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BRUNO BETTELHEIM

(1903-1990)

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Bruno Bettelheim, eminent scholar and educator, directed the University of Chicago's Orthogenic School for nearly thirty years. He published sixteen books and numerous scholarly papers and essays. The main thrust of his writing was his application of psychoanalytic principles to problems in education, society, and the family. He also devoted several works to reinterpreting psychoanalysis in light of his formative years in Vienna, and under the impact of his admired mentors and colleagues: educator and philosopher John Dewey; and psychoanalysts August Aichhorn, Anna Freud, Erik Erikson, and Sigmund Freud himself.

Psychoanalytic applications: the orthogenic school

Many of Bettelheim's publications dealt with his modifications of psychoanalysis to fit the milieu he created for severely disturbed youth at the Orthogenic School, one of the University of Chicago's laboratory schools. An example of the university's dedication to renovating primary and secondary education, Bettelheim's treatment milieu was strongly influenced by the ideas of John Dewey. Bettelheim combined his interest in reshaping psychoanalysis with the inventive, inquiring spirit that permeated the university's Department of Education and the University of Chicago as a whole.

Dewey's works (1965) in combination with psychoanalytic works provided the theory. But August Aichhorn was probably Bettelheim's greatest inspiration in fashioning the Orthogenic School. Aichhorn (1965) wrote that the problems of 'dissocial' youth could only be remedied by taking them out of the home environment, which had precipitated the antisocial behavior, and putting them in a training school. Similarly, Bettelheim (1950, 1955, 1967, 1974) wrote at length that severely disturbed youngsters must be removed from the environment which fostered their symptoms and housed in an especially designed treatment milieu based on psychoanalytic principles. Although psychoanalysis proper could not be applied to every waking moment, Bettelheim thoroughly described an orderly institutional structure that combined an observational approach with a psychoanalytic interpretation of events.

Foremost was Bettelheim's idea that, because the child had suffered anguish in his inability to sustain himself in the family, he needed 'central persons' in his life at the school. These important persons were to be nurturing, observing and interpreting: the heart of the child's existence. Speaking psychoanalytically, one might say that the mainstays of the child's life (counselors and teachers) functioned as ego supports to these extraordinarily needy young people whose ego functioning had lapsed, often for years, before they were admitted to the Orthogenic School.

Bettelheim functioned as a sort of superego. He expected every child to work hard to solve its problems. He oversaw the institution as a whole, for example, by making rounds every evening as the children were put to bed and by conducting daily staff meetings where he not only searched a child's behavior for meaning but also brilliantly instructed the child's 'central persons'. Staff discussions, then, became the forum for influencing the pivot around which the child's experience revolved.

If dream interpretation is the royal road to the unconscious, psychoanalysis, in Bettelheim's view, is the royal road to educational reform. Sigmund Freud (1965) couldn't have agreed more. In his foreword to Aichhorn's (1965) work, Freud wrote: 'Of all the fields in which psychoanalysis has been applied none has aroused so much interest, inspired so much hope, and accordingly attracted so many capable workers as the theory and practice of child training. [...] The child has become the main object of psychoanalytic research and in this respect has replaced the neurotic with whom the work began. [...] It is no wonder that expectation was aroused that psychoanalytic work would prove valuable in education, the purpose of which is to guide the child on his way to maturity, to encourage him, and to protect him from taking the wrong path.'²

Freud went on to say that educators do not necessarily have Aichhorn's intuitive gift. Thus, they should be psychoanalytically trained because 'otherwise the child, the object of [the psychoanalyst's] effort, remains an inaccessible enigma to him.' Freud echoed one of Johann Pestalozzi's critics (Gross, 1963) who wrote that if intuitive gifts, or 'love' for the child, are the essence of education, everything depends on the intuitive wisdom of individual teachers. Therefore, method became important in the training of those not so intuitively gifted. Bettelheim put Freud's advice into practice at the Orthogenic School by helping to educate the child through educating his care-takers (Bettelheim, 1974).

Educating children at the orthogenic school

Among the best known of Bettelheim's works describing his novel approaches to the treatment of severely disturbed youngsters is his first book, *Love Is Not Enough* (1950). In the chapter entitled 'The Challenge of Learning,' Bettelheim discussed at length the 'hows' of educating the children at the Orthogenic School. He borrowed and reworked ideas not just from John Dewey but also from Maria Montessori. He recognized that sensory experience as a precursor to intellectual learning was particularly important in the education of autistic young people (Bettelheim, 1962). At this time he also began to use Jean Piaget's work to mark the child's developmental progress and to theorize how Piaget's ideas on the child's developing mind could be transformed into classroom practice at the Orthogenic School (Bettelheim, 1967).

