to the declaration, systematisation and codification of law, thence to deliberate legislation and the critical scrutiny of the ethical basis of the law, unquestionably constitutes growth in self-direction and the rational ordering of life.' The motives behind the drive to systematisation are not only technical and logical but also ethical: they comprise principles of high generality, such as the general principle which excludes arbitrariness and insists that like cases must be treated in like manner, but also, increasingly, the 'middle' principles which attempt to define what constitutes arbitrariness in a given context. 'It is in the field of the "middle" principles that knowledge of the ways in which institutions affect the individuals concerned, directly or indirectly, is of vital importance.' Such knowledge (in which ethics most needs the co-operation of the social sciences) does not alone suffice; it offers no apocalyptic visions—but 'it can do something to help man to make his own history before the end'.

T. H. Marshall recalled 'a lunch at UNESCO held to bring Ginsberg

and Raymond Aron together and persuade them to collaborate in planning a symposium on development. Ginsberg wanted the role of rationality to be the guiding light in the proceedings. Aron objected on the grounds that the thesis underlying the idea was untenable. He brought all his big intellectual guns to bear, but in vain. In the end he was completely baffled by this stubborn champion of rationality who, as it appeared to him, was quite impervious to reason.'

Aron's arguments for the contention that the thesis underlying Ginsberg's idea (that the concept of development in human affairs must express the expanding role of rationality) are not recorded. It must be said, however, that there was nothing in Ginsberg's position to suggest that he was impervious to reason. He felt deeply the widely prevalent reaction against reason and the cult of the irrational, but this set-back was not in itself a reason for abandoning a theory of social development as progress in the building up of a rational ethics. There is an ineluctable ethical or normative component in any idea of human social development.

Ginsberg did not suppose that the concept of a rational ethics implies a fixed code or one uniform for all peoples. As our knowledge of and sensitiveness towards human needs grows and as greater control is achieved over the conditions of development, the system of rights and duties must undergo change. 'There will never, in all probability, be a universal code of morals, though the history of moral development supports the possibility of agreement on a minimum code of the kind now trying to find expression in a list of human rights.'

In the psychology of morals he wrote briefly but informatively and perceptively on the English moralists of the eighteenth century and on contemporary writers who stood nearest to them—in particular, Samuel Alexander and Edward Westermarck; and also on Bergson. He devoted more time and attention to Freud. He was persuaded, no doubt under the influence of his friends Dr Emanuel Miller and Professor Aubrey Lewis, that psycho-analysis had much to contribute to the study of morals—short, of course, of committing the naturalistic fallacy. He devoted his Conway Memorial Lecture in 1952 to 'Psycho-analysis and Ethics'. In an appreciative but not uncritical review of Freudian theory he suggested that it might be used to throw light on the natural history of morals; to provide the material for a comparative moral pathology, which would facilitate inquiry into the causes making for variation in moral codes and for social conformity and deviance on the part of individuals; to assist in the building up of a rational ethics, by disentangling the unconscious elements in moral experience, clarifying it by ridding it of the magical elements that have gathered round it in the course of its history and ridding it of fear, hate and anger.

In an essay on 'Psychoanalysis and Sociology', contributed to *Politics and Letters* in 1944, he was severely critical of Freud as social psychologist and social theorist. In the sociology of morals he gave close and critical attention, in particular, to Durkheim's theories of ethics and religion as illustrating the value and limitations of applying 'the method of positive sciences' to the study of morals; and to Pareto's denial of human progress, resting on his disbelief in any rational ethics and his view that history has disclosed no significant changes but only oscillations.

At the first Annual General Meeting of the British Sociological Association in 1952 Ginsberg devoted his Chairman's address to the idea of progress. This address, in the expanded form in which it was published in 1953 as *The Idea of Progress: An Evaluation*, appears in Volume III of his collected essays, *Evolution and Progress*. Ginsberg began by quoting the French historian A. Javary, writing in 1851, to the effect that the idea was so firmly established that no one any longer would contest it and all that remained to be examined was the conditions under which it was realised. A hundred years later he was obliged to report that the belief in progress was seriously weakened. Nevertheless, the idea persists and Ginsberg was able to show without much difficulty that its critics frequently lapse into inconsistency and do not, in fact, entirely reject it. The theories of its protagonists he sorted into three groups: Marxism, which he regarded as the only nineteenth-century philosophy to remain influential; the theory associated with L. T. Hobhouse and especially the views advanced in *Morals in Evolution*; and a more generalised theory of evolution which includes the field of human history and an emergent morality.

Ginsberg devoted a chapter of his study of progress to eighteenth-century theories of perfectibility, another to Comte, and still another to Hegel and Marx, both of whom he found unimpressive on the subject. He himself favoured the generalised evolutionary theory, though he was fully aware of the complexities involved (see his Introduction to the seventh edition of *Morals in Evolution* [1950]; two essays on the subject in *On the Diversity of Morals* [1956] and one in Michael Banton [ed] *Darwinism and the Study of Society* [1961]). He drew a distinction between evolution and development. Evolution is a term that is sometimes used to mean any orderly change and especially in biology, where new forms arise in a process of differentiation from the old. Development, an older term, is a process in which what is potential becomes actual. Neither one is progress but Ginsberg offered a definition in terms of both of them: 'progress is development or evolution in a direction which satisfies rational criteria of value'. Evolution itself cannot supply such standards. He agreed with T. H. Huxley that 'from the facts of evolution no ethics of evolution can be derived'.

