

of the present-day relation between pure and applied science, between scientist and technologist, and the directions in which we might seek, in practice, to improve our organization.

BEHAVIOUR THERAPY

Experiments in Behaviour Therapy

Readings in Modern Methods of Treatment of Mental Disorders derived from Learning Theory. Edited by H. J. Eysenck. Pp. x+558. (Oxford, London and New York: Pergamon Press, 1964.) 100s.

The Causes and Cures of Neurosis

An Introduction to Modern Behaviour Therapy Based on Learning Theory and the Principles of Conditioning. By H. J. Eysenck and Dr. S. Rachman. Pp. xii+318. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965.) 28s. net.

BEHAVIOUR therapy is a term for which one will look in vain in the psychological dictionaries—or the general text-books. It is also a term which carries considerable emotional overtones to many psychologists and, still more perhaps, to the average informed layman. Part of the disquiet is probably due to an at least partial misapprehension—the narrowing of the concept to cover only its most dramatic and in some ways most characteristic form, although it is by no means the most frequently used method among those that are subsumed under the general heading of behaviour therapy. I refer to aversive conditioning, or, as it is more commonly called, aversion therapy, the most widely publicized application of which has been in the treatment of alcoholism through the use of emetic drugs. ‘Punishment’, in the non-technical sense of the term, is a word often invoked by the hostile critic. Up to a point the imputation is just, but, as Prof. Eysenck points out in one of his own contributions to the present readings (p. 180), there are fundamental differences. In common with other varieties of behaviour therapy, aversive conditioning is based on the principles of learning theory; in other words, behaviour therapy represents a scientific approach to the problem of altering human behaviour “in the direction of greater sanity, greater happiness, and greater social usefulness” (foreword, p. ix).

Much of the basic literature on behaviour therapy has already been reprinted in Eysenck’s *Behaviour Therapy and the Neuroses* (1960), to which *Experiments* is a sequel and companion volume. Understandably, therefore, the present emphasis is now on experimental studies and case reports, but there are also important papers of a general character, notably by the editor himself and by Joseph Wolpe, of the University of the Witwatersrand, to whom, incidentally, the book is dedicated. Wolpe’s technique of ‘systematic desensitization’ is central to the first of the four parts into which the book is divided, although this section, in fact, carries the title “Reciprocal Inhibition”; the other three are devoted, respectively, to “Operant Conditioning”, “Other Methods” and “Behaviour Therapy with Children”. The essence of desensitization consists of, to quote the author, “presenting to the imagination of the deeply relaxed patient the feeblest item in a list of anxiety-provoking stimuli—repeatedly, until no more anxiety is evoked. The next item of the list is then presented, and so on, until, eventually, even the strongest of the anxiety-evoking stimuli fails to evoke any stir of anxiety in the patient”. Wolpe claims that “. . . consistently . . . a stimulus that evokes no anxiety when imagined in a state of relaxation will also evoke no anxiety when encountered in reality”.

This is clearly a less tough-minded procedure than that of aversion therapy, and less open to criticism on grounds of callousness. It would, in fact, appear to tie up closely with the ‘rational psychotherapy’ of Albert Ellis which constitutes the major contribution under “Other Methods”.

Rational psychotherapy is based on the view that, as Ellis puts it, “neurosis consists of stupid behaviour by an un-stupid person”. Treatment, to quote again, consists of “teaching clients to organize and discipline their thinking”. To the sceptic this may seem to amount to little more than the adjuration to take a grip on oneself which centuries of experience have shown to be ineffectual. Nevertheless, a high measure of success is claimed for the technique, as indeed for all the other methods described in the book. One feels that for therapy of this kind to be successful the patient must have a high level not only of motivation but also of sophistication. The same is probably true of the relaxation preparatory to desensitization, and of the imaginal processes involved in the actual desensitization. The work of Natadze and the Tbilisi school on the effect of imagined experience on perception of illusions has suggested that there are very large individual differences in the ability to evolve a ‘set’ on this basis, and one would welcome information on whether this might not also be true of receptiveness to desensitization.

Unlike some of Prof. Eysenck’s previous volumes with similar titles, which were based entirely on work carried out at the Institute of Psychiatry or under its inspiration, the present collection of readings is culled from a wide variety of sources. In particular, the papers on operant conditioning are all of United States origin, chiefly from Indiana. The main difference from reciprocal inhibition is that while the latter claims to “cure the patient”, operant conditioning usually “focuses on one specific symptom”. This would appear to be more closely in line with Eysenck’s often reiterated statement of his own theoretical position: that “there is no neurosis underlying the symptom, but merely the symptom itself”. On this view, if the symptom is removed, the patient is cured. It is manipulation of behaviour along these lines that is the behaviour therapist’s main concern. That this can be done is abundantly clear, and it is perhaps the individual role of the psychologist, *qua* psychologist and distinct from the psychiatrist, to devise and validate techniques of doing it.

The foregoing was written before *The Causes and Cures of Neurosis* came to hand, and most of what has just been said could stand equally as comment on the latter book: the authors, in fact, say many of these things in almost the same words. The book carries the sub-title “An Introduction to Modern Behaviour Therapy Based on Learning Theory and the Principles of Conditioning”, and covers the same ground as the *Experiments*, with only a slight redistribution of emphasis. It may be said to stand midway between the *Experiments* and Prof. Eysenck’s recent ‘Pelican’, and as such no doubt fulfils a different function. Nevertheless, reading the book, one has a strong feeling of *déjà vu*—the case material is familiar, and even the same photographs turn up again. Furthermore, despite its title, the book is still predominantly research-centred, and in no sense more patient-centred than Prof. Eysenck’s other books. Writing in the *Experiments* (p. 3) of some work by Yates on the treatment of tics, Eysenck states: “It would be quite wrong to regard its main purpose as the alleviation of human suffering”. In the next sentence but one he alludes to “the preoccupation of many psychiatrists with curing patients”. It is perhaps unfair to wrench these phrases from their context, but, be that as it may, it is easy to understand why Eysenck attracts criticism as bitter as some of his own polemics against psychoanalysis. It is a pity that advocacy of behaviour therapy should so frequently be associated with attacks on other disciplines; equally it is a pity that behaviour therapy should, in some quarters at least, be equated with brain-washing, or worse. There is ample evidence in these books that it can be beneficial. Whether its theoretical foundations are unassailable is a matter for dispassionate examination. **BORIS SEMEONOFF**

¹ *Fact and Fiction in Psychology* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965). 5s.