

Book Reviews

The Scientific Basis of Psychiatry

Edited by Malcolm Weller

Bailliere Tindall, London, 1983

This book reflects current trends in psychiatry; this latter has opened its frontiers to important contributions from other scientific disciplines. It represents a survey of experimental findings and results of research studies in psychology, physiology, biochemistry, pharmacology and genetics. It is evident throughout the 29 chapters that the aim of the book is to emphasize the interconnections between psychiatry and the other disciplines rather than attempting at a comprehensive account.

This book is forwarded by two introductory chapters. The first one puts an outline of the scientific content in the following chapters. Here the editor discusses a number of experimental findings from different scientific disciplines. The amount of knowledge being extensive and diverse, its coverage appears inevitably superficial and brief. The same criticism can be addressed but to a lesser degree to most of the other chapters.

The second chapter entitled "historical introduction to psychiatry", provides a lively description of the epoch starting from 1881 and ending in the present time. It is a period of time full of events that has shaped the route of progress of psychiatry. The author follows the place of dominance shifting from France to Germany to the English speaking countries (more to the USA than to England). Here detailed knowledge is presented in an amazing and interesting way so that the reader may feel that the author is conversing rather than writing.

The rest of the chapters are subdivided into six parts. The first one discusses the neurological sciences that are of relevance to the concerned psychiatrist. Chapter 3 considers the neurophysiological

aspects of psychiatry. Throughout the discussion it is noticed how it is still difficult to relate psychiatric symptoms to the underlying physiological processes. In chapter 4, the author starts from the famous controversy about the anatomical localization and then reviews the most recent findings concerning disorders of language, perception, action, memory, personality, emotion and cerebral laterality. Chapter 5 includes a review of the research and recent neuropathological observations in relation to current concepts of synaptic transmission with particular emphasis on dementia. In chapter 6 the principles of EEG are presented in a concise way while the EEG findings in different psychiatric disorders are mentioned briefly. Chapter 7 provides a revision of basic neurology.

The second part deals with another important issue in relation to psychiatry that is methodology. It includes two chapters; the first one (chap. 8) provides something about the rationale on which rating scales are based. It presents a background for psychometric tests against which specific rating scales can be evaluated. Moreover, it invites implicitly and openly psychiatrists to know more about psychometry. The second one (chap. 9) is intended to be a guide to those who wish to plan a research study or to be able to make critical appraisal of scientific research.

The third part entitled 'clinical pharmacology' includes four chapters. The first one deals with the subject of hypnotics and anxiolytic drugs. Here, the author describes the basic properties of the most commonly used drug of this type with reference to their pharmacological effects, mechanisms of action and the problems which arise from their use. In the following chapter (11) important topics related to depressive illness and antidepressants are discussed. In chapter 12 titled 'neurotransmitters and schizophrenia', the authors consider the subject of etiology of schizophrenia; they take it from what is inherited down to the neurotransmitters level. They also probe into the neurochemical and neuroanatomical substrates for schizophrenia which is viewed as a stress response. The neuroleptics are dealt with in chapter 13. Here

the author gives a concise account of their discovery, their mechanism of action, their uses and their side-effects. In the section dealing with genetics, three subjects are reviewed. The first one (chap. 14) considers genetics and mental illness. The second one (chap. 15) makes emphasis on genetic studies of affective and anxiety disorders. The third chapter (16) is devoted to the main cytogenetic and genetic disorders associated with mental handicap.

The fifth section is the longest one and it discusses the subject of psychology in seven chapters. The first chapter (17) considers perception and attention from a new perspective. Here, perception involves selection, simplification and abstraction. Moreover feature detection and perception as well as perceiving structure are considered. In the following chapter (18), sleep and arousal are considered along a continuum. The author starts by discussing the stages, patterns and functions of sleep to reach the mechanisms of activation and the measurements of arousal which belong altogether to one phenomenon. In chapter (19), it has been argued that the simple conditioning paradigms of Pavlov and Skinner cannot account for human learning phenomena. Social learning theory, with emphasis on the cognitions that mediate between stimulus and response, provides a more palatable alternative explanation. In the chapter of human memory (20), the author discusses first the processes operating at the time of storage, second the important role played by the nature of the memory test in determining whether or not previously acquired information is remembered and finally some of the theoretical constructs discussed in the earlier parts of the chapter are applied in the last section to the interesting topic of abnormalities in memorial functioning. Chapter 21 deals essentially with the controversy of the problem of dimensionality of intelligence. In chapter 22, titled 'human development; childhood and adolescence' the author begins with a brief description of the development of various aspects of behaviour. This is followed by discussion of the development of mental processes. In the following chapter (23) the author gives a brief outline of the three very

different approaches to the study of personality. These are namely the factor analysis, the psychodynamic and the personal construct approaches. The last chapter in the section of psychology (24) discusses emotions briefly and devotes much place to the related concept of stress.

