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# CANONS OF CRITICISM

AN article on the United States Supreme Court by Fred Rodell in the September *Progressive* (adapted from the first chapter of Mr. Rodell's book, *Nine Men,* a forthcoming political history of the Court) is a perfect example of the sort of problems critics may create for their readers. Mr. Rodell is a skillful writer, even a brilliant one. As Professor of Law at Yale University, he is thoroughly at home in his subject. Yet this discussion of the Supreme Court, like some other articles written by Mr. Rodell for the *Progressive,* inspires some pretty long thoughts.

Let us look, first, at the mood of Mr. Rodell's article, conceding—since he is a specialist in the subject—that he has his facts straight. He begins:

> At the top levels of the three branches of the civilian government of the United States sit the Congress, the President plus his cabinet, and the Supreme Court. Of these three—in this unmilitary, unclerical nation—only one wears a uniform. Only one carries on its most important business in utter secret behind locked doors—and indeed never reports, even after death, what really went on there. Only one, its members holding office for life if they choose, is completely irresponsible to anyone or anything but themselves and their own consciences. Only one depends for much of its immense influence on its prestige as a semi-sacred institution and preserves that prestige with the trappings and show of superficial dignity rather than earning it, year after working year, by the dignity and wisdom of what it is and does. Under our otherwise democratic form of government, only one top ruling group uses ceremony and secrecy, robes and ritual, as instruments of its *official* policy, as wellsprings of its power.
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> The nine men who are the Supreme Court of the United States are at once the most powerful and the most irresponsible of all the men in the world who govern other men.

To document the claim of this last paragraph, the writer quotes Justice Harlan F. Stone, who declared in a tense moment of dissent: "The only check upon our own exercise of power is our own sense of self-restraint." It is hardly possible, however, that Mr. Rodell seriously intends his readers to accept the view that the members of the U.S. Supreme Court are "the most irresponsible of all the men in the world who govern other men." He means, rather, that they are *in a position* to be irresponsible, should they want to be. That, in his opinion, these men have done things which Mr. Rodell regards as irresponsible—and which he lists in his article—is a very different sort of indictment of them. By contrast, his first paragraph seems to imply that the designation of a man for the Supreme Court and his confirmation by the Senate somehow infects him with maximum irresponsibility.

This is only, we trust, Mr. Rodell's manner of speaking. But it is not a manner calculated to produce understanding of the problems of government and the solutions currently available. Further, any discussion of the Supreme Court of the United States, it seems to us, should begin with something more than a mockery of the symbolism which is associated with the high functions of this body. The element of ritual in the conduct of the Court's affairs is reasonably slight, and it does no particular honor to persons, but to the impersonal justice which the Court is supposed to represent. This institution is the guardian of the principle of reference to an impersonal body of law, as the final authority in the settlement of disputes. A certain gravity ought to attach to its proceedings, and even if, in Mr. Rodell's words, an air of "semi-sacredness" seems to be involved, this is far better than the honoring of royal personages or nationalist traditions. It is quite true that the dignity of the Court should be confirmed by its actions, making room for proper criticism here, but there is intrinsic importance in the fact that Americans choose to rest the final authority of their government in philosophic conceptions of Natural Law. Mr. Rodell's somewhat lampooning mood tends to make this great achievement seem negligible and unimportant.

He might have begun with an analysis of the basic problem of power and the control of the exercise of power. Eventually, in the design of a system of government, you get to a point where power must be allowed to *someone*, and the chance taken that it will not be abused. This is known as faith in human beings, and no form of government can operate without it. The American political system, as it has evolved, takes the chance on the integrity of nine men to render just interpretations of a body of principles. By contrast, under a monarchy, you take the chance on the quality of a single man. In a pure democracy, you take the chance on the good sense and stability of the entire body of citizens. A pure democracy imposes no restraints upon the popular will. The popular will, expressed by vote, is the highest authority.

The American form of government anticipates a calculated risk on the good sense and integrity of (1) the executive, (2) the legislative, and (3) the judiciary branches of the government. Mr. Rodell's complaint seems to be that the risk on the judiciary is greater than it ought to be, and he indicates acts of the judiciary (the Supreme Court) which in his opinion reflect neither the will of the people nor the public good, but only the bad habits of the men on the bench.

Our complaint against Mr. Rodell does not involve the claim that the Supreme Court is or ought to be above criticism. Our complaint is that he does not offer his criticisms in a measured frame of comprehension of the limitations of human institutions. We get the feeling that if Mr. Rodell has the notion to attack any public servant, or any branch of the public service, he will leave us only very small pieces to pick up after he is through.

We suspect that the record of the Supreme Court is at least as good as that of the Executive and Legislative branches of government. The Executive, as everyone knows, is quite able to involve the country in a major war, by encouraging policies which make war practically inevitable, and then obtaining the sanction of the legislature when it is too late or completely impolitic for the Congress to do anything else. The Legislature, also, is capable of considerable folly.