True to Dewey's thesis that 'education' and 'experience' coming in the child's growing up years (the state of modern American education notwithstanding), Bettelheim described how the children at the school, who had a past history of aversive reactions to learning, often welcomed learning when it was based on personal experiences (Bettelheim, 1950). He wrote that the study of nature provided an arena within which the children could begin the learning enterprise because it does not suggest to a troubled child that he must learn about family secrets. Nor does he face the Pandora's box of learning to read, which implies to the child that he must learn about everything—especially the facts that troubled children do not want to understand. Bettelheim explained: 'The psychological reason seems to be that every child grew familiar with certain aspects of nature long before he ever knew about complicated family relations or family secrets. He became afraid of understanding what they were like; long, too, before he knew of reading as a means of acquiring knowledge. Moreover,

nature does not demand comprehension of what seems to the beginning reader to be the magic connotations of symbols, such as words. The child thinks that if he studies nature, he will understand only nature. Whereas if he learns to read, he fears he will learn to understand everything, including that which he thinks he is not supposed to understand.³

Observing the Orthogenic School's children in the learning environment taught Bettelheim that atypical children, because of their exaggerated behaviors, teach us how normal children learn. His premise was that if educators can reach troubled youth by adjustments in the curriculum and in teaching methods, educators can refine their procedures regarding normal children (Bettelheim, 1950; Bettelheim & Zelan, 1981). While the normal child usually complies, the atypical child protests. It is from these outright protests, Bettelheim believed, that we can learn better ways of reaching all schoolchildren.

Like Pestalozzi (1963) and Montessori (1967), Bettelheim (1950) realized that the curriculum and special teaching methods were of little use 'unless the child himself is convinced he ought to learn for his own good.'⁴ As Maria Montessori wrote, it is not that a child believes what he sees, but he sees what he believes (Röhrs, 1982). This meant to Bettelheim and to many others, notably Jean Piaget (1972), that a child is not open to learning ('seeing') without a firm conviction that what he will learn will mesh with his previously formed predilections ('believing'). But, being psychoanalytically oriented, Bettelheim was not content to leave it at that. He counseled educators to understand that troubled young people have a reason for not learning, and that their learning protests are ineffective 'even when viewed from what [the child] feels are his own interests.'⁵ While he did advise us to apply what we discovered about atypical learners to normal learners, he also differentiated the teaching of atypical and typical learners. Education should be based on the atypical child's experience, but progressively so, necessitated by the symptomatic learner's initial inability to structure his own experience.

Bettelheim (1950) illustrated the importance of a child's educational experience in the dramatic account of 'George,' an extremely angry boy who spontaneously developed and used a symbolic system (letters, numbers) to express his rage. But George, in the Orthogenic School classroom, was prone to regressive episodes. Regressive modes of functioning were discouraged in class. While the child might need to regress in other situations (in therapy, in dormitory life), Bettelheim hoped that the classroom would bring out and develop the child's most mature strivings. Nonetheless, many children resisted school learning because it implied that they had to 'grow up,' about which they were very ambivalent.

George was one of those children. He needed his science teacher's help to structure his learning. Prompted by his teacher, he devised an ingenious way of combining his regressive tendencies with reaching for maturity. George originally wanted to shun growing up by sucking milk bottles during class, which represented a return to infancy. At the suggestion of his teacher, he constructed an elaborate siphoning system connecting bottles with rubber tubing so that by blowing or sucking at one end he was able to force liquids through the various bottles and tubes. Rigging up this elaborate device was enough to sustain him in class without reverting to sucking real milk from real bottles. Through sublimation of his needs, which were directly connected to the learning experience, he could wait to suck milk until lunch time, when he punched a hole in his milk carton, stuck a straw in the hole, and began to drink the milk through the straw as any normal youngster would.

Bettelheim (1950) felt so strongly that the education of severely troubled youth was critical in their recovery that he concluded his chapter, 'The Challenge of Learning,' by writing that the treatment of a disturbed child in a milieu setting cannot be complete unless the child not only succeeds in the classroom, but also wants to learn on his own and *enjoys* learning.

Psychoanalytic applications: family life

Bettelheim's first attempt to reach the parents of normal children and to deal with typical, family child rearing problems resulted in his 1962 book, *Dialogues with Mothers*. He used psychoanalytic theory, especially the refinements of the theory he had implemented at the Orthogenic School for two decades, to illuminate common childhood enigmas. Similar to Benjamin Spock, whose famous child rearing book, *Baby and Child Care* (1946), preceded Bettelheim's *Dialogues* by sixteen years, Bettelheim concentrated on parent/child interactions. He contrasted the old child rearing with the new child rearing which was, in part, the result of Spock's work. Bettelheim (1962) wrote that the difference between the new and the old lay in the fact that today's parent has not recognized the contradiction in his affording the child individual freedom at the same time that the parent wants the child to reach the goals the parents have set for him. By way of contrast, the child rearing theory prior to the 1950s and 1960s dictated that a child must adhere to a strict discipline. 'Nowadays we want our children to make their own decisions, but we expect those decisions to please us. Life was much easier for my parents: they knew what a child was supposed to do, and he had jolly well better do it.'⁵

