Book Reviews

Other People's Children

Two Worlds of Childhood. U.S. and U.S.S.R. URIE BRONFENBRENNER, with the assistance of John C. Condry, Jr. Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1970 (distributor, Basic Books, New York). xii, 196 pp., illus. $7.95.

Urie Bronfenbrenner's previously published comparisons of child-rearing patterns and child behavior in different countries are in the main models of scholarly excellence, and several are all the more impressive for having been done in part in the U.S.S.R., where cooperation in international social science research has been rare. The book under review, however, is not a dispassionate, technical account of his research findings, nor is it a well-argued statement of their implications. It turns rather in the direction of a wide-ranging polemical tract, provocative, perhaps, but not convincing.

Bronfenbrenner is impressed with the power and potential of models, peers, and group forces in the lives of children. He argues that in the United States children "used to be" brought up by their parents (p. 95) but are no longer. Instead, there has been a long-term "spontaneous drift" in which supervisory control over children has been relinquished to television, with its models of aggressive behavior, and to the informal peer group, which Bronfenbrenner sees as anti-adult and antisocial. This has produced, on an increasing scale, such undesirable manifestations as alienation, indifference, antagonism, rebelliousness, violence, and juvenile delinquency. The central thesis, he says, is dramatized effectively by the mythic truth contained in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, where the "quickly rising sadism of peer power" menaces civilized life. Bronfenbrenner's diagnosis leads him to conclude that the United States must develop "a new style of socialization" in which we eschew spontaneous drift and "determine our course" (p. 119).

Bronfenbrenner believes children are treated better in Soviet Russia. Russian mothers are exceptionally warm to their children, and at the same time withdrawal of emotional support is commonly used as a means of discipline. This combination of circumstances makes the children especially liable to group influence, including that of their peer groups. But the latter are organized and supervised by adults and older children, and in these groups, the prototype of which is the Young Pioneers, the children are effectively taught obedience and conformity. The personalities thus formed are more adult-oriented, less aggressive, more concerned with being clean, orderly, and well-mannered, ready to serve society, and so on. There are admittedly some disadvantages to this recipe, for if Soviet children are taught to "conform more completely to a homogeneous set of standards" they also end by having less concern than children in other countries for telling the truth and seeking intellectual understanding (p. 81).

We also learn from the book that some of the distinctive features of Soviet upbringing are fading away. New trends will enhance the role in socialization of the Soviet family, and the author notes that recently Soviet pedagogues have been placing new emphasis on the importance of developing such traits as individuality and independence. Nevertheless, he thinks Soviet children will continue to benefit from explicit training for conformity with adult standards, and presumably so will the rest of the Soviet population. For example, he remarks that the streets of Moscow and other Soviet cities will continue to be "reasonably safe for women and children" (p. 90).

What is to be done here at home? What would a "new style of socialization" for the United States involve? Bronfenbrenner's answer occupies two chapters, in which the reader is exposed to the potency of models, the importance of social reinforcement and intensive relationships, types of existing groups that might be exploited, and the desirability of "superordinate goals" for groups to strive for. Of the last, especially recommended are such goals as "caring for a little child," "helping the young child of poverty," and "involvement in tasks which are of service to others." Two concrete recommendations are taken from Soviet practice. Older children might spend more time with younger ones through the institutionalization of *shefstvo*, or patronage, whereby a preschool or primary class is "adopted" by an older class, each younger child having an older "brother" or "sister" from the more advanced class to look after him. Secondly, each total community might establish a "Commission on Children" which would study the behavior of children and devise means to improve their lives.

One can agree with a moderately stated version of the author's thesis:

> If the Russians have gone too far in subjecting the child and his peer group to conformity to a single set of values imposed by the adult society, perhaps we have reached the point of diminishing returns in allowing excessive autonomy and in failing to utilize the constructive potential of the peer group in developing social responsibility and consideration for others [pp. 165–66].

Unfortunately, the overall impression left by the book is less moderate and less acceptable, and a good number of the supporting arguments are dubious or in sore need of qualification.