All three branches of the government, in other words, are wide open for unmeasured criticism, if you are inclined to make your case without some normative regard for the intrinsic hazards of democratic self-government. Useful criticism, however, is criticism which develops against a background of understanding that the institutions of a representative democracy or republic are slow-moving reflections of the potentials present in the general electorate. If any man or group of men in politics exceeds by too much these potentials in proposing programmatic goals, a fiasco is almost sure to result. The demagogues see to that. So, when you criticize a public institution like the Supreme Court, you have to keep this in mind if what you say is to be at all instructive to readers.

Mr. Rodell has another paragraph which conceals as much or more than it reveals. He writes:

> . . . the old saw, beloved of school books and political speeches, that "ours is a government of laws, not of men," is an insult and an undemocratic canard. Laws are words, nothing more. Laws do not write or enforce or interpret themselves. Even constitutions are no more than words except as men give them flesh and meaning in action, then the flesh and muscle are molded and the meaning in action is directed by men. The words of the Soviet constitution are in many ways more democratic than ours—as are the words of the constitutions of the several Latin-American countries now run by dictators. And the cold truth about "laws, not men" was never better put than by one of the Founding Fathers of Maryland, who said what all of them were wise enough to know as they hammered out the U.S. Constitution back in 1787: "It is a great mistake to suppose that the paper we are to propose will govern the United States. It is the men whom it will bring into the government and interest in maintaining

Well, of course. Men are needed to interpret the law. They will not all interpret it the same way. Prejudice will affect decisions. Good and wise men will make the best interpretations. But reference to a body of declared and agreed-upon principles is what is meant by a government of laws and not of men. If this is what Mr. Rodell means, he ought to take the trouble to say so, and not brush off the difference between the rule of an absolute monarch, however wise, and the orderly definition of human

relationships, rights, and responsibilities made possible by the social compact.

Rose Wilder Lane, something of an enthusiast, wrote a valuable book with a good chapter in it devoted to the difference between a government simply by men and government by men who have agreed to be guided by laws. (See *The Discovery of Freedom*, pages 110-12.) The difference is very great. Mr. Rodell made a glittering paragraph by ignoring it. He could make similar mincemeat of the claim that "All men are created equal." Men are very unequal, but a great principle of both law and humanity is present in this simple phrase. It would be foolish to lose sight of it.

Mr. Rodell takes pride in being a myth-buster. He is certainly good at it. For example:

> The second and related myth, even more deeply embedded in our folklore of government, has it that the men who become Justices become simultaneously—or ought to become if they don't—politically sterile; that they put on, or should put on, with their robes a complete impartiality or indifference toward the nation's social and economic problems, that they switch, or should switch, their minds to neutral in dealing with every issue outside the verbal needlework of the law. . . . The idea that a human being, by a conscious act of the will, can rid his mind of the preferences and prejudices and political slants and values that his whole life has accumulated in him, and so manage to think in the rarefied atmosphere of simon-pure objectivity, is simply a psychological absurdity.

Well, the way Mr. Rodell tells it, it certainly sounds like an absurdity. But if a man has *no* chance of overcoming his prejudices, the hope of gaining an impartial decision in a court of law is an even greater absurdity. Our understanding of the American political tradition is that it begins with the assumption that men *can* reduce their prejudices, if not erase them; and that a man who wants to be a judge is supposed to make a career out of getting rid of his prejudices. This is still a good idea, even when it fails, or only partially succeeds. After all, if judges can't move in the direction of impartiality, how can we expect ordinary citizens to do so? The judge began life as an ordinary citizen.

Mr. Rodell may be bored with this argument. He may say, "I take all that for granted. Everybody ought to know that." Maybe so. But taking it for granted makes nearly everything else he says sound pretty hopeless. He *doesn't* take for granted the idea that judges are human beings capable of being affected by their past associations and attitudes and interests. He really spells out how vulnerable they are. How smart and how dumb are the people he is writing for, anyhow? Are they smart about some things, and dumb about others, to suit Mr. Rodell's undeniably effective prose?

He is careful to note that the Supreme Court has made some good decisions—desegregation for example. Naturally, the "Court" made the decision because of the men sitting on it. This is Mr. Rodell's big point. What he seems to neglect—and this, it seems to us, is of the greatest importance—is that the whole idea of democracy is that men, whatever they are to begin with, have opportunity to become better on their own initiative under the conditions of self-government. The institutions which are created as "abstractions"—anathema to Mr. Rodell—have the *cultural* function of being constant reminders of this possibility and this ideal, since they are mechanisms created at least in part with this intent.

