

BOOK REVIEWS

Psychology with a Heart

Psychology is About People. By H. J. Eysenck. Pp. xvii+331. (Allen Lane: London, June 1972.) £3.50.

SOMETHING is stirring in the psychological world: there is a spate of books, broadcasts, and papers which do not deal with technical and detailed issues. Rather they discuss broad questions of principle, perhaps like Professor Hudson in a broadcast attacking "the tyranny of fact" in academic psychology since the war; or perhaps like B. F. Skinner writing a controversial book to argue that an objective and experimental approach is the only way to design a viable culture. Professor Eysenck's book is another contribution of this kind, nearer to Skinner than to Hudson in his views, but nevertheless sharing with Hudson an immediately intelligible and attractive style.

The general thesis of the book is that a hard headed experimental approach is the right one in psychology, but that it is a fallacy to expect the same treatment to produce the same results on all human beings. Rather, Professor Eysenck makes (as he always has done) personality his central variable. The method of argument is to take a number of specific fields: starting with the familiar criticism of psychotherapy as unsupported by objective evidence, moving through Kinsey-like enquiries about sexual behaviour as a function of personality, and leading to a brief popular statement of the claims of behaviour therapy and teaching machines. There is then an argument for the use of intelligence tests and of taking genetic factors into account in education, and a rather wicked discussion of political attitudes as a function of class. Next comes a discussion of pornography and permissiveness in the mass media and finally a lengthy plea for the objective approach on moral grounds.

The strength and weakness of the book can be best illustrated from the section on pornography, which is perhaps the most novel to those who know Professor Eysenck's earlier views. He draws attention to the widespread use by modern therapists of "desensitization" techniques in which a formerly frightening experience is gradually made acceptable by repeated exposure at a safe distance and in a harmless form. This method will sometimes cure irrational phobias: but, he argues,

is it not analogous to the repeated presentation of scenes of violence in the comfort of a living room? Might we not explain in this way why "people ask wonderingly why there has been such a terrible outbreak of violence in the USA"?

This kind of point certainly needs discussion. To argue that human behaviour stems entirely from within and is unaffected by cultural experiences would be to deny almost every finding of social psychology. In any consistent culture there ought therefore to be, and in fact are, limits upon the things that can be said or shown without massive disapproval: our society does not in fact tolerate overt racist statements, nor (if they are too blatant) attempts to whip up hatred against particular religions, contempt for women, and so on. What appears on the mass media ought therefore to be considered, to see whether it is going to produce good changes in society or bad ones: for example, whether it might reduce freedom to express divergent points of view.

But Professor Eysenck's argument passes hastily over difficulties. Desensitization frequently fails in the clinic: and we don't really know why. Is it not therefore even more likely to fail in the broader range of experiences met in the living room? Again, even if we admit the applicability of desensitization, we have the problem of identifying the stimuli most likely to produce it. Is a contemporary film with an X certificate really more desensitizing than a traditional cowboy in which blows produce no blood, bullets no mess of skull and brains, and everybody dies decorously and with dignity? Bluntly, has the United States suffered an increase of violence?

These doubts are general throughout the book: things which are true and badly need saying are mixed with things which are uncertain and might be true or false: and occasionally with statements which most other psychologists would regard as very unlikely. No note of increasing doubt appears as one goes from one to another. Perhaps this is inevitable in a book for broad audiences, but it is bound to worry specialists and to make the book slightly dangerous to the general reader. For the latter it ought to appeal by being easy to read: although for the more strait-laced, its impact may be marred by Professor Eysenck's inability to resist

a joke. Was it really necessary, for an example of the difficulties of experiment, to describe the procedures for establishing the potency of Prince Vincenzo Gonzaga? Yet there are some instances where Professor Eysenck's taste is impeccable: for example, his choice of the career of a great black scientist, Moses Carver, as a counter-example to those who feel that environment determines educational attainment, and his account of the suicide of a homosexual denied behaviour therapy, as a rebuke to those who regard such therapy as unethical. Passages of this kind convince one that Professor Eysenck's heart is in the right place, and this may do more than any of his technical arguments to win supporters for an approach to human beings based on evidence rather than emotion.

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Fisher's Papers

Collected Papers of R. A. Fisher. Edited by J. H. Bennett. Volume I. 1912-24. Pp. 604. (The University of Adelaide: Adelaide, 1971.) A\$17; US\$20.

WHAT is achieved by republication of the complete writings of a distinguished scientist? Not, surely, any immediate addition to his science, for what is clearly important in his work will long since have been assimilated to the general body of knowledge. Yet the opportunity of re-reading the original papers instead of subsequent paraphrases by others, of seeing perhaps for the first time work no longer readily accessible, and of tracing the development of major lines of thought can be rewarding and may influence substantially a new generation.

When the author is one who both created, almost single-handed, one field of science and gave much to another, the importance of such publication is incalculable. Ten years after R. A. Fisher died, the University of Adelaide begins a five-volume collection of all his main publications and a few short reviews. These are reproduced photographically from the originals, enlarged or reduced to a standard page size, thus preserving their individuality and an appearance familiar to many. Where available, additional notes and comments by Fisher are added; the editor, Professor