No plausible general laws of social development or progress have as yet been formulated. Nevertheless, it is possible to enquire if there are particular trends in history or society which exhibit 'advance'. Ginsberg identified two significant trends: the emergence of law; and the unification of mankind, by which he meant interconnectedness and interdependence. In discussing the unification of mankind he arrived at a monistic interpretation of civilisation. As to whether it is approaching unity in the sense of unity of goal or purpose, Ginsberg disagreed with both Whitehead and Toynbee. He denied that religion in general or Christianity in particular has exhibited an 'upward trend'; but he found evidence for moral progress. 'The case for moral progress rests above all on the persistence of the quest for justice in the history of mankind, spurred on by the sense of injustice.' He agreed with the eighteenth-century philosophers who saw progress as a movement towards reason and justice, equality and freedom.

In addressing the British Sociological Association in 1952 on the subject of progress, Ginsberg had chosen the topic closest to his heart but least likely to inspire his audience. Legislation in the Welfare State was a powerful and articulate agent of social change; members of the Association, which included social workers, teachers, doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists as well as academics, were concerned to demonstrate the importance of social research for the effective handling of social problems and to bring its results to bear on social policy. Ginsberg had understandably strong and persuasive views on the adverse implications, for the theory and practice of social research, of the divorce in the universities of teaching in philosophy and teaching in the social sciences: on the one hand, lack of training in critical scrutiny of the nature and validity of the methods employed in social research; and on the other hand, the inculcation of a superficial, even misleading conception of the nature and requirements of ethical neutrality. 'There can be no doubt that much confusion has been caused by failure to observe the distinction between things as they are and things as they ought to be, and insofar as the present attitude of the social sciences is intended to guard against this confusion there is clearly much to be said for it. Yet I am not sure that the grounds of the distinction have been accurately stated or that ethical neutrality is observed in practice'. This had been the theme of an address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1937 and he might well have reiterated it in 1952. *Naturwissenschaftlich* procedures in the social sciences are not plain sailing in theory or in practice.

As regards practice, the empirical work which flourished at the LSE, especially after 1945, was very much after Ginsberg's heart, concerned as it was, on the one hand, with the problems and prospects of radical egalitarianism in the context of modern social structures, viewed historically

and comparatively (the changing occupational structure; the distribution of wealth and income; social class differences in fertility, morbidity and mortality, family size, measured intelligence, educational opportunity and achievement) and, on the other hand, with the psychology of class and status; the nature and distribution of attitudes and opinions; electoral behaviour and so forth. He took no part in this work. The survey methods and statistical techniques of analysis had become specialisms in their own right and were a far cry from the simple but immensely laborious procedures he had adopted in 1929, in his pioneering investigation into 'interchange between the social classes'. He could no longer participate but he was interested and appreciative of the departmental enterprise and ready to make use of the results in his lectures for the paper 'Ethical Aspects of Social Organisation' which, at his suggestion, was introduced into the revised syllabus for the B.Sc. (Econ) degree in 1962.

Volume III of his collected essays *Evolution and Progress* contains the Herbert Spencer lecture he delivered in Oxford in 1958 on the subject of Social Change, and the five lectures he delivered in Tokyo in 1955, the year after his retirement.

By social change he understood changes in social structure, such as in the size of a society, the composition or balance of its parts or the type of its organisation. And he concerned himself in this lecture with 'fundamental problems involved in all sociological and historical analysis but which require reformulation from time to time in the light of current thought'. In a learned, wide-ranging and effective discussion he considered problems of causality in the social sciences, such as the role of human purpose, the significance to be attached to the concept of 'social forces' and the problem of teleology arising from the occurrence of changes which look as if they were designed but in fact have not been designed or foreseen. He discussed the view around which the *Methodenstreit* had raged in Germany at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century: that the natural and the cultural sciences differ radically in their aims and methods. This view had been fully discussed in England by Collingwood but was again being taken up vigorously by both philosophers and social scientists. He argued with the aid of examples closely analysed that the causal relationship has much the same significance in the social as in the natural sciences; but went on to show from consideration in detail of the various important differences between social and physical causation that the social sciences are inherently, not contingently incapable of achieving the universality, certainty and precision characteristic of causal propositions in the natural sciences.