# *Letter from* INDIA

MADRAS.—The reviewer of Nevil Shute's *Requiem for a Wren* examined the novelist's illustration of how many active in the war did have a good time which disappeared with the advent of peace. The war provided a bounty of thrills and excitement which offered maximum scope for heroism and gallantry, otherwise undisplayable. The prompt dismissal of rehabilitation of these qualities for which the homelier occupations of peace have hardly any demand or utility, is difficult and this therefore results in a psychological unsettlement at the end of the war.

The nationalist movement in India against British rule under the leadership of the Indian National Congress was in the nature of a war though Gandhi's creed of non-violence made it very different. The freedom movement offered only "blood, toils, tears and sweat" for the nationalist, therefore drew out his best qualities and filled him with a sense of mission. The ruling British Government reacted to nationalist opposition with a severity that provoked passionate exhibitions of courage and endurance.

The achievement of freedom did impart an irrelevance to the brand of courage and patriotism that inspired the nationalist to defy authority and brave official displeasure as long as the struggle was on. India's political atmosphere which was characterised by a tenseness because of the freedom movement had to settle down to a fervourless normalcy it had never known. The domestication of belligerent passions after independence into constructive abilities is a problem the presence of which soon came to be felt.

The freedom movement kept the younger generation, particularly students, in perpetual animation. The indefensibility of governmental repression by an alien power condoned the intolerance and spontaneity of student resentment at the doings of the British in India. The virulence of youthful intolerance of injustices however insignificant or indigenous, was realised when India's popular governments fell foul of students in various States. Recently students in Bihar ran into trouble with the State Transport Department officials and nearly six students were killed and many injured in the police firing.

It will be wrong to suppose that Indian students have no aptitude for constructive activity. The zeal with which they have taken part in voluntary developmental programmes has been very much in evidence in road-making, rural uplift, etc. However, disturbing happenings of student indiscipline indicate that considerable headway is still to be made in combating youthful intolerance which has a die-hardness about it.

Such happenings as the Bihar tragedy in pre-independent India would have raised a country-wide ballyhoo and universal condemnation of the brutality of the British Indian police while the student behaviour that provoked such brutality would not have suffered even a formal examination. Freedom robs political commotions in India of such simplicity and induces responsibility in political approach and action. It is not unlikely that many politicians regard the period of the nationalist struggle as the best years in their lives when patriotism excused irresponsibility and greatness could be had more easily. It is no exaggeration to say that many politicians did have a "good time" during the freedom movement basking in their own glory.

Mr. Nehru has often emphasised that the urgency about solving India's economic problems requires that they be tackled on a "war footing." The recapture of the war spirit which animated Indian nationalists before independence is beset with difficulties in Free India wedded to democtacy. It is possible in a dictatorship which with an effective propaganda about enemies without, greedy to gobble up their state, combined with totalitarian ruthlessness and drive, can enthuse people permanently into a mood of war.

Dictatorship is tension (to use the words of Mr. Louis Fischer, the American journalist) while democracy is a babel of voices that weaken official persuasion to the extent they make people halt and hesitate. The sublimation of pre-independence passions into constructive dynamism in democratic India requires imaginative handling.

Another aspect of Indian freedom is the future of Indian idealism, which under Gandhi and Nehru inspired Indian people during the freedom movement. The emergence of India as a free country imposes a strain on Indian idealism—and the strain becomes the greater under the corrupting influence of power when she assumes importance in world affairs. Assertion of interests, however legitimate, particularly when they concern territory, becomes suspect; and there is always the danger of magnification and overpleading of self-interest. Already India's anxiety for the interests of her nationals in South Africa, Ceylon and to a smaller extent in Burma has been characterised in certain quarters as imperialistic. Foreign comments on India's policy in Kashmir (in her dispute with Pakistan) have been sometimes unfriendly. India's stand on Portuguese colonies in India has been branded by unfriendly Western observers as Hitlerite.

India faces the possibility of progressive moral deterioration with the progressive earthiness of ends and interests which as a free nation she will in future be confronted with. How far she will steer clear of such degeneration will depend on the moral vitality of her people to turn out a steady stream of men like Gandhi and Nehru.

The United States of America, after the American War of Independence in 18th century, emerged in a haze of idealistic glory. At present large sections of Asian opinion regard America's Asian policy as imperialistic—a result, perhaps inevitable, of America's activities as a world power. Freedom palls and self-interest stultifies. India's freedom has been achieved two centuries later by a steady assault of idealism and the trend it takes will certainly be a historical curiosity, inducing reflections on American history as well.

—INDIAN CORRESPONDENT

# *REVIEW*
## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF PREJUDICE

GORDON ALLPORT'S *The Nature of Prejudice* suggests, we think, content for one of the most important courses our schools and universities could teach. Here is a topic in which sociological and international issues blend with much needed personal disciplines in logic and semantics.

