

## Book review

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## BOOK REVIEW

*The Subnormal Mind.* By Sir Cyril Burt. Third Edition. London: Geoffrey Cumberlege. Oxford University Press. 1955. Pp. 391 + xix.

This is a third edition of the book which first appeared in 1935. It has a new preface and footnotes, but there appear to be no important changes in the text. The book describes and explains all the mental abnormalities of children, intellectual and temperamental, with the exception of childhood psychosis. In the last twenty years it has become widely recognized that psychotic conditions can exist in childhood and it is perhaps a pity that Professor Burt has not brought his book up to date in this respect. Apart from this, intellectual and personality abnormalities in children are discussed comprehensively and with case histories and as description the account is probably the best available.

In psychology it is refreshing to read a book which is written judiciously and with common sense. Professor Burt does not put forward any views which might seem to the layman implausible or dangerous. He advocates firm discipline for the delinquent, reassurance for the anxious, special schools for the backward. The attitude is broad-minded and eclectic. While viewing psychoanalytic theory with caution, the author accepts the Freudian mechanisms accounting for phobias and conversion hysteria. Due allowance is made for both constitutional and environmental factors in the discussions of the causation of mental conditions.

Theoretically, Professor Burt rests largely upon the theory of instincts and sentiments put forward by McDougall. Some readers, especially if they are experimental psychologists, may regard the foundations of this theory as insubstantial. Probably the chief problem concerns the differentiation of the postulated instincts and the implication that empirical relationships can be established between stimulus and response. Accepting the dualism in which this theory is cast, in the case of both the observable and the emotional response a distinction should be made between the social instincts and those induced by some internal condition (e.g. food seeking, sex), together with escape. For the second group, relationships can be established between stimulus and response, so long as the response is defined as an activity which terminates the stimulus situation, e.g. relationships can be established between hours of food deprivation and eating activity. It is doubtful whether any comparable relationships can be found for the social instincts; one of the most impressive attempts to establish such a relationship, the frustration-aggression hypothesis, has been recognized as untenable.

A similar distinction should be made in the question of the emotional response. It is likely that in the case of internally induced emotions relationships can be established between stimulus conditions and conscious feelings, e.g. food deprivation and feeling hungry. Everyday experience suggests that no such inductions are possible for externally-induced conditions. Thus given a policeman's rebuke, some people will feel fear, some anger, and others pride, curiosity, gregariousness or mirth. For this reason it seems plausible to many writers to regard these reactions as *learned*. At any rate, in the present state of knowledge there is little evidence to support Professor Burt's view that delinquency should be ascribed, even in part, to a strong instinct of pugnacity, or even that such an instinct exists.

These theoretical issues, however, do not greatly affect the descriptive content of Professor Burt's book and this is its chief purpose. As a straightforward account of the psychological disorders of children it will remain a standard work. R. L.