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BOOK REVIEWS

Palmer, James O. *The Battered Parent and How Not to be One*. Prentice-Hall, 1980, 191 pp.

As a parent and a graduate student, I have been horrified by increasingly graphic newspaper and television reports of child beating and abuse in our society. We need to learn more about this problem quickly, in order to know how to stop it, because one fact that continually emerges is that children who are abused (and live) are likely to be abusive parents when they grow up. So when I saw this title, it seemed to be just the book to shed light on a difficult subject.

I was wrong. The title is catchy, but also misleading. Palmer's "battered parents" are not the "battered parents" (physically) as we know them, but are the "battered parents" (psychologically) as he claims to know them. His "battered parents" are marked by four different symptoms: one, confusion as to who is in charge; two, a generalized feeling of pain and depression on the part of the parents towards child rearing; three, poor communication, typified by a great deal of screaming—or silence; and four, a perverse inability of both parents and children to recognize that anything is wrong in the family (p. 4). However, any parent knows that they all would fit into these categories at one time or another in their career as parents. Of greater concern is the attitude that parents are incapable of responding to the stresses and problems of child rearing without resorting to "specialists" to tell them how to do things. Our culture already worships the professional too much; a reliance on professionals for advice about raising children takes away autonomy and self-sufficiency, leading to an artificial need for further guidance in this area.

Palmer's explanations of how changing social structures affect the family are woven throughout the book and are the best sections. In general, the writing style does not encourage finishing the book, and even the use of case studies does not add any life or sparkle to the text. The case studies are not identified as coming from Palmer's clinical practice—I only assumed that they did.

I also have difficulty with such Freudian concepts as "adolescents who become overheated by unexpressed sexual feelings are likely to have some skin problems" (p. 34), or "middle-aged parents are likely to find themselves not as sexually attractive as before and certainly unable to compete with an adolescent. . . this kind of competition often breaks up marriages. . ." (p. 119). Or that girls react to sensual stress by becoming bashful and silent while boys react with hyperactivity (p. 67). This might appear reasonable to some professional clinicians, but it is not a reasonable explanation to a sociologist or the general public.

Palmer has mentioned almost every topic that might be stressful for parental interaction with children. These range from feelings about pregnancy and its eventual consequences to separation anxiety, handicapped children, trust, schooling, sex, drugs, grandparents, divorce, and step-parents, just to name a few. However, the discussions appear to be simplistic, short, and perfunctory.

Overall, the book does not retain the attention that the title attracts, nor does it live up to the promise on the book jacket of telling how to correct, or even prevent, the problems of raising children.

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Arnold Gehlen, *Man in the Age of Technology*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, 185 pp.

This translation of the 1957 revised edition of *Die Seele im technischen Zeitalter* is the first work of Arnold Gehlen's to be translated into English. For this reason, Gehlen's work is unfamiliar to most American sociologists, although he was one of the leading conservative social theorists in post-World War II German sociology. Despite his relative obscurity, Gehlen has had an indirect influence on American sociology, primarily through the works of Peter L. Berger, the author of the Forward to this volume. One can only hope that this translation will be followed by translations of Gehlen's other major works, since his other works elaborate ideas that are not fully developed in the current work, and his message has not lost its relevance for contemporary Western culture.

Gehlen's conservatism should be of special interest to an American audience since the conservative tradition of which he was a part bears little resemblance to what is called "conservatism" in the United States. As a representative of German conservatism Gehlen was not an apologist for capitalism and the changes it had wrought. His work shows the influence of a number of intellectual traditions including those associated with both conservatism and radicalism. The influence of Hegel, Max Weber, Max Scheler, and Oswald Spengler is evident but so is that of Marx, Werner Sombart, and Ferdinand Tönnies, as well as Henri Bergson, Pitirim Sorokin, David Riesman and Jose Ortega y Gasset. Gehlen synthesized the contributions of these divergent intellectual traditions in this analysis of modern society. The theme of this work is the loss of individual autonomy that is the consequence of modern social formations, a theme that American "conservatives" rarely address outside of a narrow political-economic context. Gehlen's critique of industrial culture is comprehensive and suggests an affinity between the concerns of conservatism and those commonly associated with a radical critique of modern society, although his conservative universe of discourse is distinctive from that of the radicals.