From the point of view of psychology, maturity is measured in large part by freedom from prejudice. The mature man is recognized by his constancy in self-reliance, which alone gives inner security; it is the *insecure* person who is most given to prejudice in an effort to bolster a failing ego. Anti-Semitism, for instance, as Sartre has pointed out, stems basically from a desire on the part of insecure and immature persons to believe that they are at least unalterably superior to *someone.* And, most important, when a person is allowed to retain his serious prejudices during youth, there is little chance that he will suddenly overcome them in later years, for, to quote Surindar Suri's review of Allport's book in the *Humanist* (July-August):

> The intolerant individual has no faith in the benevolence and goodness of fellow humans and is constantly afraid that others will take advantage of him. He tends to be a conformist, and will not tolerate unconventional conduct in anyone. He is a great joiner of fraternities, lodges, and clubs for he needs to lose himself in a dosed, exclusive group of which his "race" and his nation are the most extensive and basic. This individual is also bothered by his conscience, because of his inability to live up to its ideals. It leads to guilt-feelings but, unable to admit his own weaknesses, he projects his failings upon others. He comes to believe that others are depraved and that he can justifiably hate and persecute them. He thus relieves his own mind of guilt-feeling.

We trust that the editors of MANAS are not alone in wishing that *The Nature of Prejudice* may become as influential as Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*—though Allport's lack of a single, tight thesis makes this eventuality unlikely. There is much, however, to establish kinship between the two volumes. As social psychology begins to come of age, the focus of investigation inevitably swings toward the meeting ground of social forces in the individual psyche. This might be described as the third, or genuinely synthetic stage in the growth of a scientific study of man's consciousness. The beginning was inspired by Freud, with emphasis upon the hidden demons of the personal mind. The next step might be called "social" and "environmental" psychology involving examination of the group attitudes which were found to be so largely responsible for the confusions finally erupting as neuroses and psychoses. Finally, in the works of such psychoanalysts as Fromm, sociologists like Riesman, and in a book such as Allport's, various insights combine to suggest an affirmative outlook. We begin to see what a man must learn to think and feel in order to become free.

While *The Nature of Prejudice,* like the major works of Fromm and Riesman, necessarily begins with criticism of numerous conventional attitudes, the most important underlying theme is The Man Who Can Be—once he has learned to transcend philosophical myopia. The following paragraphs will serve for illustration:

> The core of the matter seems to be that every living being is trying to complete his own nature: i.e., to learn by subsidiation. His quest may take one of two roads. One road calls for safety through exclusion, through a *rejective* equilibrium. The person clings to a narrow island, restricts his circle, sharply selects what reassures him and rejects what threatens him. The other road is one of relaxation, self-trust and, therefore, trust of others. There is no need to exclude strangers from one's gathering. Self-love is compatible with love of others. This tolerant orientation is possible because security has been experienced in the realistic handling of inner conflicts and social transactions. Unlike the prejudiced person, the tolerant person does not perceive the world as a jungle where men are basically evil and dangerous.
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> Some modern theories of love and hate maintain that the original orientation of all men is toward a trusting and affiliative philosophy of life. This disposition grows naturally out of the early dependent

> relationship of mother and child, of earth and creature. Affiliation is the source of all happiness. When hatred and animosity grow in a life, they are crippling distortions of this naturally affiliative trend. Hate results from the mishandling of frustrations and deprivations that have been allowed to disintegrate the very core of the ego.
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> If this view is correct, the development of mature and democratic personalities is largely a matter of building inner security. Only when life is free from intolerable threats, or when these threats are adequately handled with inner strength, can one be at ease with all sorts and conditions of men. . . .
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> Several investigators have called attention to a general *inwardness* in the personalities of tolerant people. There is interest in imaginative processes, in fantasies, in theoretical reflections, in artistic activities. Prejudiced people, by contrast, are *outward* in their interests, given to externalizing their conflicts, and finding their environment more absorbing than themselves. Tolerant people have a desire for personal autonomy rather than for external, institutional anchorage.

Isolation of these excellent passages, we suddenly realize, however, may give a false impression of the structure of *The Nature of Prejudice*—since this quoted distillation rests on a foundation of more than four hundred pages of detailed studies. Chief emphasis, from the standpoint of proportionate space, of necessity falls rather upon "racial" or ethnic prejudice, with the influence of religion—often not good—receiving a measure of consideration. Of the effectiveness of legislation in counteracting prejudice, Allport writes:

> While it is true that many Americans will not obey laws of which they disapprove strongly, most of them deep inside their consciences do approve civil rights and antidiscrimination legislation. They may approve even while they squeal in protest. Laws in line with one's conscience are likely to be obeyed, when not obeyed they still establish an ethical norm that holds before the individual an image of what his conduct should be. The goad of the law often breaks into a vicious circle so that a process of healing starts to occur. Forces in the individual and in the community that have nothing whatever to do with the law are thus liberated. It is not entirely true that legislation must wait on education—at least not on complete and perfect education, for legislation itself is part of the educative process.

