

Review: Ralph Borsodi's Social Philosophy

Reviewed Work(s): Education and Living by Ralph Borsodi

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book is as fresh as if it were written yesterday: "Most of those who now pass as Liberals are Tories of a new type." He was referring to the Liberals who believed in coercion. There is need for a return not only to Smith but to Spencer and Jefferson as well.

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### Ralph Borsodi's Social Philosophy

*Education and Living.* By Ralph Borsodi. New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1949, 2 vols., 719 pp., paper \$5; cloth \$6.50.

Ralph Borsodi, spokesman and philosopher of the Decentralist movement in the United States, has in this unusual book begun a summary of his views on the present state of man and society. The reader here will find a brand of thinking which cuts across the stalemated frontiers of "radical" and "conservative" ideology. Strongly humanistic in his outlook, the author addresses himself impartially against authoritarianism and regimentation whether embodied in the political Welfare State or in the domain of industrial finance-capitalism.

In his conviction of the fundamental significance of the family and the local community as the matrix for national economic and political organization, he rephrases much of the grass-roots Jeffersonian faith; while in his analysis of the extreme specialization of industrial society as the underlying cause of a host of neuroses and social ills, he corroborates the findings of modern psychiatry. His insistence on private enterprise and the free market as the only basis of a good society should delight the disciples of Adam Smith and disappoint socialists of all complexions. But his equal insistence on the end of all monopoly in money, land, banking, patents and corporation statutes as a necessary political condition for such a society places him squarely in the tradition of American libertarian radicalism marked by Josiah Warren, Thoreau, Henry George and Benjamin Tucker.

Borsodi envisages a continuous process of education, conceived around the requirements for "normal living," as the means by which we may evolve towards a happier balance. He deplores the specialization of contemporary pedagogy and its capitulation to the demands of an industrial economy, chiding even the great John Dewey for his early contributions to this trend. His proposal for "schools of living" centered in each locality and dedicated to working out the real-life problems of the men and women of the community in terms of the enduring wisdom and science of mankind is an interesting and challenging one.

One hopes that Borsodi's adoption of a rather formidable terminology and system of logical classification does not discourage readers of an otherwise significant and constructive work. It is an interesting point that, no doubt as an outgrowth of the author's philosophy of the balanced life, he set the type and largely composed the book on his own linotype machine in his country homestead, much in the tradition of William Morris and kindred craftsmen-philosophers.

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### Freedom in Perspective

*Freedom and Civilization.* By Bronislaw Malinowski. New York: Roy Publishers, 1944.

Here we have the final expression of one of the greatest anthropologists of our generation, of his basic beliefs and conclusions regarding war, totalitarianism and the future of humanity. Starting from the actual problems of today, the late Professor Malinowski finds "that a clear understanding of what freedom means is necessary for a fighting democracy" (p. 319). He then proceeds to analyze freedom in evolutionary perspective and establishes the theory that culture "is the real context in which human freedom is born and by which it is specifically limited. Culture gives freedom to man in that it allows him to control his destinies. . . . From the very beginnings of civilization, freedom has been the prerequisite of all constructive work in the maintenance and development of culture. It can also, therefore, be stated that culture is the gift of freedom at the beginnings of humanity and throughout its development" (pp. 319-20).

Malinowski develops his theme by rambling across the world and ranging over centuries, ages and eons, displaying his brilliant erudition in anthropology. He concludes that "the concept of violence is the greatest enemy of freedom," and "all freedoms are dependent on the elimination of collective violence" (p. 325). We, therefore, need "A Superstate, a World Federation, or a Commonwealth of Nations in order to have freedom anywhere and everywhere" (p. 336).

The greatness of the book lies not only in its simplicity and insight into the anthropological aspects of the problems of freedom and violence in our civilization, but primarily in the solid basis of factual material which it presents, and which sustain Malinowski's hopes for a rational world order.

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