

BOOK REVIEWS

DIANETICS: THE MODERN SCIENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH. By L. Ron Hubbard. (New York: Hermitage House, 1950. Price \$4.00.)

L. Ron Hubbard released his book simultaneously with a long article about it in the May issue of *Astounding Science Fiction* magazine. The reaction was instantaneous and overwhelming. In the intervening months there has grown up a large following of practitioners, mostly from lay ranks, who are now avidly using the method not only on all types of mental and emotional disease, but also on psychosomatic cases, which have previously been in the realm of the internist and general practitioner. We are thus confronted with a phenomenon of great importance not only to psychiatry but to medicine in general.

Mr. Hubbard developed his system of psychology from the analogy of a perfect thinking machine. His analytical mind corresponds roughly to the conscious mind, is purely mechanical, cannot make a mistake if fed the right data. Irrational or psychopathological behavior comes from the reactive mind, which feeds the wrong data to the analytical mind, thus jamming the machine and making it reproduce the wrong answers. It is somewhat similar to the unconscious mind. The engram bank of the reactive mind is explained by the concept that "the body remembers pain." The engram is inherent in the cellular structure and is not dependent on perception, so that engrams can be formed before birth. They are formed by moments of unconsciousness when pain is inflicted on the body. Their effect remains dormant until they are later "keyed in" by a correct set of circumstances, at which time they are fed to the analytical mind as wrong data (demon circuits) giving rise to the subsequent irrational behavior. The author uses the term somatic mind for the motor component. It corresponds to the autonomic and voluntary nervous systems. However, most of the similarity to established doctrine is only superficial and much oversimplified. The technique of dianetics consists of systematically erasing the engrams by sending the patient back the "time track," contacting the engrams, erasing them by repetition and abreaction. This process is continued until "basic basic" is reached and resolved, at which time the patient can be considered "cleared," i.e., completely rational.

Hubbard's psychology and technique of therapy would naturally be popular. He exploits the current impotence of psychiatry, promising quick cures, including those of formerly hopeless cases; an entirely mechanistic, predictable psychology; nonmedical, cooperative treatment; freedom from personal responsibility and guilt feelings in our neuroses; in other words the millennium in psychiatry. As might be expected he quickly found a following, first in the readers of *Astounding Science Fiction*, then in Southern California where any cult will thrive, and now almost everywhere in the country.

The extent and force of the movement can be judged from testimonial letters written in to *Astounding Science Fiction* (July, August, 1950), *Time* (Sept., 1950) and *Nation* (Sept., 1950). These all indicate that people are using dianetics and getting spectacular results of some kind.

Without pretending to pass final judgment on the movement, certain things can be said about it psychiatrically. The whole project was irresponsible by accepted scientific standards. Testimonials cannot be considered scientific proof of any method yet most of the evidence for dianetics consists only of testimonials. The author's claims of exhaustive tests for his findings seem to reside in his own fantasy. They certainly are not included in the book or in any public record that I have found. The procedure of introducing dianetics to the public was also unorthodox. Hubbard's explanation that there were lives to be saved sounds pretty thin when it is considered that any sincere scientific therapeutic method has in the past always been introduced first to the medical profession. Hubbard's medical shield, Dr. J. A. Winter, states in *Astounding Science Fiction*: "The medical profession, or at least a part of it, was not only aware of the science of dianetics, but had tested its tenets and techniques and was willing to admit there was something to it." He did not explain that a preliminary report had been submitted to the *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY* and been rejected. The obvious dangers of widespread use of this system could only have been minimized by an irresponsible adventurer such as the author. However, Dr. Winter, John B. Campbell (who is described in the book as a nuclear physicist, but who turns out to be the editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*), the publishers, the medicine editor of *Time* magazine, and many others must share this stigma as all have had an important part in furthering this project.

There has been much speculation among reviewers as to the nature of the phenomenon we are witnessing. This seems rather futile. Surely a better method would be a fair study of the whole thing by a psychiatric commission such as was done of Mesmer by the French Academy of Science. Until that is done everyone is entitled to his own explanation. This reviewer would explain the phenomena as a mass suggestion similar to hypnosis, Christian Science, and other faith cures. The main difference seems to be that it is being done under the ægis of the new psychiatric religion that in the past few years has so much replaced the established religions in fixing our standards and guiding our thinking. As for Hubbard himself, he may be explained as a misguided and frustrated genius whose previous efforts in the realm of scientific fiction writing have subtly prepared him for that nice ignorance of reality without which he could not have developed this epic. Certain bits of internal evi-

dence such as his insistence on the frequency of abortions, his cruel fathers, his unfaithful mothers, his blundering doctors, his arrogance toward authority, may indicate the author's own systematized paranoid delusions. The public's ardent espousal of his cause is reminiscent of Freud's primal horde overpowering the father (doctor). *Folie à beaucoup*.

