

Two Psychologists look at:

'Crime and Personality'

1) Reviewed by PETER SEDGWICK

I FIND THIS on the whole an unsatisfactory book,* since its documentation is too selective and its basic concepts too crude to enable either the psychologist or the layman to improve his understanding of criminal behaviour.

Much of Eysenck's data is drawn from a phenomenon known as 'classical conditioning' which has been developed in academic laboratories over the last sixty years. Classical (or Pavlovian) conditioning is a procedure whereby a human or animal subject is exposed, in a carefully regulated sensory environment, such as a noiseproof room, to the pairing of two signals. One of these, the unconditioned stimulus (UCS) has already been found to evoke a certain response from the subject prior to the conditioning process. The other, the conditioned stimulus (CS) does not normally elicit this response, and it is the task of the experimenter to regulate the pairing of CS and UCS so that the reaction is eventually evoked by CS when presented alone. Pavlov used dogs

in his original experiments, with food as the UCS for the response of salivation; the food was presented along with the CS of a ringing bell, and after a number of CS-UCS pairings the sound of the bell became sufficient to arouse what was now the conditioned response (CR) of salivation. Since Pavlov's day, classical conditioning has been tried with a number of species as subjects, from earthworms all the way to humans, and using an immense variety of signals for CS and UCS: shocks, words, puffs of air, food rewards, and sights and sounds too numerous to list. The forms of behaviour that have been conditioned are also varied, but most authorities seem to agree that the laws of Pavlovian conditioning apply only to responses attributable to the *autonomic nervous system*—the section of our bodies that is concerned with the functioning of smooth muscles including the heart and various glands. Salivation, reflex blinking, dilation of the pupil, and the change in the electrical conductivity of the skin that is often called the psychogalvanic response (or PGR), are all potential CR

**Crime and Personality*

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Routledge, 25s.0d.

material. Where other behaviours are concerned, involving skeletal, striped-muscle movement (including speech), rather different kinds of learning have to be considered, although Pavlovian concepts can be extended quite widely by postulating the existence of a central motivating process in the autonomic nervous system which is often called 'anxiety'.

Eysenck in fact leans very heavily on this inferred central state since he is concerned to argue that both neurosis in patients and conscience in people generally are acquired through a process of classical conditioning. Both neurosis and conscience are conditioned anxiety responses; the criminal is like the neurotic in that his conditioning is socially maladaptive, and unlike in that his case 'what has been conditioned, through some quirk of fate is . . . a reaction which, on the whole, gives him pleasure, and which he would be reluctant to abandon.' Eysenck tentatively suggests that some type of aversion therapy has 'considerable promise' in handling various types of criminal conduct, and that more desirable moral norms could also be induced in offenders through some application of conditioning theory (perhaps with the aid of drugs) which he cannot as yet specify. Any such developments in penal treatment would, he thinks, have to take account of individual differences among experimental subjects on lines derived

from his general personality theory. According to this, (a) individuals differ with respect to *conditionability*, i.e. the relative ease with which they form and maintain CR's; (b) introverts condition more easily than extraverts; (c) delinquents, and especially psychopaths, tend to be extraverts.

I personally would take strong exception to most of Eysenck's propositions in this field. In the first place, it is very much to be doubted whether learning through classical conditioning occurs very often outside the restricted environment of the psychological laboratory. When we endeavour to socialize our offspring, we cannot constrain their irrelevant movements, as Pavlov restrained his dogs by means of special harness. Nor can we exclude distracting stimulation, as conditioning experimenters do with their sound-proof rooms, constant visual backgrounds, headphones and the like. Still less are we in a position to adhere to the rigorous conditioning schedules that have been found so necessary in these experiments, where the optimum interval between CS and UCS is measured in fractions of a second, and conditioning seems to be impossible if this interval is prolonged over more than a very few seconds. Eysenck emphasizes the 'highly specialized conditions' for conditioning (including the time-interval) only when he wishes to explain the failure of the recidivist to respond to the conditioning-

schedule of repeated imprisonment; he does not explain how so specialized and tricky a process could account for the development of similar social norms in nearly everybody within a given culture.