The essence of the treatment milieu he created for troubled youth thus became the message to normal parents of normal children. Most important is the recognition of the child's strengths. He felt that parents focused much too heavily on children's *problems* without giving them credit for their *intelligence* in creating those problems. A two-year old might, for example, react to the birth of a sibling by trying to change her identity or the identity of the entire family. Whatever the reasons behind such wishes, Bettelheim centered his group of mothers on the contradiction in the parent's thinking which suggested that a child could develop a complex structure to alleviate her anxieties but did not have the wherewithal to understand it. Similarly, in his writings about the Orthogenic School, Bettelheim (1950, 1967, 1974) repeatedly stated that the child's intelligence helped to create his symptoms; therefore, we should use the child's intelligence to help resolve them.

Bettelheim continued with the family theme in his 1987 book, *A Good Enough Parent*. He described typical impediments to productive parent/child relationships, autobiographically borrowing from his own upbringing, and deftly advancing selected psychoanalytic principles he hoped would harmonize parent/child interactions. Among other themes, he chose to write about the important theme for modern American parents, namely, the difference between discipline and punishment. (An excerpt of this section of his book was published in 1987 in *The Atlantic*, entitled 'Discipline Versus Punishment'.) His view of discipline was based, in part, on the dictionary definition that reveals the word's origin in disciple, meaning student. Bettelheim wrote that proper discipline educates the child and sets his energies free to develop productively on his own. This, then, has the happy effect of bettering parent/child relationships. Punishment, on the other hand, 'doesn't work,' according to Bettelheim. 'There is a world of difference between acquiring discipline by identification with those one admires [the parents] and having regimentation imposed on one—or sometimes painfully inflicted [...]. As for punishment, it may restrain the child, but it doesn't teach him self-discipline [...].'⁷

He observed that children cannot be fooled, and that they pay attention to our behavior as much as, or more than our words. He wrote that the punitive parent who is carried away by

emotions rather than choosing to educate the child, fools only himself/herself and not the child.

The meaning of play is a second important theme discussed by Bettelheim (1967) in his parenting book. Like Piaget (1962, 1969), Bettelheim viewed the playing child as attempting to bridge his inner reality and the world around him. In early childhood, play is the primary modality within which children develop themselves and communicate with others. Quoting Montaigne, Bettelheim wrote, 'Children's play should be regarded as their most serious actions.'⁸ Play is an outlet for emotional expression, but it also serves to resolve conflicts and enables the child to cope better with the world. While Piaget documented the intellectual aspects of playing, Bettelheim's psychoanalytic perspective focussed on the emotional and social benefits of play, especially those that accrue to a healthy parent/child relationship. He viewed the child's play as nothing less than the route to identity. Drawing on Freud's insights, Bettelheim wrote that play is the means by which 'the child accomplishes his first great cultural and psychological achievements [...] This is true even for an infant whose play consists of nothing more than smiling at his mother as she smiles at him.'⁹

Bettelheim, who had been immersed in the history of ideas at least since adolescence, welcomed the idea that a child's spontaneous, playful activity was analogous to the great cultural achievements of our time. He enjoyed, rightly so, elevating the minutiae of the child's behavior to the heights it deserved.

In *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), his prize-winning treatise on the uses of fairy tales in the child's upbringing, Bettelheim poignantly described how the child's imagination is served by romantic stories, especially those told to the child and, in the telling, elaborated by the child's freely created variations. Again, Bettelheim emphasized the collaboration of parent and child in sharing fairy tales to enhance the child's developing sensibilities. The child needs not only those coping skills that are fostered by didactic parents, but also, Bettelheim wrote, a moral education communicated not through abstract (ethical) concepts but through fairy tales that deal with what is tangibly right and therefore meaningful. He likened the child's understanding of fairy tales to the psychological insights gained long ago by poets. The German poet Schiller wrote: 'Deeper meaning resides in the fairy tales told to me in my childhood than in the truth that is taught by life.'¹⁰

As in so many of his works, the foundation for Bettelheim's thesis that fairy tales foster the child's developing mind and provide a forum for emotional expression rested primarily on the application of psychoanalysis to childhood education. True to the subject, Bettelheim whimsically discussed some of the most difficult psychoanalytic concepts in clear, amusing and fanciful language, rendering his thesis accessible to contemporary parents. Conspicuously oedipal themes in fairy tales are brought forth for the reader to consider. The power of Bettelheim's writing resides in his ability to illuminate concepts that are obvious to psychoanalysts but remain obscure to parents without explication. A little girl's conflict with her mother is narrated in 'Cinderella' by the device of having the child's mother portrayed as the wicked stepmother. Such a theme resonates with a girl's feeling of helplessness which is then overcome by the 'good mother,' a fairy godmother, who rescues Cinderella and supports her in her aspirations to meet the prince. Bettelheim also highlighted the importance of sibling rivalry in the family and in the Cinderella story, which depicts beautiful but shy Cinderella helpless at the hands of her stepsisters. This, too, is resolved by the rescuing fairy godmother, a resolution that every little girl deeply appreciates. Bettelheim hoped that as parent and child together understood the deeper meaning of these stories, the parent and the child would bond in mutual enjoyment.