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EXPERIMENTAL FOUNDATIONS OF GENERAL PSYCHOLOGY. By Willard L. Valentine and Delos D. Wickens. (New York: Rinehart and Co., Inc., 1949. Price \$3.00.)

In the tumultuous rush of psychologists to apply their skills to the ills of a neurotic world, the basic fact is often overlooked that the only claim for the uniqueness of psychology as an attempt to understand behavior lies in the method by which it attacks its problems. The need for psychological services is so great that it is not unusual for the practitioner, absorbed by the urgency of his task, to forget the nature of the techniques that initially justified his pretensions to special qualifications. This overpreoccupation with application is reflected in the frequent teaching of general introductory psychology without reference to the scientific methodology that presumably underlies the principles expounded. Such courses may (or may not) be useful in improving the personal adjustment of the student, but they can scarcely claim to provide an orientation to an objective psychology or to prepare a student for advanced psychological work. The reconciliation of this utilitarian purpose with the necessity for imparting, at least to the future psychologists, an enthusiasm for the experimental approach is no superficial instructional issue, but a dilemma calling for a careful weighing of values for psychology as a whole.

Valentine and Wickens have recognized the multiplicity of objectives in the customary first course, but have chosen to treat one of them—the application of scientific method to behavior problems—with clarity rather than to produce a would-be best-seller that says all things to all people. The result is an admirable work, which any instructor could well use as a supplement to a more inclusive beginning text. Here the “scientific” purpose of the first course is well met, and the instructor is left free to introduce whatever other materials he feels are needed to round out the subject.

In general, the authors have set out to describe in some detail a few important experiments selected from each of the areas usually treated in general psychology. The student is not confused by a mass of inadequately presented data, but is shown how a particular segment of behavior has been attacked in one representative study. The methodological aspects are stressed, the manner in which controls allow valid conclusions is demonstrated, and the relation of the results to larger topics is pointed out. These specific tests of psychological principles emphasize that their basis is empirical rather than

speculative. Thus the student sees how psychological data are distinguished from those of nonscientific disciplines concerned with behavior, and gains some insight into the difficulties and satisfactions of adequate psychological research.

This first edition is more than a bald collection of experimental reviews. Since the first edition in 1938 the tendency has been to add commentary and integrative material to the research summaries. With the addition of a new chapter on “Magic and Science,” by the late Dr. Valentine, and the organization of a chapter emphasizing the principle of control, this edition presents its message with greater fluency than either of its predecessors. The beginner, and, indeed, the practicing psychologist who has forgotten his basic training, could find no better primer on the methods of science. Directness, simplicity of style, and an attractive format contribute to high readability. Even with these distinct improvements, the critical reader might be left with the impression that even more integration would be desirable. The relative independence of material in each chapter may reflect on the way psychology is traditionally chopped into isolated topics rather than on this text in particular. Nevertheless, the effort to incorporate the results of many experiments into an inclusive theory is as much a part of scientific procedure as is the conduct of a single experiment. It is regrettable that this phase of the process has not received more attention. This might have been accomplished in a revision of a summary chapter that appeared in the second edition but is unfortunately missing in the present effort. New material on personality and social behavior, together with the addition of some very recent studies, make the third edition the most complete to date, however, and the changes as a whole have been advantageous.

Experimental Foundations of General Psychology is a healthy restatement of the methodological approach that alone sets psychology apart as a profession with a unique contribution. This text provides a possible solution to the pedagogical problem of perpetuating this approach in courses devoted in part to other objectives. Its success will be determined largely by the degree to which psychologists themselves continue to value the advancement of scientific understanding as a necessary basis for their efforts in applied fields.

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MEANING AND CONTENT OF SEXUAL PERVERSIONS.

By M. Boss, M. D. Translated by L. L. Abell, Ph. D. (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1949.)

As Diethelm says, in a cautious foreword to this book, “to many, these theories may not be acceptable; but to everyone they will be stimulating.” Boss rejects the orthodox analytic concept, contending that the Freudian doctrine is too mechanistic, and too much based on a presumably false assumption that psychic life can be understood in terms of exact scientific concepts. On the con-