

THE MORAL JUDGMENT OF THE CHILD, by J. Piaget
(Kegan Paul, *International Library of Psychology, etc.* Pp. x 418,
12/6d. net).

This admirable book presents a fully documented account of the changes that occur with increasing age in children's modes of evaluating and ordering their conduct. The data collected relate to the ways in which children regard the rules of their games, to their judgments on lying and stealing, and to their ideas of justice. The standardized interviews, by means of which the information was obtained, appear to have been excellently planned and carried out, and to have avoided the danger of distorting the facts through artificiality in the way they were elicited.

The two main stages of moral development which Piaget distinguishes are: first, the acceptance of adult injunctions as unquestionably valid and as deriving their cogency purely from having been promulgated by adults; second, co-operation with other children on an equal footing and consequent obedience to certain injunctions because their necessity to group activity is recognized. This gives a more critical attitude to rules, which, nevertheless, are in practice obeyed more carefully than are the younger children's magically sacred rules. Similarly with justice: whereas in the early years anything done by an adult is just, later on justice demands the recognition of equality among children of the same age. As a result of this development the childish conception of punishment changes: what is at first expiation for an infringement of the mystically powerful rule becomes (when co-operation has been reached) a redressal of the social balance, this having been disturbed by the individual aggression that is being punished. In this way there emerges 'the rather short-sighted justice of those children who give back the mathematical equivalent of the blows they have received.' This one might suppose to be the final development of a system of judgments founded entirely on the maintenance of equality in social relationships. Some other principle would appear necessary in order to explain any further advance.

Piaget however is completely committed to the view that all morality arises from the social interaction of equals. 'Morality presupposes the existence of rules which transcend the individual, and these rules could only develop through contact with other

people.' He is careful, however, to dissociate himself from Durkheim's views. Where Durkheim sees social constraint as the origin of morality Piaget sees it as a feature of childhood, one which must give place to social co-operation before true morality develops: 'the unilateral respect belonging to constraint is not a stable system, and the equilibrium towards which it tends is no other than mutual respect.' His data show that this process does in fact take place, but the whole tenor of his interpretation is to the effect that social equilibrium is an end in itself and not simply an aid to individual development. The effect of this interpretation appears in the curious confusion of the following passage: 'The essence of experimental behaviour—whether scientific, technical, or moral—consists, not in a common belief, but in rules of mutual control. Everyone is free to bring in innovations, but only so far as he succeeds in making himself understood by others and in understanding them.' Here Piaget disregards the fact that one may introduce innovations into one's own conduct or beliefs as a purely individual experiment. If others disapprove of the innovation (whether they understand it or not) they may put a stop to it and even penalize the innovator. But the innovation remains an individual experiment, to be judged good or bad according as its final results sort well or badly with the innovator's individual standards. This is not to underestimate the importance of social relationships in guiding the individual and helping to establish his standards; it is instead to make the notion of morality more fundamental than anything that can arise solely from social interactions—to make it, in fact, continuous with the physiological co-ordination which prevents flexors and extensors from being excited simultaneously, and the psychological integration (still individual) which solves the conflict between the desire to eat one's cake and the desire to have it.

The interpretation one adopts is extremely important in determining one's attitude to punishment. Piaget, by regarding social equilibrium as an end in itself, provides no satisfactory means for advancing beyond the notion of revenge. He notes that 'As respect for adult punishment gradually grows less, certain types of conduct develop which one cannot but class under the heading of retributive justice. . . The child feels more and more that it is fair that he should defend himself and to give back the blows

he receives. . . . It is entirely a matter of reciprocity. So-and-so takes upon himself the right to give me a punch, he therefore gives me the right to do the same to him.' He goes on, 'It may be objected that such a morality will not take one very far, since the best adult consciences ask for something more than the practice of mere reciprocity.' But this something more he goes on to characterize as 'charity and the forgiving of injuries.' Nothing could show more clearly the hampering effect of valuing social equilibrium for itself. For the conception of forgiveness involves hardly any *conscious* advance on the simple morality of 'a blow for a blow'; one forgoes one's right to exact full retribution, but the right remains implicit. And the forgiving child (or adult), not exercising his right to revenge, yet still clinging to it, demands in compensation at least a sense of superiority. He preens himself on 'forgiveness' when he achieves a rudimentary awareness of the fact that his social 'rights' are, in certain situations, useless to him. The stage of development that this awareness initiates, that of taking reparation when possible but declining revenge, and of distinguishing between deterrent punishment and requital, must be regarded as due to the individual's advance beyond the simple concern for social equilibrium. He is at last holding his fellow creature at arm's length and deciding on the best course of action for himself, an individual, regardless of maintaining his social rights for their own sake.

To disagree with the central assumptions of this book is by no means to lose one's respect for it. Only when applied to the facts of later childhood does Piaget's thesis seem inadequate and unilluminating. For the early years of childhood it allows extremely convincing and often subtle conclusions, of great pedagogical significance, to be drawn from observations which are in themselves of extraordinary interest and value.

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SELECTIONS FROM REMY DE GOURMONT (Phoenix Library, Chatto and Windus). The price of this book is 3/6d. not 7/6d. as announced in the first edition of the second number of *Scrutiny*.

PATTERN AND VARIATION IN POETRY, by Chard Powers Smith (Scribners, 15/-).

Nothing, probably, will stop this book from having, with a little luck, a great success: lecturers and teachers whose notion of criticism derives from Mr. Greening Lamborn's *Rudiments* will find in Mr. Smith what they were waiting for. Its catholic modernity (cf. 'Mr. Elliott's *Waste Land* . . . rationalistic pseudo-poetry') makes its academic futility the more seductive. It will be useless to assure most professional students of poetry that 'technique' as Mr. Smith conceives it has little relation to the business of criticism. But one cannot repeat too often that the profitable analysis of 'technique' can have no use for graphs or scansion and demands the active co-operation of a trained sensibility. Mr. Smith's sensibility has been 'trained' into uselessness.

THE OFFENCE, by Pierre Bost (Elkin, Mathews and Marrot, 7/6d.).

This novel won the Prix Interallié, and though not a great or even a remarkable novel is well worth reading if one must read novels to pass the time. Unlike the English equivalents it obviously proceeds from a mature and adult sensibility, from an intelligent and cultivated man of the world who is yet in no degree stale or uncritical of his environment. The scene is contemporary Paris—the worlds of the student, the journalist and the artist.

THE TWO THIEVES, by T. F. Powys (Chatto and Windus, 7/6d.).

Mr. T. F. Powys's position is now such that all those who are capable of realizing that he is that rare thing, an original artist, may be presumed to have already had his work brought to their notice. Our alternative is either to criticize this new book of three stories at length or merely to announce it. Having no room for the former, we rely on the latter to direct the attention of serious readers to *The Two Thieves*.

THE PRESS AND THE ORGANIZATION OF SOCIETY, by Norman Angell, mentioned in the first number of *Scrutiny* as out of print, is being reprinted immediately by the Minority Press (Cambridge) at 3/6d.