Psychoanalytic applications: social problems

Bruno Bettelheim wrote a number of papers and books applying psychoanalysis to social

problems. In *The Informed Heart* (1960), he used his personal experiences in the Nazi concentration camps to pose questions about man's autonomy in mass societies. Speaking of civilization's progress in providing us with more freedom than in earlier times, Bettelheim (1960) wrote in his 'Preface':

With so much at hand that generations have striven for, how bewildering that the meaning of life should evade us. Freedoms we have, broader than ever before. But more than ever before most of us yearn for a self-realization that eludes us, while we abide restless in the midst of plenty. As we achieve freedom, we are frightened by social forces that seem to suffocate us, and that seem to move in on us from all parts of an ever-contracting world.¹¹

To combat the unpredictable outcomes of our fast changing world, Bettelheim wrote that we can no longer afford to bifurcate the reasons of the heart from the reasons of the mind. 'The daring heart must invade reason with its own living warmth, even if the symmetry of reason must give way to admit love and the pulsation of life.'¹² Bettelheim never lost sight of the importance of feeling. Exquisitely educated in the history of reason, his life's work consisted of advising us to inform pure reason with the emotions, which is the very substance of a humanistic psychology.

Psychoanalysis was the inspiration for Bettelheim's survival strategies to escape death in the camps and his anchor in writing *The Informed Heart*. He shared with his readers how he secretly observed the Nazis at work, memorizing countless incidents and speculating on the motivation of the prison guards. In taking mental notes about the process of personality breakdown in prisoners, Bettelheim saved his own mind. This is because his mind's function silently counteracted the regime's attempts to break it down and to render his personality conformist. Years later, he turned Naziism on its head by creating the Orthogenic School. In the camps, people's personalities were shaped in such a way as to make them robots. At the Orthogenic School, life was structured in every detail to promote the child's reach for autonomy (Bettelheim, 1974). From his own traumatic experiences in the camps, Bettelheim understood the power of social structure in influencing personality development and would not rest until he undid those events in Orthogenic School life, which represented, for him, a personal metamorphosis from depersonalization to renewed self-actualization. Just as important, his Orthogenic School venture benefited the children by taking them out of psychological limbo and resuscitating their inner selves so they could return to society.

Bettelheim had been thinking about prejudice for a number of years before he published *The Informed Heart*. In a book co-authored with the sociologist, Morris Janowitz, Bettelheim (1964) theorized about the virulence of prejudice in modern society. His contribution to the work consisted of reminding the reader that an individual's childhood experiences would affect his attempts to deal with life's vicissitudes, such as the call to military service. Bettelheim's thesis was that the more secure the ego, the less the need to maliciously classify another ethnic group as evil in order to shore up the sense of self. To quote from Bettelheim and Janowitz: '[...] it should be stressed that the comparison of objective army experiences and their subjective evaluation has shown that objective reality seemed comparatively less important in shaping interethnic attitudes than the personal frame of reference within which objective reality is experienced. [Some] were relatively free of fear and found it possible to be optimistic even in adverse circumstances (combat, threat of depression). Such optimism and the self-confidence and self-respect which go with it, as well as *the parallel ability to control hostility*, all originate in fortunate childhood experiences.' [italics added]¹³

Bettelheim's view was that the individual's inner control of hostility was the key to interethnic harmony, while projecting hostility onto other social groups created the prejudicial attitude upon which the concentration camps were formed.

Having turned to psychoanalytic theory to explain the socio-cultural problems arising from Hitler's European takeover, he later focused his attention on the social problems in modern American schools. In a 1966 paper, anticipating what he was to write in 1982 (Bettelheim & Zelan, *On Learning To Read*), Bettelheim wrote about violence as a neglected mode of behaviour. He bade educators to pay attention to violence and aggression, which, Bettelheim argued, was conspicuously observable in today's youth. He recommended that primers address the child's violent impulses and that stories depict ways to deal with it. In *On Learning to Read*, he made plain how school personnel and school boards foster a reading curriculum that does not match the schoolchildren's predilections or their natural development. Bettelheim described how 'empty texts' evolve at the hands of school boards who pressure publishers of texts to publish only those stories that will not offend parents. For example, a story about a dying pet is unacceptable because it might enrage animal enthusiasts. This creates a colossal social problem when schoolchildren who are unengaged are referred for special services because of alleged disabilities. The real problem, Bettelheim (1982) wrote, is the schoolchild's boredom with the curriculum. Despite the inane materials children are supposed to read, many of them spontaneously put meaning back into the reading texts, efforts that go unrecognized by school personnel. Bettelheim and Zelan found that bored children, through 'misreadings', create story fragments that appeal to them and enable them to read for meaning, although they may miss a few words for psychological reasons.