1) On concern for children: Bronfenbrenner asserts that the worth of a society can be judged by the degree of concern it shows for its children. He suggests, but presents no convincing evidence, that there is more concern for children in the U.S.S.R. than in the U.S.A. But in fact the most appropriate statistical indicators—infant mortality, amount of formal education received, amount of time spent by parents with children, amount of juvenile crime as a proportion of all crime—either show no appreciable difference between the two societies or favor the situation of American children. Bronfenbrenner thus has to rely largely upon impressions from his Soviet travels about how mothers and the general public there are warmer and more solicitous toward children and on his unsubstantiated argument that peer groups supervised by adults constitute a better socializing agent than do spontaneous peer groups and parents, many of whom in the U.S. of course still do rear their children.

In addition, there is considerable evidence that in both societies concern

of parents for children is strongly related to social level, families in the higher portion of the status hierarchy showing more concern than those in the lower. This intrasocietal regularity is probably much more pronounced than any such cross-societal difference as that alleged by Bronfenbrenner. Indeed, in terms of the contrasting shapes of their stratification systems it could as well be argued that in the aggregate more concern is shown for children in the United States, where the proportion of workers and agricultural laborers is smaller.

By his presupposition that youth groups in the United States are predominantly amoral or antisocial, and by his too-facile disposition of the efforts of American parents to bring up their children, the author is unfair to both generations in the United States. By overstressing the influence of the organized classroom and youth group in the U.S.S.R. and accepting uncritically the assertedly "secondary" role of the Soviet family he is also unfair to Soviet parents, most of whom are faced with the same responsibilities and problems as American parents but who get less credit when things go well with their children than do American parents.

2) On the traits of youth: Bronfenbrenner's classroom survey establishes what other observers have noted on the basis of less systematic observation—that Soviet schools emphasize obedience and conformity, whereas in the United States independence and creativity are more valued. Bronfenbrenner opts for the Soviet choice, stressing the harmfulness of the negative aspect of independence and creativity, namely, rebelliousness and nonconformity to adult standards. Three comments are in order. One set of traits is not clearly better than the other, but if the choice had to be made this reviewer would choose independence and creativity over obedience and conformity. Secondly, research by Melvin L. Kohn (*Class and Conformity*, 1969) has shown that obedience and conformity to adult standards are values typically more stressed by working-class parents, whereas self-direction is a paramount value of middle-class parents. Thirdly, research on the psychic traits of "modern" as compared with "traditional" man has revealed that independence and self-reliance are characteristic of the former and a submissive, fatalistic conformity typical of the latter. In view of these facts Bronfenbrenner's preference seems arbitrary and anomalous, whereas it is easy to grasp why Soviet educators, as Bronfenbrenner himself notes (pp. 81–91), are increasingly critical of the obedient and dependent conformity produced by collective upbringing and are moving "toward new configurations more conducive to the emergence of individuality and independence" (p. 89).

3) On youth groups as a source of emotional maturity and political freedom: As Parsons, Eisenstadt, and others have suggested, informal youth groups and subcultures constitute a means whereby young persons strive for and achieve emotional independence from their parents and learn patterns of behavior and values appropriate to their adult roles in the larger society but according to criteria which could not be followed in their lives at home with their parents. From this perspective the *independence* and *spontaneity* of youth group and subculture are all-important; youth groups controlled by adults and with imposed adult standards simply do not serve, because they typically fail to elicit the strong emotional involvement of the young person which is the specific mechanism required to change the focus of his emotional life from his parental family to his own age group. Thus, Soviet school "collectives" are "pseudo youth groups," which do not perform well the maturational task for which youth groups have arisen spontaneously throughout the modern world. Informal, spontaneous youth groups do arise in the U.S.S.R., but they are feared by the Soviet leaders and quickly dispersed and stigmatized by the authorities even when their activities seem quite innocuous.

