

Reviews

Modern Experiments in Telepathy. By S. G. SOAL and F. BATEMAN. Faber & Faber Ltd., London, 1954. Pp. 425. 30s.

The phenomena of telepathy remain as baffling as ever, in spite of much devoted work. Prominent as workers are the authors of this book, who give an excellent account of their labours over the past twenty years. Those who want to learn something of the present position cannot do better than consult it.

The book's title is not quite exact, for it also gives an account of some of Soal's work on extra-sensory perception; but the inexactness is not important, for, as Soal shows, the relation between the subjects is close and complex. Most of the results have already been published in technical journals; in the book they are described more comprehensively, and are shown as a series, so that the relations between the parts can be made clear. As a result, the book is readable and coherent, though at times the detail in which the experiments are described makes the reading somewhat laborious. While writing it, the authors must clearly have been in a quandary. With insufficient detail, and too superficial a description, the reader would not have appreciated the thoroughness of the precautions taken; an exhaustive description would have wearied him. In fact, the account given strikes a satisfactory balance.

The reader who wants to form an opinion on the subject must read the book and judge for himself, but a few comments here may not be out of place. In particular, I can say that the statistical methods bear everywhere not only the stamp of competence, which is to be expected of a professional mathematician, but also bear witness to an unusual shrewdness and depth of understanding in the various applications. The matter is worth mention, for Spencer Brown has recently attempted to raise the question whether the results, both of Soal's work and of Rhine's, might not be due to some basic flaw in statistical method. The attempt, however, seems to have come to nothing. Such flaws as Spencer Brown has been able to suggest are mostly capable of direct refutation from the experimental results; in many ways Soal shows both his deep understanding of what is involved and his skill in being able to devise experiments that are independent of such possible flaws. It is the reviewer's opinion that the conclusions drawn by Soal from his results are perfectly justified from the statistical point of view.

What, then, is one to say of Soal's general conclusions? There is no doubt that some of the work done on telepathy and extra-sensory perception can stand comparison with most good scientific work when one considers the care, patience, and ingenuity brought to the work. Soal deserves commendation for the skill he has shown in the experiments and for the patience with which he has sustained an appalling amount of plain drudgery. The evidence he has produced is very strong, strong enough to give ample justification for a belief in telepathy.

Unfortunately, although the long sequences of tests have given results that cannot be ascribed to chance, the *size* of the effect is often small, and one can say that the effect must be due to telepathy only if one can be sure that every possible small ordinary source of bias has been excluded. Exclusion of every conceivable source of small bias is not easy, and those who wish to support the verdict of "not proven" are in no way unreasonable. The position, in fact, is still uncertain. The evidence is very strong—there is no question of that—but one may still doubt whether it is absolutely conclusive. If this view seems contradictory, I can plead only that the facts themselves are still contradictory, so that it does not seem to be yet possible to come to a final decision.

The position seems to me to be strongly reminiscent of that occurring 150 years ago in the phenomena of electricity. At that time only one or two phenomena were known, the relation between them was obscure, and it could be asked contemptuously what connection could rubbed amber possibly have with a frog's twitches? Neither of the phenomena were regularly reproducible, and they doubtless often refused to

appear when a special demonstration was staged; (for the occasion would lead to variations in method that were unwittingly fatal to the demonstration, for no one knew what was important). The little that was known about the phenomena made no sense in terms of the science of the day, which recognized only gravitational, mechanical and chemical forces. The phenomena were trivial, and there were plenty of "ordinary" explanations that might have explained them. "Electricity" in those days was not, scientifically, a respectable subject. It may be that these telepathic and other phenomena are similarly just straws that show the movements of an otherwise unobservable atmosphere.

Be that as it may, Soal's book is as good as any written on the subject. It can confidently be recommended.

W. ROSS ASHBY.

General and Social Psychology, By R. H. THOULES. University Tutorial Press Ltd., London. Third Edition, 1951. Pp. 430. Price 17s. 6d.

"This book is intended for students studying for a degree in psychology"—as such it is quite excellent. It commands one's deep respect.

Much of this third edition has been completely rewritten and account has been taken of "new developments in psychology and new directions of interest". The book is indeed comprehensive.

It is evident that the author has read widely throughout his very big subject; having digested what he has read, assimilated and thought about it, he has presented his knowledge with clarity. The 316 references in the text are blended into a single, clear exposition. The facts and theories of psychology are placed in perspective with an apparent effortlessness which is always the product only of skill. The reader's attention is thus held.

This relatively small volume of well spaced type is packed with knowledge. The author's style is not expansive, he is not verbose and nothing in the book is redundant. This is not a book to be skimmed; it is a text book deserving to be studied, learnt and remembered.

C. E. H. TURNER.