By way of contrast, Bettelheim (1982) presented to the American public some of the stories given to European schoolchildren. These stories are carefully geared to the child's life experiences, mirroring actual annual events so that a child entering school in autumn might read about the beginning of school, a child anticipating upcoming holidays might be given a story about festivities, or a child might be given poems which deal with the universal growing-up issues from the child's viewpoint. About a child's need to be satisfied by her busy mother, Bettelheim quoted from a story in an Austrian primer called, 'Mami, Please!'

'Mami, please, a piece of bread!
'Yes.'
'Mami, please, read me a story.'
'Later.'
'Why later?'
'Listen! Don't you hear anything?'
'Mami, please wash us!'
'Mami, please polish us!'
'Mami, please mend us!...'
'That's how it goes all day.'
'Jug, come, we'll help Mother.
The two of us will go and fetch milk.'¹⁴

Explaining the text to American readers, Bettelheim noted that a child cannot be expected to go hungry but occasionally must wait to be read to. Then the child experiences an inner-directed impulse to read to herself, since she realizes that she cannot always count on her mother's instant availability. The story also implies that a child has the resources to provide herself with comforting and potentially educational experiences.

Bettelheim wrote next that this primer story calls upon the child to observe her mother's behaviour, which releases the child from feelings of rejection as she observes the true reasons for her mother's actions. The little story's denouement is that a caring mother, who describes to her child what goes on all day, will suggest to her how together they might help each other with the day's work. All of this in an Austrian primer that not only creates enjoyment in the child as she reads but also strengthens her understanding of the mother/daughter relationship!

Psychoanalysis reinterpreted

Bettelheim's contribution to a re-examination of psychoanalytic concepts arose from his ingenious and original reworkings of psychoanalytic orthodoxy to fit the symptoms of the heretofore 'untreatable' youth comprising the Orthogenic School population. The works directly related to the school's functioning, mentioned earlier, led to a proliferation and expansion of ideas which culminated in *Symbolic Wounds* (1954) and *The Empty Fortress* (1967). Based on observations of the young people at the Orthogenic School, Bettelheim (1954) took classical psychoanalysis to task for failing to recognize that males are just as envious of females as females are of males. He was referring to the concept 'penis envy', applied to female development, which he felt did not include the envious feelings of males toward females. Studying the spontaneous puberty rites originated by the adolescents at the school, he noted that: 'We are hardly in need of proof that men stand in awe of the procreative power of women, that they wish to participate in it, and both emotions are readily found in Western society. As a matter of fact, some poets find these emotions the source of some of the highest achievements of the Western mind [...].'¹⁵ He continued: 'My own purpose was to show that some preliterate societies, far from being inferior to us in this respect, made the spontaneous move from the negative experience of fear to the positive experience of mastering it—by trying to make women's power their own.'¹⁶

The link between his reflecting on the children at the Orthogenic School and on individuals in preliterate societies was his conviction that neither schizophrenic youngsters nor preliterate individuals were primitive; on the contrary, both groups, unlike 'normal' Western adults where emotions may be carefully hidden, found ingenious ways to express their emotions and try to make peace with them.

Bettelheim (1954) described a spontaneous 'initiation rite' that began innocuously enough in a group of adolescents who were planning their adult lives. The 'rites' developed when two Orthogenic School girls began to menstruate, which aroused the interest of two or three of their male peers. While they were eager to plan their adult lives, they were extremely ambivalent about the growing-up process implied by the onset of the girls' menses. The youngsters imagined that becoming actors or entertainers would admit them to the fascinating world of Hollywood and to the world in general. Thereupon, they formed a secret society that would protect them from adult criticism. Their ritual was for the boys to cut themselves on the index finger every month and mix their blood with that of the menses. At this point, Bettelheim wrote, it was necessary for adults to intervene to protect the children from injury.

Bettelheim believed that these inventive, talented young people could more openly address their adolescent curiosities than normal youngsters primarily because they were in residential placement with all the safety and security it provides. But they also were not as bound as 'normal' youngsters to keep their feelings secret. Quoting Fenichel (1945), who wrote that 'in schizophrenia, the unconscious is conscious,'¹⁷ Bettelheim noted that this is particularly true of schizophrenic young people.