In closing, a thought expressed at the beginning of this review clamors for repetition: Why not take the bull by the horns in the public schools, working out studies of prejudice suited to various age levels, and cap this off with university courses in prejudice-analysis? Each high school boy and girl, in our opinion, could benefit greatly from exposure to the techniques of analyzing prejudice, and, if some come into conflict with shoddy and unjustifiable pronouncements from parents—well, all the better. Children are always taking issue with their elders about something, so why not increase the likelihood that the issue will be important? Sociologists have pointed out again and again that children are naturally "tolerant," usually giving in only reluctantly to the biases of their mothers and fathers. And behind all this is the fact that attempts to understand the mechanisms which allow prejudice to arise, and those semantic and logical disciplines which can aid in its banishment, can be pursued most successfully in the company of others.

# *COMMENTARY*
## DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

THE address last month of G. H. Mehta, Indian Ambassador to the United States, before a conference on South East Asia at Johns Hopkins University, contains some matters of interest to supplement this week's Letter from India. Mr. Mehta reports that despite the problems created by illiteracy and multilingualism, the Indian Republic is firmly committed to democratic methods. During the last general elections (1951-52) "nearly 107 million persons voted out of a total electorate of 179 million." More recent state elections were also gratifying, with from 75 to nearly 90 per cents of the electorate going to the polls.

On political trends in India, Mr. Mehta has this to say:

> While the Rightest parties, that is, those who do not accept fully the conception of a secular State or are not in favor of measures of social reform for the Hindu community, made a poor showing in the last general elections, the Leftist parties did much better, which is not surprising, in view of the poverty and economic hardships of the people. Nevertheless, since the general elections, the present Government has gained strength for a variety of reasons. Through the Five-Year Plan, a sustained and concerted endeavor is being made to raise the standards of living and provide an "element of hope" which is essential for the survival of democracy. Revolution by consent is India's approach to realization of social justice. . . .

Then, in regard to India's policy of complete independence in foreign affairs, the Ambassador reports:

> Contrary to forebodings and apprehensions that India's policy of non-alignment would play into the hands of the indigenous Communist Party, the expression of friendship by Soviet Russia and the Peoples' Republic of China have, if anything, placed the Indian Communist Party in a dilemma. The *Economist* of London in its May 28 issue said: "The Communists' life is intolerable. On the international front they cannot criticize Mr. Nehru for being friendly with everybody when Moscow has no objections to this; when, indeed, Moscow itself is busy making friends wherever it can. In regard to foreign aid, they are equally impotent. India gets aid from the West but it also gets a steel plant from Russia. On the domestic front, the wind is taken out of their sails by talk of a 'socialistic pattern of society,' by land reforms and community projects, by loving care bestowed on handloom weavers, by equalitarian aims of the budget and the recommendations of the Tax Enquiry Committee."

While India may not be "killing" her Communists with kindness, these policies are certainly stultifying with good will the time-honored methods of communist agitation. If the canny London *Economist* takes this view, the analysis is likely to be correct.

# CHILDREN
## . . . and Ourselves

BRUNO BETTELHEIM'S *Truants from Life,* like or even more than his *Love Is Not Enough,* belongs on the supplemental reading list to MANAS "Books for Our Times." The editors, in fact, have often felt that the B.F.O.T. list is somehow incomplete without representation of Dr. Bettelheim's work, but learned from lending *Love Is Not Enough* to various people that many may feel such volumes to be "highly specialized" rather than "must" reading for everyone. Since a major purpose of the B.F.O.T. series was to provide awareness of significant new trends of thought *without* depending on the categorical divisions of subject so well known in the academic world, this objection to Bettelheim's recital of work in child-rehabilitation places us in a dilemma. So we shall have to leave it to those of our readers who agree with us that *Love Is Not Enough* and *Truants from Life* are really not specialized at all, save in appearance, to place these books—as a unit—on the MANAS list.

As Superintendent of the Sonia Shankman Orthogenic School, a residential treatment institution devoted to the rehabilitation of children with severe emotional disorders, Dr. Bettelheim has demonstrated the compassion of a good doctor, the sympathy of an understanding parent, and beyond these, the capacity to relate the ills of a child's mind with major corresponding ills of our society. In reading the moving "case histories" recorded in *Truants from Life,* one soon recognizes that he is not simply considering the life of a single child, but rather travelling slowly along a road of comprehension which makes both self-study and the study of society in general more rewarding. Though Dr. Bettelheim himself does not belabor the thesis, nor even, so far as we can recall, make this comprehensive claim, the evidence is there—and experience of its impact awaits each thoughtful reader. At the outset, though, care should be taken to make clear that the "case history" approach does not, in this book, bury human personality under a pile of graphs and statistics. These are human stories, warm without any overlay of sentimentalism, detailed enough to impress themselves indelibly on the reader, yet short enough that continuity is never lost. Bettelheim's explanations in respect to his choice of no more than four "life stories" for his alloted five hundred pages are interesting in many respects. He writes:

> One way to present a picture of our work as reflected in the children's lives with us would be to describe a great many children. Another way would be to devote an entire book to one child—to show in minute detail how his rehabilitation proceeded and what experiences influenced the unfolding of his new personality.
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> To present a complete account of just one case would not be possible even if the whole book were devoted to it. In addition, using a single history might suggest that we had arbitrarily selected a particularly successful case or one making a special point in favor of our theories and methods. The reader might even suppose that we work with only one type of disturbance.
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> On the other hand, to present a great many cases would permit only a brief account of any one child's life with us.
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> The end result of presenting too few and too many data thus is the same. The reader, confronted with a task beyond the ability of his creative imagination, gives up, and accepts or rejects the author and his thesis without adequate grounds for either reaction: in one instance because he has learned too little about the person whose development and treatment he is supposed to understand, and in the other because the overabundance of detail has destroyed his potentiality for spontaneous empathy. In neither case can the reader critically evaluate the author's assertions by testing them against what seems to him to be the essential logic of the case.
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> These considerations explain why several long, though not exhaustively complete, case histories are presented in this book.

This passage indicates what Dr. Bettelheim is striving for throughout—enough scientific research to merit respect, yet with greater attention paid to quality of data than to quantity. Also, one gets the feeling that Bettelheim is a scientist and a researcher only because he has to be in order to reach sure ground in dealing with ailing human psyches. Above all, we should say, he is a philosopher, and a man of

compassionate understanding. In the Appendix to *Truants from Life*, we find a further set of "notes" on the plan and structure of the book—broadly suggestive of what we are trying to say about its author:

> Only a work of art, and not a case report, could give full life to each human being whose history is presented here. Although some blurring of highly individual relations may have occurred in the process of weaving a composite picture, it is hoped that enough has been said about each child so that he comes to life—still without encumbering the stories with too much detail. Even such lengthy histories as form this book can give a relatively adequate picture of only a few of the more important events in each child's life; it has been necessary to concentrate mainly on what seemed the most significant developments. I hope, however, that by steering a middle course between too much and too little I have made it possible for the reader to experience each child as a person. Only thus may the reader fill out the many gaps that remain, fathom reactions and motives of the child and staff even when they are not explicitly stated, and apply his own critical judgment in evaluating the events described.

Another revealing remark is that "sometimes the staff members and I were sorely tempted to include in a child's story vividly remembered events that had great emotional meaning for us and the child but which, unfortunately, for one reason or another, were not reported at the time they occurred. Perhaps they seemed unimportant to the participant-observer when they took place, and their far-reaching significance emerged only later. But we withstood the temptation to tell about these occurrences—though sometimes with much regret. I only hope that, despite such efforts to prevent our very personal involvement from influencing our objectivity, the deep dedication of staff members to each of the children described has not been obscured."

For the readers of the major works of Erich Fromm, the first case history in *Truants from life*, will be of special interest, as it is titled "Paul, A Case of 'Institutionalism'." This particular child had, as a substitute for any normal sort of family living, been subjected to successive enrollments in several public institutions. When the Sonia Shankman School first received Paul his behavior was not extraordinarily dangerous or aggressive; all his impulses had been curbed by institutional routines. When he was allowed some real freedom of choice, however, it soon became apparent that Paul could not get better until he got a good deal worse. His individuality was not only distorted, it was *buried*—providing evidence for the psychoanalytic contention that an ill cannot be corrected until it is adequately observed and understood. An interesting passage toward the close of "Paul's" case history reveals that Bettelheim and his co-workers realized that even *they* represented an institution to the child, albeit one so different from the others in which he had lived. After achieving success with Paul over a period of years Bettelheim observes that "one of our knottiest problems was to decide which was more important for him, to continue living in the School or to live with a family. If he stayed with us, with the people to whom he had related more closely than to anybody else in his life, he would continue to use these relations in integrating his personality. But this would require at least two or three more years, and by then, when he was seventeen, it would certainly be too late for him to live in a home, with a family, during what remained of his formative years. If we waited that long, Paul would truly spend all his youth in institutions, and even in the best institution he must live a carefully arranged life. Paul's life had already been too much dominated by routine, and too little conditioned by his own spontaneous decisions."