Secondly, even if conditioning were acceptable as a learning mechanism for moral behaviour, it does violence to the facts to reduce conscience to a conditioned anxiety-response. Conscience comprises a variety of moral tendencies, each with different implications in stimulation, emotion and behaviour: shame, remorse, guilt, righteous anger, sheer embarrassment and positive moral satisfaction, for instance. The idea of a single central anxiety-state rooted in the autonomic system cannot accommodate these variations. Interesting work has recently been done to link some of these different moral components with differing patterns of parental social control, on lines which could not easily be predicted from Eysenck's model.

Thirdly, the idea of conditionability is worth further examination. It still has to be established that people *can* be reliably ranked with respect to the ease with which they can, in general, form and preserve Pavlov-type CR's. While Eysenck quotes studies to the effect that introverts acquire conditioned eyeblinks more easily and stably than extraverts, other work employing a different conditioning measure (the PGR mentioned

above) has shown no such variation in ease of conditioning along the introversion-extraversion scale.

Fourthly, although some reports (cited by Eysenck) show delinquents to be more extraverted than normal controls, a number of studies on British prison samples show nothing of the kind. In any case Eysenck's extraversion-test scores for a mixed pattern of behaviours, some of them common among certain types of criminal (impulsiveness), others less so (sociability at parties).

Fifthly, while conditioning therapy is a promising method for some psychiatric problems, e.g. phobias, it does not, as yet, merit uncritical applause. Eysenck cites 'a success rate of over ninety per cent' using one such technique 'in relatively few sessions', and states, apropos of the bell-and-blanket technique of treating bed-wetting: 'for all practical purposes we know the causes and we know the cure.' However, in the case of the principal behaviour therapist named in the text (J. Wolpe), it has been shown that when those patients who fail to complete treatment are included in the reckoning, the success-rate falls to something like three-quarters, a figure comparable to the rate of spontaneous recovery so often cited by Eysenck against psychoanalytic claims. Recent research in Australia has documented a very high proportion of relapses in apparent conditioning successes among bed-wetters trained by conventional bell-and-

blanket schedules; and even though the technique has as a consequence been refined so as considerably to reduce relapses, we are not yet in a position to make anything like as sweeping a claim as Eysenck's.

There is, indeed, a tremendous difficulty in conceiving any possible application of behaviour-therapy techniques to the bulk of criminal activity. In conditioning experiments, whether conducted in the laboratory or in the clinic, two circumstances operate which are not found in delinquency: there is a rather specific set of physical movements produced by the subject's nervous system, which it is the experimenter's concern either to inhibit or to encourage, as the case may be. There are also specific, objectively definable stimuli functioning as signals for the subject, and varied by the experimenter. Most criminal responses are not physiologically specific in this way; the action of signing a cheque for which no funds exist differs not at all from the action of signing a valid cheque, and the motions of 'lifting' an article of property belonging to somebody else cannot be distinguished from the movements involved in legitimately lifting what is one's own. Nor, on the stimulus side, is there much scope for the experimental variation of crime-associated signals. Burglars, one imagines, might be induced to vomit at the sight of their implements, and chivs might

be electrified in the grasp of G.B.H. enthusiasts. But there appears to be nothing in the stock-in-trade of the con-man, the petty thief or the marauding teenager that could conveniently be fed into a conditioning schedule. Not so much CS, UCS and CR are involved here as (dare one say it?) a whole way of life; a way of life which is in any case so remote in its basic choices from the lifestyle of the neurotic patient or of the average volunteer for conditioning experiments that one important precondition in all ethically permissible experiments on people—namely, a willing subject—cannot often be assumed to hold good.