It is hard to understand how a report on patterns of child-rearing in the United States and the Soviet Union finds absolutely nothing to say (unless on p. 115 and in the "moderately stated thesis" already cited) about the political implications of the observed differences. Is it so easy to forget that in the recent past the imposition of "adult standards of conformity" has in some places crippled the minds of youth with political irrationality and hatred? The *Lord of the Flies* does not strike me as an apt metaphor. The danger of reverting to savagery is much overshadowed, I believe, by the threat of one or another "ism" which prescribes conformity to simple and obvious standards as a proper solution of the problems of youth. Life is no longer simple, its pattern is no longer obvious, and the young must inevitably be exposed to complex and conflicting information and values, including values which they devise themselves, however unpalatable some of them may be to adult taste. In this connection, it is most provocative to learn that Bronfenbrenner's data show that in England, a country where political stability and human dignity have high standing, independent peer-group influence over youth is even stronger and adult influence even less potent than in the United States. The generalization I prefer from all this would be something like: the more legitimate the distribution of political authority and the more efficient and just its exercise by constituted authorities in a given country, the more frequent the appearance and the more powerful the influence of informally organized subcultural groupings, including youthful peer groups. Moreover, these, with all their warts, offer some assurance that higher values such as justice and freedom will not be stifled in the name of obedience and conformity.

4) On comparative analysis: International comparisons are often richly rewarding, but only if they are properly executed. In this book there are defects in the comparison procedure. First, Bronfenbrenner commits the error of mistaking the ideal model in the U.S.S.R. for the behavioral reality. For example, one cannot assume without convincing evidence that the pedagogical doctrines of Anton S. Makarenko are actually carried out in practice in Soviet families. Indeed, a variety of sources, including Soviet ethnographic and journalistic writings, would incline me to the belief that most Soviet parents do not practice "withdrawal of love" as a disciplinary measure. Those who do follow the recommended pattern are likely to be, as Bronfenbrenner suggests, mainly from "professional families" rather than the "less-cultured" (p. 14).

A second mistake arises from Bronfenbrenner's tendency to treat instances of social problems in the United States as though they were the average circumstance. In the end he compares the best in Soviet life with the worst in American. He has a good deal to say about conditions in the schools and auxiliary child-rearing institutions of Moscow and other large Soviet cities, where the greatest support and attention have been accorded them as befitting the showplace role of these cities. But it verges on intellectual dema-

goguery to shift from a very favorable comment about the distribution of "free oranges daily" among children in Moscow nurseries and kindergartens to several paragraphs about the prevalence of handicaps and disorders among the children of the disadvantaged in the United States, however regrettable these may be.

Apart from these issues, the book is quite readable, and the text is enhanced by photographs of Soviet children and by reproductions in color of ten agitation posters extolling the principles of model Young Pioneer behavior. But they remind us that Bronfenbrenner has not given us evidence bearing on his apparent conviction that American youth groups are mainly antisocial. And he doesn't show any pictures of the Boy Scouts.

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Festschrift in Biology

Essays in Evolution and Genetics in Honor of Theodosius Dobzhansky. MAX K. HECHT and WILLIAM C. STEERE, Eds. North-Holland, Amsterdam, and Appleton-Century-Crofts, New York, 1970. xviii, 594 pp., illus. $16. A Supplement to *Evolutionary Biology*.

The reviewer of a festschrift is in the position of a wedding guest required to comment objectively, and publicly, on the quality of the gifts. Perhaps this is why the volume in honor of Theodosius Dobzhansky has found its way to my remote trans-Atlantic desk.

Let me say at once that these essays add up to a fine gift indeed. They are nicely produced and elegantly wrapped, and if the contents of a few do not attain the standard of the packaging we must charitably remember the parable of the widow's mite. They are a timely and well-deserved tribute to one of the great names in evolutionary biology.

