

Book Reviews

I. PSYCHOLOGY

On Being Mindful of Man. Essay Toward a Proactive Psychology. By HUBERT BONNER. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1965. Pp. 239. Price 32s. 6d.

This book should be welcomed for its timely and apposite criticism of the shortcomings of academic psychology, which seems to have become obsessed with measurements, statistical analyses, trivial experiments, atomistic classifications, the general rather than the particular and unique. Especially appreciative will be those who have spent days and nights studying the "laws" of attention, memory, learning, instincts and so forth, suddenly realized that the human being has been lost on the way, and then turned to the great poets and novelists in order to learn something really vital about human nature.

Professor Bonner's proactive psychology has much in common with the holistic and existential schools. It stresses respect for the unique individuality, and castigates many oft-repeated shibboleths, for instance, the theories of adjustment, security, tension-states. The rebel may be more healthy than the docile conformist: after all, the environment can be so deplorable that adjustment would be a sure mark of pathology. In general, "authentic, healthy behaviour deviates from what is common to all individuals", and society is blamed for pressing standardization and enslavement of the autonomous individuality. Again, security and tranquillity cannot be regarded as universal goals and their attainment as necessarily a sign of mental health. On the other hand, adventurous experimentation, the risky search for new experiences, and the attendant increased tension-states, are the proper signs of mental health,—"healthy life is not a homeostatic condition, but a disquietude". In contrast to reactive man—deterministic, tethered to his past, predictable—proactive man is to be regarded as a being-in-becoming with unpredictable potentialities, having freedom of choice and guided by goals of the future. The reactive psychologies of psychoanalysis and behaviourism are condemned because of their atomism and mechanical causal determinism, and are dismissed as "outmoded ways of dealing with the psychological nature of man".

The author tells us that man refuses to be classified and that none of the many type-descriptions have received universal approval. Nevertheless he ventures

to describe seven categories of personality: noetic, mystic, sympathetic, authoritarian, aesthetic, utilitarian and proactive. This will no doubt join the increasingly lengthy record in the history of typology.

In the last chapter of this stimulating book, there is a discussion of the perfectibility of man, a difficult task indeed, as the author admits. If perfectibility implies a realization of one's potentialities, and man by freedom of choice can direct their future development—and at the same time we are to respect the unique individuality in all its infinite varieties—then surely there will be all sorts of perfectibilities, some perhaps hateful to each other. The goal may be an achievement of Nirvana by concentrated meditation, a straining for the style of the Ancients of A.D. 31920—or, the ideals of a De Sade. And, as the poet asks:

Now, who shall arbitrate?
Ten men love what I hate,
Shun what I follow, slight what I receive;
Ten, who in ears and eyes
Match me: we all surmise
They this thing, and I that: whom
shall my soul believe?

Moreover, we must not try to force a particular ideal of ethics or we shall again be dictating conformity and blocking the actualization of some unique potentialities. An equating of perfectibility with the development of potentialities is too bald a definition—the second world war has demonstrated that man can actualize some very unpleasant potentialities. It would seem that human beings will for many centuries yet continue to be a mixture of nobility and cunning sparks of hell, but Professor Bonner has done well to stress the neglected aspiring nature of man.

I. ATKIN.

Attitude and Attitude Changes. The social judgment-involvement approach. By CAROLYN W. SHERIF, MUZAFER SHERIF, and ROGER E. NEBERGALK. Philadelphia and London: W. B. Saunders Company. 1965. Pp. 264. Price £2 18s. 0d.

The authors aim to present in this book a systematic framework for the study of social and political attitudes and attitude changes. They claim that social attitudes, or the stand a person will take when faced with having to give an opinion or having to act, are