I am left, finally, with an uneasy feeling that Professor Eysenck's overall approach to deviant behaviour is in large part an up-to-date version of the late Jeremy Bentham's theorizing upon penal treatment. The Benthamite model of course contained no physiological details of the sort offered here, and had nothing to say about individual differences in personality (a neglected topic which we must be grateful to Eysenck for raising so insistently). All the same, both views have in common an individualistic perspective of moral formation, based on associations between varying proportions of pleasure and pain and excluding any consideration of sociological levels of explanation. Both approaches advocate the resocialization of the offender

through his exposure, in an effective environment of experimental isolation, to dosages of discomfort (and to some extent of moral uplift) worked out on the basis of a pleasure-pain calculus. Bentham thought that the process of moral training could be conducted most efficiently within an institutional setting of solitary confinement and relentless custodial vigilance against association. Eysenck has nothing at all to say about the institutional surroundings that would best suit his methods. Prison he says, causes

excessive anxiety and is therefore bad for conditioning; but it is unlikely that (say) the aversion therapy of psychopaths could be conducted exclusively on an outpatient basis. Eysenck's whole emphasis does in a sense, therefore, lead us away from the treatment community and back to an atomistic, and hence cellular, structure of penal influence; even though, along with each inmate, he takes pains to incarcerate a quantity of electronic apparatus and a zealous experimental psychologist.

2) Reviewed by BERNARD MARCUS

TO START AT THE END, i.e. the author's recommendation for the treatment of criminals: There are two kinds of drugs—stimulant drugs, which increase an individual's excitatory potential, that is to say make it easier for him to acquire conditioned responses, and depressant drugs, which have the effect of lessening the subject's conditionability. Now there is reason to believe that conditionability, the ease or otherwise with which people can acquire conditioned responses (think of Pavlov's dogs), is related to their degree of socialization. Highly socialized individuals condition easily, and what is most relevant to our point of view, anti-social individuals are resistant to conditioning. This being so, it would seem to follow

that treating criminals with stimulant drugs, thereby making them more easy to condition, would help diminish their anti-social propensities (it will be seen even from this very skimpy version of Eysenck's theory that it is a deductive type theory, if *this* is so, then *that* would seem to follow, if the criminal tends to have a certain type of nervous system, then a certain type of drug ought to be good for him. This deductive quality makes it a good theory, and by a good theory is meant not one that is necessarily true, but one from which testable consequences follow, i.e. one which it would be possible either to confirm or refute).

The comparative simplicity of Eysenck's recommendation is not likely to make it very popular.

There is a powerful feeling amongst those concerned with psychological treatment that because the human personality is a very complex thing—which is undoubtedly true—then the treatment of its disorders must be also complex. But this conclusion, despite appearances, does not logically follow from the premise. It probably *is* true but, particularly in the face of psycho-analytic canons, it is tempting to consider the possibility that complexity is *not* synonymous with repressed-complex unravelling.

In recent years a form of therapy, known as behaviour therapy, has been developed by Professor J. Wolpe. Briefly, behaviour therapy aims to do precisely what psychoanalysts say is an inadequate objective for psychotherapy—namely to remove a symptom, a phobia, perhaps, a fetish, or sexual impotence. This is done by “reciprocal inhibition,” i.e. by reconditioning the patient, so that situations which formerly produced anxiety now produce a state which is physiologically antagonistic to anxiety. The point is that this method of treatment, much briefer and more “superficial” than psychoanalysis, can tentatively claim, so far as we can see, a higher success rate. The belief that the removed symptoms will be replaced by something just as unpleasant is an article of psychoanalytic faith which does not seem to be borne out in practice.