The first essay, "Theodosius Dobzhansky up to now," gives us some fascinating insights into the man behind the name. Its bibliography shows that at the age of 70 Dobzhansky publishes 20 papers a year and that his average productivity is still rising. The authors of the essay give an unconscious example of Dobzhansky's enormous influence when they discuss his discovery, in 1943, of seasonal fluctuations in the frequencies of *Drosophila* inversions. They state that "up to 1943 it was generally believed that the action of natural selection was so slow that no visible change could be detected in a lifetime, except perhaps when man had radically changed the environment." If this was true, it was so despite the work of Bumpus, di Cesnola, Dubinin, Fisher, Ford, and Timofeef-Ressovsky. Dobzhansky's observations must have convinced the world when others did not. If it was not true, the authors have fallen into the common trap of attributing too much to one great man, like undergraduates who think that Darwin invented evolution.

The two essays that follow this biographical sketch deal with philosophical subjects. The first, by G. G. Simpson on "uniformitarianism," provides a characteristically clear historical account of the wordy and complex pathways of geological theory. The second, by B. Rensch on the evolution of consciousness, is an example of what Simpson calls a "semasiological morass." Its conclusion, italicized for extra emphasis, is that "human thinking, successively developed phylogenetically, is a part of the reality of the entity." This delicate point is reached by a long series of apparent illogicalities. I hope that there have been errors in the translation.

The remaining essays bring us firmly down to earth. There are useful reviews by E. B. Spiess on the genetic basis of mating propensity in *Drosophila* and by G. L. Stebbins on variation and evolution in plants. F. Ayala neatly shows that the classical Lotka-Volterra equations do not adequately describe the competitive interactions between experimental populations of *Drosophila pseudoobscura* and *D. serrata*. M. J. D. White examines the occurrence of polymorphism in parthenogenetic animals and argues that in some situations parthenogenesis has been favored because it preserves heterozygosity. White's essay illustrates the need for surveys of protein polymorphisms in parthenogenetic forms.

E. B. Ford and his colleagues, bringing up to date their studies on the "boundary phenomenon" in the butterfly *Maniola jurtina*, report some of the most extraordinary observations in the history of population genetics. The number of spots on the hind wing of female *M. jurtina* varies from one to five. Throughout most of Britain different butterfly populations show similar distributions of spot numbers. In Cornish populations, however, there are relative deficiencies of single-spotted individuals. The change from the "English" to the "Cornish" spot distribution takes place literally within a few yards despite the apparent absence of any barrier and despite the widespread uniformity of populations on both sides of the boundary. Even more remarkably, the position of the boundary alters from year to year, sometimes by as much as 40 miles. Consequently the offspring of individuals showing the "English" distribution may develop the "Cornish," and vice versa. Ford and his colleagues categorically attribute these phenomena to the effect of powerful but unknown forces of natural selection. Their argument depends upon an experimentally observed heritability of about 75 percent for spot numbers in female *M. jurtina*. It is well known, however, that heritabilities measured in the laboratory are likely to overestimate the genetic component of variation in the field. Furthermore, the experiments used material from the Scilly Islands, rather from the region of change. It seems possible that this region represents a zone of hybridization between two races of *Maniola*, and that the individuals within it are particularly prone to developmental instability. Until this alternative explanation has been excluded, the conclusions of Ford and his colleagues must be treated with reserve.

The outstanding paper in the collection is an essay on the evolution of Hawaiian *Drosophila* by H. L. Carson, D. E. Hardy, H. T. Spieth, and the late W. S. Stone. Published alone it would be a powerful tribute to Dobzhansky, illustrating the many elegant uses to which his techniques can be applied. By means of a combination of comparative anatomy, comparative ethology, comparative ecology, and, in particular, comparative chromosomal morphology, the authors have begun to make sense out of the enormously complex and interesting evolutionary situation found among the 700 species of Hawaiian drosophilids. Their paper is too long and too full of good things for me to summarize, but it provides a fitting climax to the festschrift. In reading it you can join the multitude of people (this reviewer included) who wish "Happy Birthday" to Theodosius Dobzhansky and who look forward to the (extrapolated) 30 papers a year in 1990.

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