

## Book Reviews

### SUBNORMALITY

**The Subnormal Mind.** By SIR CYRIL BURT. Third Edition with a new Foreword by H. J. EYSENCK. London: Oxford University Press. 1977. Pp 391. £5.95.

Since his name hit the headlines, the impression gained of Sir Cyril Burt may, for some, be that of a rigid hereditarian of dubious integrity, unsympathetic to the problems of the underprivileged and uninterested in psychological methods of treatment. This book may do something to redress the balance. It is a reissue of the third edition (1955) of a series of lectures originally given at the London School of Hygiene in 1933. The subject is broader than the title might suggest. Burt deals with the diagnosis and treatment of schoolchildren suffering from a variety of social and psychological problems—the delinquent and neurotic, as well as the intellectually subnormal. It shows him as the scholarly clinical psychologist, using individual case histories as well as statistical comparisons to assess the relative influences of home environment, social factors and temperamental traits. He warns against a one-sided view of the importance of heredity. The mother of an anxious girl of 11 could be reassured that her daughter was not going insane like the mother's own sister: 'The first sign of "queerness" which the mother reported was that Mary cried whenever she was expected to go to church—a peculiarity that was not, at first sight, a conclusive proof of insanity.'

His views on treatment were eclectic and encouraging. It may come as a surprise to read of his recommending a course of psychoanalysis for certain cases of habitual crime. Burt's reliance on the instinct psychology of McDougall may seem outmoded now; but not so the importance he laid on quantitative and multidimensional methods of assessment, new at the time.

In his introduction, Eysenck lays emphasis on Burt's brilliant originality of mind, the balance of his judgement, and the elegance of his style. But as regards some of his scientific reports he agrees, from personal knowledge of the man, that it is 'almost as if Burt regarded the actual data as merely an incidental backdrop for the illustrations of theoretical issues'; through Burt's carelessness his scientific reputation has inevitably suffered. Part of the trouble,

Eysenck thinks, may be that at the time he collected his data standards of evidence were less strict than they are today. In the present reviewer's opinion, the more one learns about some of Burt's later work the less reliance can be placed on it. However, those 'character assassins' who have made 'hysterical accusations of fraudulence and fake' come in for stronger and more polemical condemnation.

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### SOCIAL WORK

**People Not Cases. A Philosophical Approach to Social Work.** By NICHOLAS M. RAGG. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1977. Pp 159. £4.25.

Is the social worker's main duty to the individual client or to the community? And in so far as he or she has a duty to the community, does this mean to 'the people', to the Social Services Department, or to the State? As the definition of social problems grows wider, and legislation is heaped upon legislation, dilemmas are developing in social work which will be less readily resolved than similar conflicts faced by those in related fields. Of course, a question becomes a dilemma if people are concerned about it, and I hope many social workers are. Some, however, seem to have no doubt that their proper job is essentially a radical and political one, while many seem comfortable in what is fundamentally a 'medical model' position, offering diagnosis and therapy. Between these extremes, how and where do social work aspects of law enforcement—if that term doesn't cause too much discomfort in this context—fit in? Such questions are of interest not only because of the role of social work colleagues, but because psychiatrists, too, need to be clear about where their duties lie.

All this is not discussed exhaustively in Dr Ragg's book, but I think he makes a useful and important contribution to the debate. He distinguishes what the client *needs* (which requires expert or quasi-expert diagnosis, according to one or other conceptual framework) from what he *wants* (which requires description and clarification of his problems in living, and not explanation in psychological terms). Dr Ragg sees the social worker's task as helping the

client with the latter, clarifying what he wants and helping him use his own resources and imagination to achieve these. Whether one agrees with him or not, it is as clear a proposition for a professional relationship as a statement about a relationship can be.

This conclusion is not particularly extraordinary; what Nicholas Ragg suggests seems to fall, consistently enough, somewhere between consultation and advocacy. But he reaches this conclusion by an interesting route, bringing together ideas and concepts which are often insulated from each other, and I think that what he has to say does in fact contradict the way in which many social workers work. Unfortunately, however, the book is not easy to read. It reads like a thesis, being crowded with rather tersely summarised points of view and attributions, and I found it heavy going.

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#### LIAISON PSYCHIATRY

**Psychiatry and the Paediatrician.** By F. H. STONE. London: Butterworths. 1976. Pp 168. Index 7 pp. £6.00.

Psychiatric aspects of paediatrics have received academic interest in recent years, but often clinical practice is sadly deficient in this respect. General practitioners and paediatricians tend to be pre-occupied with organic disorder, and at least until late in the day fail to consider the impact of social and emotional factors. The fault to a large extent must lie with undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. A difficult balance has to be achieved between avoiding overburdening the student and giving sufficient basic training, but an understanding of the emotions and behaviour of children is essential to adequate medical treatment.

*Psychiatry and the Paediatrician* is intended to help paediatricians gain such understanding. The book is divided into three sections, an Introduction including development and interviewing, four chapters on psychopathology and ten chapters grouped together as clinical problems. The author is at his best when describing interviewing techniques and giving insight into the dynamics of relationships. Some of the other sections suffer because of the difficulties in covering the topics so briefly. There is little room for discussion of different views, though to be fair the author does indicate personal viewpoints, as in the section on psychopharmacology which might otherwise be considered biased.

It must be remembered that the purpose of this book is not to teach child psychiatry but rather to

encourage a particular attitude in paediatrics. It succeeds in this and can be well recommended, perhaps as much to undergraduates during paediatric attachments as to postgraduates. Low cost is essential for books for this market, and it is to be hoped that a soft cover edition is being produced.

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#### PERSONALITY

##### **New Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory**

Edited by D. BANNISTER. London: Academic Press. 1977. Pp 355. £10.80.

##### **A Manual for Repertory Grid Technique.**

Edited by FAY FRANELLA and DON BANNISTER. London: Academic Press. 1977. Pp 193. £7.50, £3.80 (paperback).

*New Perspectives in Personal Construct Theory* is, on balance, an uneven, and ultimately disappointing book, containing too much that is not new and too little in the way of perspective. The exhumed piece by Kelly which opens the book sets the tone for much of what follows; it offers unexceptionable sentiments, a pleasant, homespun and unpretentious style and a decent optimism, but it does not represent a genuine contribution to knowledge. Issues which have received two or three millennia of philosophical attention and at least a hundred years of psychological inquiry require more serious attention. Instead, too many of the contributions are cloying, cosy, self-indulgent and self-congratulatory affirmations of loyalty to the theory; after 'as Marx himself said' and 'as Freud himself said', are we to suffer 'as Kelly himself said', too?

It is over twenty years since George Kelly's major work was launched, and the attempt to integrate his theory with the other main trends of psychology is long overdue. Too many of the articles collected here avoid this attempt, neither testing personal construct theory against new observations, nor considering how the theory ties in with the observations and concepts of other psychologists. Of the more theoretical papers, that by McCloy does extend the personal construct account of emotion quite thoughtfully. This account leaves one wondering what becomes of the body; for example, if one sees a car about to run over one's leg, is it 'imminent incidental change in one's core structures' that one experiences? Of the more personal papers, Mair describes in an entertaining way the use of the metaphor of 'community' for exploring the self but makes no reference to the large literature on the uses of imagery; in his passing acknowledgement to the existence of psychoanalysis