Book Reviews

Mediators of Action

Cognitive Views of Human Motivation. Papers from an AAAS symposium, San Francisco, Feb. 1974. BERNARD WEINER, Ed. Academic Press, New York, 1974. xii, 106 pp., illus. $7.95.

To say that our thinking affects our desires would hardly arouse skepticism in the man on the street. But psychologists, fettered by mechanistic models of behavior, have had serious conceptual problems dealing with "thought" in relation to motivation and action. One's commitment to a theoretical framework of stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) contingencies seems threatened by the admission of "self-control" to problem status. The slender volume under review presents four attempts to break out of the S-O-R paradigm.

Of these the two most elegant are Walter Mischel's attack on the delay-of-gratification problem and the Birch, Atkinson, and Bongort model of the "stream of behavior." Mischel's research is more fully reported elsewhere (as is the other research described in this book), but the present summary captures the main lines of his thinking. He tackles self-control head on. The essence of socialization lies in the development of a capacity to forgo immediate small rewards for later, more substantial ones. But how does the psychologist get control over the ideation that mediates successful delay? Through a series of clever interlocking experiments with nursery school children, Mischel convincingly shows that delay is facilitated by distracting thoughts or by symbolic representations (for example, colored slides) of the rewards involved. When the rewards themselves are present, however, delay is inhibited! This complex pattern of findings takes Mischel into an interesting minitheory involving the joint motivational and informational value of a stimulus. Seeing the actual goal object arouses consummatory affect as well as serving as a reminding cue. This arousal is frustrating, and the vivid appeal of the present rewards leads to a breakdown in delay capacity. The precision of the effect is evident in the further result that instructing the child simply to think about the consummatory qualities of the reward object (for example, the crunchy, salty taste of a pretzel) reduces delay time. And yet thinking about the consummatory qualities of an irrelevant reward—one not involved in the delay contingency—actually enhances the child's capacity to delay. This presumably is due to the distracting quality of such thinking.

Mischel's research provides a compelling demonstration of the value of experimentation in refining and even in drastically altering one's presumptions. In fact, Mischel's departure point was Freud's analysis of hallucinatory wish-fulfillment in the absence of the gratifying reward, an analysis that would lead one to expect that thinking about the reward would *facilitate* the capacity to delay.

Birch *et al.* introduce a "stream of behavior paradigm" to replace the "traditional episodic paradigm" of "mechanistic behavior theory." Robert Sears, in discussing this chapter, rather haughtily concludes that their "system is easily identified as the 35-year old formulation presented [by Dollard *et al.*] in *Frustration and Aggression*." In a rejoinder, Birch and his colleagues express (no doubt understate) their "disappointment" in being so subsumed. Theirs is a model designed to characterize changes in behavior over time. It looks beneath the surface of the behavior stream to identify submerged action tendencies that fluctuate as a function of present environmental instigations, past instigations, and conscious thought. At any given moment the strongest action tendency will be reflected in overt behavior, but as the motive reflected in the behavior becomes satisfied the action tendency sooner or later becomes replaced by the strongest alternative tendency. The similarity with frustration-aggression theory centers on the coupling of an instigation hierarchy to the notion of catharsis, but Birch *et al.* more emphatically include the time dimension and their model is more general and ambitious in scope.

In its present form the model of Birch *et al.* is a simulation device. When hypothetical action tendencies of different temporal form are loaded into a computer, the model provides a program for printing out the resultant picture of covert and overt action tendencies. Or, taking a set of results like Mischel's, the model provides several plausible assumptions that permit some specification of the underlying action tendencies. Integrating these tendencies and their temporal characteristics can postdict the Mischel findings. But the model remains hypothetical and descriptive. What is obviously needed is a demonstration of deductive utility. (The reader should be warned that the constituents of the model are presented in a very cryptic fashion in this volume. A fuller and more satisfying treatment may be found in Atkinson and Birch's 1970 book *Dynamics of Action*.)

The remaining two cognitive views of motivation are provided by Bernard Weiner and Richard Lazarus. Weiner summarizes the data supporting his conviction that causal attributions are critical antecedents in predicting expectancies of future success, affective reactions to success and failure, and subsequent performance. It makes a difference in each of these respects whether a person attributes his success to ability, effort, task difficulty, or luck. Weiner's formulation is sensible and heuristic, though many of his data derive from highly schematized hypothetical situations presented in questionnaire form.

Lazarus has much more to say about emotion than about motivation as he presents a loose framework for viewing the coping strategies of man in his natural environment. His theorizing leans on the concept of *cognitive appraisal*, an appraisal that is determined by the interplay of personality and the environment. His conceptualization leads him away from experimental studies into idiographic and naturalistic research. Lazarus seems to be overwhelmed by the complexity of the relationships among thought, emotion, and behavior, and one wonders whether this obeisance to complexity is itself an effective coping strategy.

The main value of this symposium summary is that it provides a quick overview of four very different perspectives and lines of research. Especially Mischel's and Weiner's presentations are models of clarity and verbal economy. The volume is also graced by Robert Bolles's surefooted discussion of historical trends in conceptualizing cognition and motivation and by a brief but trenchant critique by Robert Sears. These important additions help to inhibit the presumption that the accompanying research papers span the range of possible cognitive views. The papers do, however, celebrate a freedom from mechanism that seems certain to lead psychology toward a fuller understanding of uniquely human motivational phenomena.

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