# *FRONTIERS*

## "What Is Buddhism?"

WHILE it is possible to gain some idea of the various religions of the world from reading encyclopedias and books of reference, it is always better to go to a source which represents the convictions of a believer, since what a convinced man will say bears a quality that cannot possibly be present in the accounts and descriptions of scholars, however learned. We welcome, therefore, the answer to the question, "What Is Buddhism?", given by Prime Minister U Nu of Burma, in an article of this title appearing in the *Eastern World* for August. There is a vast amount of material in print on Buddhism, and in contrast to this wealth of discussion, U Nu's article is doubtless the briefest of sketches; nor are we competent to read it with a critical eye. Nevertheless, the words of a man who has had personally much to do with the revival of Buddhism in the East may be of particular interest, especially so since he is also addressing Western readers by choice in this article.

The Buddhism of the Burmese Prime Minister's article is best known as Theravada Buddhism, which prevails in Ceylon, Burma, and Thailand. Theravada Buddhists believe that they are preserving and transmitting to subsequent generations the teachings of Gotama as given by him to his disciples. Theravada Buddhism is one of the two great schools of Buddhism which separated into distinct points of view somewhere between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. Northern or Mahayana Buddhism found its home in Tibet, China, and Japan, while Hinayana (Theravada) Buddhism remained popular in the southern countries. The division turns, perhaps, on the question of whether or not there is a distinct surviving entity which may be called the soul, and on the ends or ideals which are held in view. Theravada Buddhists tend to deny a permanent individuality and to regard the attainment of Nirvana as the highest good. Mahayana Buddhists recognize more complicated metaphysical teachings concerning the thread of persisting human identity, and hold that the highest goal of human development is the *Bodhisattva,* "who, having attained the goal of purification and emancipation, refuses to enter Nirvana, out of devoted love for those who still remain behind and a consuming love to help them." A Bodhisattva, E. A. Burtt points out, "feels that his own salvation would be imperfect, and even impossible, as long as any living beings remained unsaved."

It could be argued, perhaps, that Theravada Buddhism represents Buddha's teaching for the masses who are so bound down by suffering that the prospect of helping to save others is so remote as to be practically unimaginable. One could also say that it purports to be simply a statement of the laws of Nature, according to Buddha's doctrines. Mahayana Buddhism, on the other hand, adds the *motive* of all the great Buddhas or Enlightened Ones to the doctrines which they taught. In behalf of Theravada Buddhism, there is the probability that it has suffered far less corruption and theological embellishment than Mahayana Buddhism, since it attempts something less than the production of "saviors," and since it accords more with the limitations of rational speculation. It is certain that, in the exposition of U Nu, Theravada Buddhism enjoys a universal appeal. He begins:

> I think that Buddhism is not properly understood in the West. Some believe that Buddhism merely teaches the avoidance of such evil things as taking life, theft, seduction, falsehood, taking liquor and drugs, and so forth. Others understand Buddhism merely as a body of doctrine teaching people to cast off hatred and disseminate love towards all humanity.
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> But these aspects of Buddhism are merely partial aspects. They are only part of Buddhism and do not represent all that it stands for. Metaphorically speaking, they are just one of the many legs of a centipede. After all, the doctrine of avoidance of evil practices and of love for all living beings were doctrines that appeared at certain periods of history even before the rise of Buddhism.
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> Then what is it that distinguishes Buddhism from other religions and from other codes of moral and ethical conduct?
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> The answer lies in the practice of Buddhist doctrine, which involves an exercise of a rigid personal discipline, so as to attain a serenity of mind,

which in turn will lead to a way of escape from suffering and stress.

U Nu does not hesitate to use the word "escape," yet he, least of all Buddhists, could be accused of "escapism." This contemptuous epithet has too long been directed at Eastern religions by Westerners who are just as guilty of "escapism" as the members of any other culture, but who adopt a pragmatic or rule-of-thumb approach to the problem of escaping from evil or pain rather than an analytical or philosophical approach. As will be seen from what U Nu says, the "serenity" sought by the Buddhist is very much the same as the "maturity" now advocated by Western psychological philosophers. The latter may not propose the same means of reaching this goal, but the attitudes and qualities which result from its achievement are extremely similar.

The first principle of Buddhism offered by U Nu will be the most difficult for Westerners to accept. It involves, he says, "belief in and an understanding of the 31 planes of existence, which may also be called the wheel or cycle of existence. Of these planes, 26 are said to be above the plane of human existence, while there are four below. This transcendental "geography" of the Buddhist faith will be a little hard to take for people who have trouble understanding only one plane of existence where they are now—but an effort at a sympathetic hearing for U Nu's exegesis may suggest helpful analogies. For example, *delirium* is a condition or plane of consciousness which is specific enough to be identified and differentiated from normal human consciousness. A fit of anger produces a similar condition or limitation, and the agony of remorse, so difficult to relieve, still another. These could be regarded as demoniacal planes below the level of normal human life. In the same way, higher planes might be imagined as affording immunity to characteristic human weaknesses.

Well, we made the effort, anyway. U Nu continues:

> If we take the human plane as our criterion, the beings in the higher planes of existence have much pleasure and enjoyment, whereas the beings in the four lower planes are in pain and torment. If I may borrow terms from other religions, the upper 26 planes of spiritual existence are the planes of "paradise," and the nether planes are the planes of "purgatory."