In titling his book *Symbolic Wounds*, Bettelheim placed the emphasis on the word 'symbolic,' explaining that the actual events, though important, were not as important as the symbolic meaning the youngsters attributed to them. He again took the humanistic stance that there is no sharp distinction between the emotions of schizophrenic youngsters and those of normal youngsters, just as there is no clear-cut distinction between the emotions of preliterate peoples and modern Western adults. The differences reside in the manner in which the emotions are expressed; disturbed youngsters are more conspicuously active in expressing their fears than normal youngsters. The same can be said for the differences between

preliterate society and modern society; in the former, emotions are brought forth expressively and ritualistically while in the latter, emotions are suppressed or repressed.

Again, based on his observations of symptomatic (autistic) children at the Orthogenic School, Bettelheim (1967) set about to sketch a new, largely developmental, theory of the etiology of autism and the kind of treatment modality he felt works best. (It should be noted that Bettelheim's definition of 'autism' was consistent with Kanner's (1943) definition, which does not include the disabled or the mentally retarded.) Bettelheim reminded us that the first days of the infant's life are especially critical for self-development. Taking nursing as an example, he argued that just as much depends on how the infant is held as his actual milk intake. Summarizing, he made a point that he repeatedly made elsewhere. The infant's beneficial nursing and being nursed turns on the degree to which his satisfaction 'affords him to actively shape the total experience in terms of his own needs.'¹⁸

Earlier, Erikson (1950) had located the beginnings of autism in the mother/child relationship, but attributed it to the mother's reaction to the child's symptoms. While Bettelheim identified the starting point of autism in the first few days of life, Erikson concentrated on the mother's reactions to the fact that: '[...] these children may very early and subtly fail to return the mother's glance, smile, and touch; an initial reserve which makes the mother, in turn, unwittingly withdraw.'¹⁹

Bettelheim's position in contrast was that within the mother/infant relationship, something preceded the infant's lack of response to the mother. He probably would not agree with Erikson's belief that the mother unwittingly withdrew. Although unwitting withdrawal certainly could have happened, Bettelheim was more impressed by the insecure parents' need to defend themselves from their unborn child from the very beginning.

Bettelheim's 1967 book was met with resistance in the American psychological and psychiatric communities because it did not deal in depth with the possible neurological concomitants of autism. Bettelheim's view was that until mental health professionals came up with a specific neurological disorder which was responsive to medication, psychotherapists had little choice but to continue with treatment efforts. While the parents were not included in the Orthogenic School program, Bettelheim did say that living with an autistic child was a hardship in which the parents often had no recourse but to respond erratically, sometimes punitively. The child elicited reactions in his parents that emanated from the impact of the autistic syndrome on them.

Bettelheim (1967) left no stone unturned in summarizing the psychological literature on autism. Furthermore, he went beyond psychoanalytic theory and looked to psychologists of other persuasions, such as Jean Piaget. Bettelheim's foremost commitment was to understand self-development, or the lack thereof, in autistic children. He thought psychoanalytic writings were attributing a too advanced selfhood to regressed autistic individuals whose behavior had broken down in all areas, reflecting the absence of an organized psyche. Since a sense of self goes hand in hand with the child's first awareness of his surroundings, he borrowed from Piaget in saying: '[...] action requires no awareness, but having acted brings first awareness. Action, then, creates the separation of self and nonself out of primordial chaos. More correctly it should be said that action creates a cleavage between what acts and what is acted upon, a separation between what (through action) become a self, and what (through being acted upon) becomes its object.'²⁰

Piaget (1976), who had been refining his ideas on the self-nonself distinction from a cognitive-developmental perspective, wrote: 'The subject only learns to know himself when acting on the object, and the latter can become known only as a result of progress of the actions carried out on it. This explains the circle of the sciences, of which the solidarity that unites them is contrary to all linear hierarchy. Furthermore, and most importantly, this explains the harmony between thought and reality, since action springs from the laws of an organism

that is simultaneously one physical object among many and the source of the acting, then thinking subject.’²¹ The two traditions of psychoanalysis and cognitive-developmentalism thus combined as Bettelheim researched the puzzle of human existence without a sense of self.

Bettelheim (1967) tracked the development of three autistic children in the treatment milieu of the Orthogenic School and showed how arduous a task it was to bring autistic children to the point of recognizing themselves as one ‘object’ among many and as a source of the ‘acting, then thinking subject.’ Similar to the developing normal infant, Bettelheim wrote, ‘Marcia,’ a preadolescent autistic girl ‘still needed to get to “know” something with her body, by doing something with it, before she could grasp it intellectually.’²²

In the case of Marcia, Bettelheim’s repeated point of departure from previous, primarily psychoanalytic, theory was his assumption that in treatment a psychotherapist could retrace developmental steps neither by starting with the child’s yearning for a good enough mother nor by assuming that in the child’s psychology there was a partial ‘introject’ and/or a ‘bad introject.’ (‘Introject’ is the result of the process of internalization whereby aspects of the outer world and interactions with it are taken into the organism and represented in its internal structure.) Bettelheim observed that it was not Marcia’s interest in a mothering person that led to her recognition of the outside world, but rather the development of a rudimentary self prior to the yearning for a good mother. Marcia, a child who had repeatedly suffered enemas in early childhood, first recognized what is ‘me’ and what is ‘not me’ by playing with her feces in the bathtub. Bettelheim hypothesized that she then began to wonder if something could and did exist in the outer world, and that this development *preceded an attachment to a mother figure*.