Among the Tokyo lectures, those on the comparative method and social morphology are of interest as valuable discussions of the methodological

problems of the synoptic study of society and social development favoured by Ginsberg. In a final lecture he reviewed the work of the 'formal' and 'interpretative' schools of sociology. The formalists, following Simmel, proposed to give sociology a distinctive role among the social sciences in confining it to the study of the forms of association and social relations in abstraction from their content. Ginsberg's accounts of the work of Vierkandt and von Wiese are brief but cogent. The same is true of his accounts of the interpretative approach of Tönnies and Max Weber: but whereas it would be fair to say that the work of the post-Simmel formalists does not suffer from a treatment purely from the point of view of method, the same cannot be said of Tönnies and Max Weber. Ginsberg's account of Weber's *verstehende Soziologie*, of his use of 'ideal type' heuristic constructions and his classification of types of social action is lucid, accurate and helpful; but it is subjected to a totally misleading critique, to the effect that though not itself psychological, the method implies a sharp separation of the social sciences from psychology and rests on a confusion of the familiar with the intelligible—on an assumption that 'what we know within our minds is somehow more intelligible than what is outwardly observed'. This is a surprising misunderstanding of Weber's concept of *verstehen*.

In seeking to evaluate Ginsberg's scholarly achievement the obvious comparison that comes to mind is with Edward Westermarck, his senior colleague at the School until 1930 when he retired from the personal chair in Sociology which he held simultaneously with the chair of Moral Philosophy at Helsingfors. The two men were well-matched intellectually, though very different in temperament. They held each other in high regard. Westermarck wrote enthusiastically and perceptively about Ginsberg's suitability as candidate for the Martin White chair of Sociology in succession to Hobhouse; and when Westermarck died in 1939, Ginsberg wrote an admirably full, intimately knowledgeable study of his life and work.

It might seem at first glance that the palm should go to Westermarck as practitioner of the comparative study of morals who put an ethical theory to work, in the grand manner never attempted by Ginsberg (or for that matter by Hobhouse), on the fruits of massive erudition and bold fieldwork. His influence on the relativist outlook of anthropologists between the wars was considerable; and he anticipated the relativist arguments developed by present-day writers such as J. L. Mackie, John Ladd and Kai Nielson. However, his reputation as a sociologist inevitably suffered a decline as the inherent difficulties of the comparative method, due to the need to detach and isolate cultural phenomena from their context, have come to be perceived as posing conceptual and practical problems far greater than those he acknowledged and supposed himself to have faced satisfactorily.

Ginsberg, on the other hand, was a cautious theorist and learned exponent rather than a systematic practitioner of the comparative method on a large scale. He admired and, in general, accepted Westermarck's use of the method, whilst recognising that some of his material was 'vague and ambiguous'; but he had shrewd and significant reservations about his contribution to ethical theory which, he saw, seriously weakened his interpretations of his comparative material. He successfully criticised Westermarck at his weakest, namely in his unsatisfactory account of the part played by 'reflection' or reason in morals. He set himself to analyse the nature of moral diversity and the sources of moral bewilderment and conflict, to raise the discussion of the part played by reason and experience in morals to a more satisfactory level and, building on Hobhouse, to formulate a theory of social development incorporating rational criteria of moral progress.

All this he succeeded in doing; and in the process he demonstrated the possibility and the requirements of a disciplined and creative comparative study of social institutions. It seems safe to say that his legacy might have proved more enduring but for the eclipse of the Enlightenment-inspired belief in the possibility of a rational ethics and the general acceptance of a view of moral diversity as contingent 'value-pluralism', as a plurality of conflicting and incommensurable conceptions of the good.

Ginsberg quietly resisted the sea-change of *Zeitgeist*. His sociology remained handmaiden to his unchanging philosophy. He read Marx as an unimpressive theorist of social development and Weber as an original but unsatisfactory methodologist who did not put the principles of his *verstehende Soziologie* into practice. At no point in his teaching or writing did he orient himself to their understanding of what they were about, or himself attempt to grasp the essence or distinctive character of modernity. He acknowledged the significance of Marxism, writing in 1932: 'Whatever estimate may be formed of the value of the Marxian theory of social development, its heuristic importance cannot be doubted and it has in fact affected recent workers in history and sociology profoundly.' But he never gave it sustained critical attention in any of its aspects, or sought to explain its heuristic importance. He confined himself to references in general terms, as was relevant in the context of his own immediate concerns. Nor did he ever address the social and moral implications of the spread of instrumental rationality which Weber identified as the hall-mark of modernity; and it seems in retrospect extraordinary that he paid no attention at all to the alleged 'negative dialectic of the Enlightenment' that so troubled the sociologists of the Frankfurt school between the wars. Several prominent members of this school sojourned briefly at the LSE in exile *en route* for the United States, generating unforgettable intellectual

excitement and much confusion among the native young. Yet Ginsberg sat quietly by. Perhaps despondency and the effort to resist despair in face of the triumphs of vile irrationalism induced a kind of lassitude, a deep reluctance to do fresh battle on the new fronts which had opened up. This would account for the decision to lecture in Tokyo in 1955 on 'Aspects of European Sociology *in the Early Twentieth Century*'.

JEAN FLOUD

Note. The Academy is very grateful to Mrs Floud for taking over the task of writing this obituary in December 1990.