Some readers may complain that while this teaching is "interesting," and not impossibly true, by what justification can it be called "rational"? Our answer is that the Buddhist method of verification of such teachings purports to be a rational method. It invokes no supernatural powers by which "faith" can be obtained, nor is there any path to knowledge except through the self-discovery of the individual. This qualifies, we think, as a rational approach.

U Nu now lays down further postulates:

> The *second* principle of Buddhism is a recognition or a realization of the following three cardinal facts. They are:
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> (1) No being born in any of these 31 planes of Existence is permanent.
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> (2) All beings born in any of these 31 planes of Existence will be reborn endlessly in one of these planes as a result of their past mental states, utterances, and actions. Buddhism lays down precisely the nature of the plane for a particular mental state, utterance or action.
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> (3) All beings in any of these 31 planes of Existence are bound to meet, more or less, with suffering and misery, in the form of separation from loved ones, having to live or work together with hateful ones, non-fulfillment and frustration of desires, advancing age, illness, death and so on.
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> The *third* principle is this: Buddhism is a way of life which will lead to complete freedom from all these sufferings.
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> What then is this way of life?
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> The Lord Buddha has clearly said that there is but one way which will lead to freedom from suffering. This way is no other than the way of complete awareness. The nature of this awareness will be understood better if one practices contemplation.

Turning to the realities of human experience, U Nu now examines the capacity of sense perceptions to excite either liking or revulsion. These automatic responses to sense experience are what must be overcome, and awareness of them—*objectivity*, a

Westerner might say—is the secret of controlling spontaneous reactions:

> So long as we allow ourselves to be victims of these states of mind, we will have an incorrect perception of ourselves and of things around us, both animate beings and inanimate objects, . . . What is therefore required is the sense of awareness at the first impact of sight, sound, scent, taste, touch and thought. An angry man, at the instant application of "awareness" of his anger, will find that his anger subsides.

U Nu lists four stages of progressive awareness. The first is that of *Sotopatti*—achieved by the man who has definitely entered the stream of consciousness which flows toward Nirvana. Such a man begins to find his old habits of life repugnant to him. The second stage is *Sakadagami*—involving still greater conquest of past tendencies and weaknesses. (In northern Buddhism, this stage represents a condition in which only one more birth is needed for liberation.) The third, termed *Anagami*, makes a man immune to anger and revulsion, there remaining in him only the desire for the highest condition. (Northern Buddhists believe that the *Anagamin* need not incarnate again, save as he chooses to do so to help his fellow beings.) The fourth stage is that of the *Arahatta*, who has perfect serenity. He can enter Nirvana at will. Concluding, U Nu speaks of the means by which these teachings may be tested:

> . . . truth can be discovered only through personal experience. No amount of explanation . . . can convey exactly what "awareness" is. . . . The Lord Buddha has said that the dhamma or doctrine of Buddhism has the following six qualities:
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> (1) It has faultless excellence.
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> (2) It is not a doctrine that has to be accepted on hearsay, or because someone has said so; it is a doctrine that has to be practiced by oneself to be realized fully.
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> (3) It produces without a deferment of time. The truth of the doctrine can be known in this life and the proof need not be postponed to the hereafter.
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> (4) It has the quality of being able to invite non-believers to come and prove its truth to themselves.
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> (5) Since it is a doctrine without inconsistencies, and other blemishes, it is one which everyone, high or low, can and should follow.
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> (6) It is not a doctrine that a father can know from his son's practicing of it, or a son can know from his father's practicing of it. It has to be practiced by oneself for one to be able to realize its truth.

The beauty of Theravada Buddhism lies in the simplicity of its principles. As we said at the outset, we are unable to place any stamp of "authenticity" on U Nu's account of Buddhist teachings. But then, we have an innate skepticism of any account of a philosophy or religion which needs the approval of scholarly authority before it can claim our attention. It is the inherent reasonableness of what is said that should draw our interest, if the reasonableness is there.

For a wider comprehension of the spirit of Buddhism and the various Buddhist traditions, E. A. Burtt's *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha*, a Mentor Classic, is highly recommended. Some notion of the contents of this work may be gained from introductory remarks in the section devoted to Theravada Buddhism. Mr. Burtt writes:

> . . . it is possible that as Buddhism passed from its earliest form into that which has since prevailed in the Theravada countries, there has been at work at least a selection, an emphasis, and a tendency toward more extreme interpretation than that of the Buddha on several important points. Happily, we do not need to decide whether this is actually the case or not. Our purpose . . . is to bring out vividly the characteristic emphases that reveal the spirit of Theravada Buddhism, as we find them presented in the scriptures which, through the centuries, have been influential in the Theravada countries.