Using Piaget’s work as a basis for comparing the development of normal infants with 12-year-old Marcia, Bettelheim (1967) wrote that once the developing process is set in motion, autistic children often gain typical infant achievements much more quickly than the infant normally does. Speaking about the spatial development required by drawing, and quoting from Piaget’s (1952) observations on his own children, Bettelheim wrote that in less than six months Marcia’s drawings had moved from infant scribbling to drawing circles, to drawing faces, to drawing the complete human figure—while it takes several years for a normal infant to progress this far.

Concluding his account of Marcia, Bettelheim again returned to the psychological construct of ‘introject,’ showing why it did not apply in Marcia’s case until she had been in treatment at the Orthogenic School for five years. An introject, Bettelheim stated, requires an act of volition. By regulating Marcia’s basic functions since infancy, her mother ‘permitted Marcia no action on her own. Hence the bad mother, the bad object, was not incorporated but simply took possession of Marcia. To do anything at all would have meant adding to the power of the invader, so she did nothing at all.’²³

Only after five years of milieu treatment was Marcia brought to the point of building a real self. On Marcia’s progress after the age of 16, Bettelheim wrote: ‘There was the move toward positive object relations coupled with a mastery of the outer world. But along with it came aggression and symptom formation. When I say symptom formation I do not wish to imply that autistic isolation cannot also be viewed as a symptom. But it is such an all-encompassing one that I am reluctant to call it so. The symptoms I refer to [by ‘symptom formation’] deal with fairly discrete aspects of mastery and defense, ones [Marcia] developed for dealing with particular problems, not with life as a whole.’²⁴ Still, Marcia was not analyzable in the psychoanalytic sense. She continued to need a holding environment twenty-four hours a day for several more years to help resolve the many childhood problems that arose apace after she had begun to conceptualize herself as a unique person. Wrote Bettelheim: ‘This once totally frozen, non-reacting girl was now alive, full of feelings, and the appropriate ones. In Hardy’s sense, we had courted her when she had not cared greatly for

life,

[...] till evasions seemed wrong,
Till evasions gave in to its song
Until living aloofly loomed duller than life among men.²⁵

Bettelheim's mentor: Sigmund Freud

It is said that in old age we return to our origins in an attempt to make sense of our lives. Bettelheim (1983, 1990) did just that through two books, the first of which celebrated his understanding of Freud and which he hoped would set American psychology straight by analyzing the mistranslations of Freud's work from German into English. Bettelheim (1983) seemed to welcome delving into his own Viennese past, remembering his life in Freud's time and immersing himself once again in the cultural surroundings that influenced both himself and his great mentor. The mistranslations of Freud, he felt, led to our misunderstanding of Freud and to errors in psychoanalytic technique. Words influence concepts, Bettelheim noted, so that the mistranslations conspicuously impacted the way psychoanalysts thought about Freud's theory.

But the overriding message in *Freud And Man's Soul* is Bettelheim's reminder that Freud's theory was humanistic, despite his own preoccupation with rendering it scientific. He quoted Freud's statement to Jung, 'Psychoanalysis is in essence a cure through love.'²⁶ Of the tension between a compassionate attitude and a scientific attitude toward man, Bettelheim wrote: 'Freud often spoke [in German] of the soul—of its nature and structure, its development, its attributes, how it reveals itself in all we do and dream. Unfortunately, nobody who reads him in English could guess this, because nearly all his references to the soul, and to matters pertaining to the soul, have been excised in translation.

This fact, combined with the erroneous translation of many of the most important original concepts of psychoanalysis, makes Freud's direct and deeply personal appeals to our common humanity appear to readers of English as abstract, depersonalized, highly theoretical, erudite and mechanized—in short, 'scientific' statements—about the strange and very complex workings of our mind. Instead of instilling a deep feeling for what is most human in all of us, the translations attempt to lure the reader into developing a "scientific" understanding of the unconscious and how it conditions much of our behaviour.'²⁷

