

Book Reviews

The Social Individual - John Rowan. David-Poynter. £3.50.

This is the second in a planned series of four books which will comprise an up-to-date guide to social psychology. As a driving force in the new movement of humanistic psychology, John Rowan brings a rather more critical approach to the accepted ideas and sacred cows of the traditionalists in this field.

He starts with a drastic re-evaluation of Bowlby's findings on the effects of parental deprivation in infants. Rowan quotes a number of research findings which throw doubt on the whole idea of a critical period in the human infant where it is more vulnerable to damage. Also on the reality of this 'damage'. While resisting the temptation to generalize into human beings the findings that a certain degree of stress can be a positive factor in increasing the size of brains in mice, he does point out a most interesting analysis of primitive cultures where there is a correlation between stress involved in puberty and other status-passage rites and the size and development of the individuals of the tribe.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution this book makes is in its very detailed analysis and criticism of research findings. This is extremely valuable as is the chapter on the various statistical methods that are used to evaluate research data. Here Rowan manages to cut through the guff and arcane complexities of the statisticians and produces a beautifully simplified description of the essential statistical tools. The book is valuable too in describing how experiments should be set up and what are the essential requirements in undertaking a meaningful social survey.

It is here perhaps that the traditional and humanistic viewpoints are likely to come most into conflict. The traditionalist approach can admit the effect of experimenter bias but may consider that this can be offset by a statistical weighting. The humanistic approach emphasizes at all times the human-ness, not only of the experimenter but also of his subject. People can be measured in many different ways but, just as in hard science, the accuracy of the measurements are a function not only of the object measured but of the measuring instrument and the observer. In the case of a bar of iron, the accuracy may be within a few molecules in a metre - an infinitely small quantity. In the case of the human being, the margin of error is not only very large but is likely to vary widely from observer to observer and from social climate to social climate. Here social psychology is overlapping into philosophy where the question may often be not 'what are the facts?' but 'given the conceptual framework in which the observer is working, can he ever observe facts outside this conceptual framework?'

STUDENT COUNSELLING IN PRACTICE - Audrey Newsome, Bryan J. Thorne and Keith L. Wyld, University of London Press. £1.50 paperback, £3.00 hardback.

The University of Keele was the first British University to establish a regular Counsellor Training Programme and also to operate a comprehensive counselling service for its own students. This is a well documented study of how this service works out in practice with a number of fascinating case histories.

The counselling was based on the ideas of Carl Rogers and emphasizes the passive empathetic role of the counsellor and the active and responsible role of the subject. The ideas of Carl Rogers have perhaps been one of the most exciting alternatives to classical psycho-analysis and clearly in a university setting - that is with clients trained to use their minds and observe - the probability of success is perhaps higher than outside. The danger of course is that people who use their intellect as a tool can also use it as a protection and 'armour' against the realities of life.

In practice however the technique seemed to work very well.

There is a fascinating analysis of the counsellor's own flow of experience in the counselling process. It is not only the 'client' who is unsure, ambivalent and looking for help. As the nervous student at his first visit slowly and hesitantly communicates his need, the counsellor also slowly and hesitantly responds, or *doesn't* respond. The client has said that it all seemed so pointless and the counsellor considers a range of

responses from 'have you seen a doctor?' to 'You sometimes think you are mad?! What he actually says is 'go on'. As the interview progresses the counsellor begins to try his hypotheses as to the underlying - and so far unverbaised - problems. He remains sensitive and accepting at one level while at another his mind is trying to unravel and understand.

With a population of university students approaching a third of a million the need for student counselling is obviously very great - not only in terms of human distress but also in terms of the cost of effectiveness and also human effectiveness of higher education. This book will be most valuable in helping to establish a climate in which the idea of counselling can be both accepted and understood.