The sixth part is devoted to the considerations of social processes. It discusses in five chapters the following topics. The historical development of psychotherapies, the group process and non-verbal communications, the cultural aspects of psychiatry, the life events and their relation to mental illness and finally the contact points of ethology with psychiatry. Thus social, cultural and psychodynamic aspects of psychiatry that in previous decades were occupying a prominent place are now much compressed and displaced by the hypertrophied knowledge in other domains that are related to psychiatry.

Finally, in a book of this sort which hopes to provide the relevant scientific background for a student of psychiatry, there has been little attempts to provide immediate and practical applications of the information given. This latter criticism could be attributed to the knowledge being upto now scattered with little attempts to integrate it with clinical observations.

Yousreya Amin

The Psychology of Phantasy

By : I. Roset

Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1984

This book deals with one of the most enigmatic issues in psychology viz., phantasy and creativity which are closely related. The author, I. Roset, a soviet researcher who has been engaged in the research on the subject for over a decade. The book attempts at introducing a new conception of phantasy derived from experimental data provided by the author and other researchers. To prove the veracity of his own theoretical postulates, the author considers a great variety of facts cited by

other writers from East and West on the subject, displaying a good knowledge of pertaining classical and modern literature.

The introduction follows the historical development of the notion of phantasy. In a great number of psychological systems, the notion of phantasy has discrepancy both in content and in volume, and there are authors who still regard the subject as superfluous. This book, however, emphasizes that phantasy is any productive mental activity regardless of the sphere of its application, the goals pursued by the subject involved in this activity, and finally the material used for investigation. In contrast to the view once expressed by Wundt and still shared by some psychologists which identified phantasy with thinking in images, the author asserts that phantasy may find its expression both through imagery and verbal - and - logical material and may be applied to art, science, technology and human relations.

The first chapter is meant to identify 'The Subject of Investigation'. The notion of creativity has long co-existed with the notion of phantasy and both are usually defined by their product. The author holds the view that creativity includes numerous problems that lie beyond the framework of the psychological problems, while the study of phantasy should not extend beyond specific psychological problems. We are dealing with an output product which may not be equated with what we fed to the input, and the purpose of the theory of phantasy is to explain nature and intrinsic laws of this productive mental activity known as phantasy.

The material presented in the second chapter 'Theoretical Conceptions of Phantasy' proves that representatives of almost all more or less significant psychological trends have made an attempt to solve the basic problem of phantasy, i.e., they have tried to find the causes for creation of the new.

The elaboration of a scientific approach to the problems of phantasy involves the overcoming of two opposite views on the essence to

phantasy : the extreme idealistic view which sees phantasy as the original spontaneous creative power, and the extreme mechanistic view which regards the emergence of the new as the result of a pure accident or recombination.

The third chapter discusses 'The Methodological Problems of Studying Phantasy'. The author concludes that a successful revelation of the internal laws of phantasy may involve a wide range of subjects and the employment of most diverse experimental procedures using any material or activities. The recognition of the existence of the internal laws which is organically connected with the recognition of their universality leads us to realise both positive and negative aspects. Excluding or minimizing the screening influence of the skills, adopting algorithms, the character for instructions, etc. are essential for an experimental scheme which creates conditions for a fuller and more exact manifestations of the internal laws.

Chapter four 'Experiments (Methodology, Results and Discussion)' provides description and analysis of the experimental data obtained by the author and other researchers. The experiments revealed two internal mechanisms of phantasy : anaxiomatization and hyperaxiomatization (respectively a devaluation and an increased evaluation of certain information or of one or another way of fulfilling a task). Both mechanisms are closely interconnected and they invariably exercise their effect on any productive mental act. These mechanisms may lead to both positive and negative phenomena.

The last three chapters are concerned with practical problems associated with phantasy. Factors conditioning the process of phantasy e.g. motives, personal peculiarities, and sociopsychological factors are being discussed.

The implications of the research on phantasy in developing creative powers and stimulating creativity are considered.

This book is of interest both to researchers concerned with the subject and practical workers, leaders of creative groups and teachers.

Hanne Soliman