The point of all this is to estab-

lish that Eysenck’s recommendation, even if it were unsound cannot be rejected on the grounds that it is too simple. Moreover, Wolpe’s success, based as it is on the deconditioning of anxiety responses in neurotic subjects, is explicable in terms of the kind of theory Eysenck sets out in this book. But I have overdone the point about simplicity (in any case reciprocal inhibition is hardly a suitable technique for psychopaths). Eysenck’s recommendation regarding the treatment of criminals comes as the climax of a complex theory of personality. Eysenck’s theoretical basis is that the non-intellectual aspect of personality can largely be understood in terms of two independently operating dimensions, or continua—neuroticism and introversion-extraversion. Every individual can be conceived as having a place, or a score, along both of these dimensions. He could be very neurotic, very stable, or he could be, and probably would be, at some intermediate point along the dimension. Similarly, he might be placed at any point along the introversion-extraversion dimension.

In this book the dimension of introversion-extraversion is of more crucial importance, and it is easy to see why. This is the dimension which, according to Eysenck, is the one which is associated with ease or difficulty in conditioning. Briefly, introverts condition easily, extraverts are very resistant to conditioning.

Supposing, therefore, that we take a group of neurotic patients—some will be introverted neurotics, who condition easily, some will be extraverted neurotics who do not condition at all, or only with great difficulty. What is the difference in their overt behaviour? The introverted neurotics, over-prone to acquiring conditioned anxiety responses, will present the conventional stereotype of the neurotic—inhibited, miserable, and above all guilt-laden. The extraverted neurotic, not having acquired the conventional socialized responses which most of us acquire in the normal process of being brought up, shows his disorder in the kind of behaviour that most of us would feel guilty about, but he doesn't. Here of course, we are getting near the familiar picture of the psychopath, and a definition of a psychopath in Eysenckian terms would be—an extraverted neurotic. Thus the question of whether or not you acquire a conscience is a function of that part of the nervous system which has to do with the introversion-extraversion dimension, in other words the system concerned with the acquisition or non-acquisition of conditioned reflexes. To answer a question which forms the title of one of Eysenck's chapters—conscience is a conditioned reflex. I will make two comments:

(a) This book is about the biological basis of criminality: criminality can be represented as

a high score on both the neurotic and extraversion dimensions. Neuroticism is associated with the autonomic nervous system, and introversion - extraversion, very hypothetically, with part of the central nervous system. Now whilst it is true that environmentalists often present inadequate evidence for their beliefs—to say, for example, that most criminals come from bad homes is not sufficient evidence for environmental determinism, since the same sort of evidence could also be cited in favour of genetic determinism—identical twin evidence on juvenile delinquents does suggest a very small genetic, and by implication a very large environmental, component. But if Eysenck underestimates the role of environmental factors, his book is a good book if it is considered as a book which is about biological factors. That biological factors exist any environmentalist will admit (and vice versa); As a series of hypotheses on what these factors might be this book is chiefly valuable.

(b) A key point of Eysenck's book is that criminals are extraverted. But crime is a legal, not a psychological, concept. It is commonplace that criminals are not a psychologically homogeneous group, but it is none the less true for being commonplace. Therefore, it is not likely that they are all extraverts. I have come across many sexually deviant criminals of whom it is possible to say that they have become strongly anxiety

conditioned to normal sex. These seem to be much more like individuals at the introverted extreme of Eysenk's dimensions, particularly when, as not infrequently happens, they show, apart from their sexual problems, signs of an over-socialized, over-conforming, personality. But I could not deny that extraverted, irresponsible, stimulation-demanding individuals, are very numerous in the criminal population.

A final word—the dimensional study of the personality, particularly of neuroticism and introversion-extraversion, is of great

importance, and its results, in my opinion, well established. This is true whether or not one accepts Eysenk's views about the innate basis of these dimensions. Whatever views we may have on the relative roles of heredity and environment, the results of dimensional analysis provide a very valuable conceptual framework for understanding people's behaviour and attitudes, whether normal, neurotic or criminal. If we think it through it may also suggest a rationale for a principle we all pay lip service to—the individualisation of treatment.

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