One of the major deficits in our understanding of Freud's theory emerges from our improper use of Freud's conceptualization of the organization of the psyche. The three realms, conscious, preconscious, and unconscious, which are psychological constructs, were meant nonetheless, according to Bettelheim, to appeal to us personally. Moreover, in choosing words to designate the structure of the mind, Bettelheim wrote, Freud used words familiar to every German child. By doing so he hoped that psychoanalysis would be accessible to a broad readership and would appeal to our most deeply felt experiences. Bettelheim noted that the title of Freud's book in German, *Das Ich Und Das Es* (1923)—the 'I' and the 'it'—was translated into Latin equivalents rather than into English words. 'The translations of these personal pronouns into their Latin equivalents—the *ego* and the *id*—rather than their English ones turned them into cold technical terms, which arouse no personal associations. In German, of course, the pronouns are invested with deep emotional significance, for the readers have used them all their lives. Freud's careful and original choice of words facilitated an intuitive understanding of his meaning.'²⁸

He went on to explain that using the words *ego* and *id* instead of *I* and *it* impedes the psychoanalyst's goal of allying the patient with him in analyzing the patient's conflicts. Psychoanalysis has it that the *ego* of the patient must combine with the psychoanalyst's counsel in order to produce a cure. But, Bettelheim argued, 'it is not the *ego* but the 'I' more

than any other term of psychoanalysis, [that] encourages us to make the unconscious become conscious and to think psychoanalytically.’²⁹

About a defensive patient, Bettelheim wrote it would be easy for such a patient to say: ‘I won’t any longer be run by my irrational anxieties.’ It seems ludicrous to imagine someone saying, ‘My *ego* won’t any longer be run by irrational anxieties.’ It is equally ludicrous to imagine that the distancing effect of the word *ego* would permit such a patient to ally himself with the analyst in any meaningful way while it is easy to imagine that such a patient would use the terms *ego* and *id* defensively to distance himself from the psychoanalytic process.

The remedy, according to Bettelheim, is to repersonalize psychoanalysis by being continuously aware that the English translations tend to distance us from our patients. Understanding Freud’s purpose in naming mental constructs would attune us to his teachings and to our patients as well.

Bettelheim’s last work, *Freud’s Vienna and Other Essays* (1990), once more returned him to his origins as he wrote autobiographically of his upbringing in Vienna. This work is at once hard to categorize and yet typical of his far-ranging interests and his tendency to write essays—many of which were synthesized in book form. Out of his personal experience he wrote commentaries on the lives of children. He described the appeal that psychoanalysis had for him as a youth, again acknowledging Freud’s place in his formative years. He wrote as well on autistic children and the significance of the holocaust for society generally and for children particularly. He retraced his steps in applying psychoanalysis to cultural issues and social problems as he contemplated what he had learned from Freud, his great master.

It is fitting that his last book was largely autobiographical, reflecting the beginnings of his dedication to the psychoanalytic tradition. The chapters on the meaning of the holocaust, in which he compared the experience of brutalized prisoners to the emotional anguish suffered by autistic children, contain nonetheless some hopeful writing on how we, in this modern age, can come to terms with society in more productive ways. While Bruno Bettelheim was ready, often eager, to search man’s soul for the darker sides of human nature, he was also committed to showing us ways to overcome our complexes, to reinvigorate society with a humanistic view, and to help us find the many, varied and personal meanings in life.

Notes

1. Karen Zelan (*United States of America*). Psychotherapist and psychologist. Author, with Bruno Bettelheim, of *On Learning to Read*. Author of *The Risks of Knowing: Development Impediments to School Learning*.
2. August Aichhorn, *Wayward Youth*, New York, 1965, p. v.
3. Bruno Bettelheim, *Love Is Not Enough*, New York, 1950, p. 137-38.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
6. Bruno Bettelheim, *Dialogues With Mothers*, Glencoe, IL, 1962, p. 1.
7. Bruno Bettelheim, *A Good Enough Parent*, New York, 1987, p. 111.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
10. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses Of Enchantment*, New York, 1976, p. 5.
11. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart*, New York, 1960, p. vii-viii.
12. *Ibid.*, p. viii.
13. Bruno Bettelheim and Morris Janowitz, *Social Change And Prejudice*, p. 273-74, Glencoe, IL, 1964 .
14. Bruno Bettelheim and Karen Zelan, *On Learning To Read*, New York, 1982, pp. 283-84.
15. Bruno Bettelheim, *Symbolic Wounds*, Glencoe, IL, 1954, p. 10.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
18. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Empty Fortress*, New York, 1967, p. 17.
19. Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, New York, 1950, p. 181.

20. *The Empty Fortress*, op. cit., p. 14.
21. Jean Piaget, *The Grasp Of Consciousness*, Cambridge, MA, 1976, p. 353.
22. *The Empty Fortress*, op. cit., p. 200.
23. Ibid., p. 228.
24. Ibid., p. 229-30.
25. Ibid., p. 232.
26. Bruno Bettelheim, *Freud and Man's Soul*, New York, 1983, p. vi.
27. Ibid., p 4-5.
28. Ibid., p. 53.
29. Ibid., p. 56.

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