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REVERSAL THEORY AND HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

This issue of **Self and Society** contains a collection of pieces devoted to a new body of theory in psychology known as 'reversal theory'. The collection seeks to outline the basic elements of the theory so as to provide those interested in other humanistic psychologies with enough information to comment upon and develop the ideas. We should stress the very basic nature of these contributions. After all **The Experience of Motivation: is the Theory of Psychological Reversals**, written by Mike Apter and to be published by Academic Press early in 1982, is 400 pages long! All we have tried to do here is introduce elements and applications.

Humanistic psychologies are characterised by their borrowing of appropriate methods from many different areas, especially psychotherapy, structural analysis, bio-energetics and phenomenology. Reversal theory, whilst sometimes taking evidence and ideas from laboratory work, relies mainly upon a combination of self-reports, case study, introspection and analytic/observational studies. In this respect it is in keeping with many other humanistic psychologies, though in its infancy reversal theory has been more quantitative than most. (1)

A much more important feature of a humanistic psychology is its focus upon the person as a whole, given that individuals operate within a social and political framework. Whilst many psychologies focus upon particular features of the person, such as their behaviour (as in behaviourism) or their physiology (as in psychophysiology), reversal theory is clearly person centred - hence its concern with 'action'.

One criticism of reversal theory that we have heard from many non-humanistic psychologists is that it is 'grand theory' of human action - that is, it is an old fashioned attempt to offer an understanding of the way in which people act in a large number of different situations. The argument goes so far as to suggest that generalised theories of action -such as Maslow's theories about motivation or our reversal theory -have a minor place in psychology because they are not easily verifiable or testable. Since humanistic psychologies are of this general kind, seeking to understand the person as a whole, we feel more at home in the humanistic camp.

This collection of papers is not the first to document the theory or the evidence which favours the notion of reversals. Mike Apter has written a number of theoretical and practical papers which look at the theory (2) and there is a growing literature on its application in counselling and therapy. (3) The South West Inter-Clinic Conference - an organisation of psychologists and therapists who live and work in the South West - held a one day conference from which a small collection of papers was also published. (4). Indeed, there are now over thirty publications documenting the theory and its applications. Some of these publications emanate from Britain whilst others are from Europe or the USA where interest in reversal theory is growing rapidly. This issue of **Self and Society** provides valuable additions to this literature and a clear statement of some of the basic propositions of the theory. We hope it is of interest and value to you.

Notes

(1) See, for example, Murgatroyd, S. et al (1978): The Development of the Telic Dominance Scale. **Journal of Personality Assessment** 42(5), 519-528.

(2) These include: Apter, M.J. and Smith, K.C.P (1979): Sexual Behaviour and the Theory of Psychological Reversals in Cook, M. and Wilson, G. (eds.) **Love and Attraction**. Oxford, Pergamon; Apter, M.J. (1979): Human Action and The Theory of Psychological Reversals. in Underwood, G. and Stevens, R. (eds.): **Aspects of Consciousness**, Vol. 1. London, Academic Press.

(3) Apter, M.J. (1979): Psychological Reversals - Some New Perspectives on the Family and Family Communication. **Family Therapy** 6(2), 89-100; Blackmore M. and Murgatroyd, S. (1980): Anne -The Disruptive Infant in Murgatroyd, S. (ed): **Helping the Troubled Child**. London, Harper and Row; Seldon, H. (1980): Patricia - A Problem of Adjustment in Murgatroyd, S. (ed) **ibid**; Murgatroyd, S. (1981): Reversal Theory - A New Perspective on Crisis Counselling. **British Journal of Guidance and Counselling**, Vol 9(2).

(4) Available from Mike Apter, Department of Psychology, University College, PO Box 78, Cardiff, CF1 1XL. Price £1.