

Book Reviews

Childhood and Society. Erik H. Erikson. New York: Norton, 1950. 397 pp. \$4.00.

Childhood and Society is an illuminating, forceful, and original book. It succeeds in establishing "meaningful relationships between the anxieties of infancy and the upheavals of society," to use the author's phrase. Its chief contribution to psychoanalytic theory, as well as to the study of social processes, lies in the fact that—for the first time—it has been possible to integrate rather than to correlate facts and ideas from various scientific disciplines converging upon the phenomena of child development.

The book offers a developmental theory that encompasses the systematic interrelationships among three simultaneous processes, organismic, psychological (ego), and societal. Each of eight major developmental stages is described in terms of their core conflict. The manner in which bodily processes, and especially social realities, may facilitate or hinder successful mastery at each phase is carefully traced. From the convergence of anthropological and psychological observations of many kinds, it is concluded that each society, through its method of child training, actively assists the child in accomplishing certain among the developmental steps, and actively hinders full realization of developmental potentialities at other stages of growth. The resulting burden of infantile anxieties carried into adulthood is determining not only for individual character structure but is also related to values and social practices, and to the mythologies and taboos that lend unity and coherence to each society. The methods of child rearing used by a given social group are, of course, an expression of the economic, historical, and social structure of the society. The relation between society and child development is presented as a dialectic one; here as elsewhere the author avoids the pitfalls of single-variable causality. Thus he wisely makes it impossible for his material to be used as though it were technology. The book does not provide a recipe for child training methods guaranteed to prevent neurosis, nor a recipe for the creation of a social order designed to eliminate chaos and suffering. The problem is merely posed: "... it is now up to man to continue the exploitation of childhood as an arsenal of irrational fears, or to lift childhood to a position of partnership in a more reasonable order of things."

Within a consistent conceptual framework the reader is led to reflect upon seemingly widely divergent topics. In each instance clinical "specimen samples" introduce the more general treatment of a topic, so that the book is rich in tangential but significant material on the uses of the case history method and on the processes of diagnosis and treatment. There is discussion of the role of exploitation and unequal power among men; of femininity and masculinity; of the peculiar wisdom of children; of loneliness and

anxiety in the well as much as in the ill; of sources of vitality and strength; and of the struggle for ego identity, which the author regards as crucial to the problems besetting Americans today. A comprehensive theory of play (in childhood and in maturity) is given, as is an analysis of the core conflicts and their characteristic part-solutions in two tribes of American Indians. The principles so derived are in turn applied to an analysis of developmental determinants and their consequences in America, Germany, and Russia.

The applicability of the author's concepts is convincingly demonstrated. In the very act of such application however, the reader becomes aware of the gaps in knowledge and theoretical scope which prevent complete analysis. For instance, awareness of the interdependence of organismic, ego psychological, and social processes makes it necessary to comprehend each case history thrice over, once in terms of each of these frames of reference. It seems to this reviewer that fuller comprehension will lead to the development of concepts sufficiently general to eliminate such "triple bookkeeping."

Childhood and Society belongs on the "must" list of scientists and clinicians in the field of child development. It is also recommended as a textbook at the graduate level. To those familiar with psychoanalysis the book is notable especially for the sophisticated treatment of ego psychological and social data in such a way that these represent not an addition to (or a redening of) depth psychology, but rather make the latter more comprehensive. To those coming from other fields it serves as a lucid presentation of psychoanalytic developmental psychology in nontechnical (but happily not in "popular") language. To all it will be important for a unique combination of imaginative clinical description, rigorous thinking, gentle humor, and deep humanity. Erikson's definition of the goal of treatment describes something essential about the effect of his book: It leads to "... a deeper humility before the processes that govern us, and the ability to live with greater simplicity and honesty."

SIBYLLE ESCALONA

Department of Research
The Menninger Foundation

Structural Chemistry of Inorganic Compounds. Vol. I. Walter Hückel; translated by L. H. Long. New York: Elsevier, 1950. 437 pp. \$9.00.

The subtitle of this two-volume treatise might well have been "Atomic, Molecular and Crystal Structure: Valence and the Nature of the Chemical Bond." This would avoid the impression that the book is a German counterpart to the recent volume by A. F. Wells which carries the title *Structural Inorganic Chemistry*. As the suggested subtitle implies, the scope of the Hückel treatment is far broader. The author has sought to provide inorganic chemistry a basis for its systematic