Book Reviews

The Myth of Mental Health

One seldom encounters articles, and still more rarely monographs, addressed to the definition of physical health, but those concerned with mental health are numerous indeed. Daniel Offer and Melvin Sabshin, the authors of **Normality: Theoretical and Clinical Concepts of Mental Health** (Basic Books, New York, 1966. 266 pp. $5.50), are well aware of this fact and aware, too, of the babel of contradictory definitions in the field. They have seen their task as one of creating order out of this confusion and they have largely succeeded in doing just that.

They begin by reminding us that until quite recent times the diseases which afflicted mankind were so numerous and so deadly that there was no doubt about the difference between being sick and well: "there was little reason to measure degrees of being without the plague." During the last century, the discoveries of men like Pasteur and Koch, which gave us our first accurate knowledge of the causes of disease, seemed to perpetuate this clear dichotomy between health and sickness by postulating bacterial infection as the single factor which made all the difference; yet even a century ago the pathologist Pettenkofer challenged this theory and proved his point by breakfasting on a sandwich spread containing a pure culture of the cholera bacillus, supplied by Koch. Today, it is generally accepted that the etiology of disease is multifactorial and that not only trauma and infection, but also factors in the patient's physique and personality and in his environment, have to be taken into account. Medicine is still predominantly concerned with the study of disease: if fitness is discussed (as John Ryle, the first Professor of Social Medicine, pointed out) one has to ask, "Fitness for what?" A Welsh coal miner and an Olympic sprinter may each be well adapted to their tasks, and yet unless they were first made sick by a series of immunizing shots both might prove a liability on a tropical expedition.

Physical medicine, then, has evaded the trap of trying to define "positive health" by thinking in terms of specific challenges to the human organism and the degree of success with which they are met. There is no such uniformity on the side of mental health. Here it seems at times as if every writer on the subject has put forward his own personal definition; in a long and useful appendix, the authors quote 22 leading examples ranging alphabetically from Franz Alexander to Roger J. Williams, but many others are cited incidentally in the text.

This cacophony of voices is brought to order by considering in turn the medico-psychiatric, the psychoanalytical, the psychological, the cross-cultural, and the biological-scientific concepts of normality. In the first category come psychiatrists, who identify their task closely with that of medicine in general and who are likely to define normality as the absence of identifiable disease.

Psychoanalysts, on the other hand, are much more prone to advance an exalted, even utopian, concept of mental health. In their view, a touch of neurosis is discernible in every man's personality; this implies either that it is normal to be a little neurotic, or that freedom from neurosis is a rare, never wholly attainable state, approachable only toward the end of a successful analysis. Several analysts claim that it is in fact suspicious if an individual maintains that he is mentally normal; this is seen as a defense against anxiety! Others move still further away from the usual doctor-patient role model by suggesting that only a mentally healthy person is able fully to benefit from the experience of psychoanalysis.

Several analysts appear to have anticipated David Riesman's concept of the "other-directed" man. For Adler, it was a mark of health that one could identify with the needs of one's fellows in society. Jung, on the other hand, saw the process of individuation as a separating out and building up of the *particular* elements in each individual, which must disengage him from the Collective Norm. Otto Rank contrasted the popular concept of the normal, or adjusted man (who finds it tolerable to accept the popular will as his own) both with the neurotic, who can neither identify with the group nor stand alone, and with the creative artist, who alone has succeeded in fully accepting and affirming his own being. In Rank's view, it was the function of psychotherapy to transform neurotics into creative artists.

Among psychologists, there are many whose concepts are basically similar to the analytic or psychotherapeutic point of view. Carl Rogers, for example, describes a "fully functioning person" as one who is "continually in a process of further self-actualization." He has listed the attributes of this person, which make him seem a paragon indeed, and implies that this state is the lasting reward of "optimal psychotherapy." (One cannot help regretting how suboptimal most of one's friends' analyses seem to have been.)

It should be added that several analytically oriented psychologists (including Erik Erikson and Marie Jahoda) have advanced less utopian paradigms of healthy mental function, in which integration and balance, the attainment of successive stages of mastery over external and internal challenges, and personal autonomy are regarded as of special importance.

Most nonanalytic psychologists, on the other hand, regard the attempt to define mental health as a task of supererogation. Friedes, for example, suggests that the multiplicity of different definitions of normality merely illustrates the uselessness of the concept. He regards the attempt to dichotomize mental normality and pathology as doomed to failure; he recommends, instead, the study of individuals' positive and negative psychological attributes in a variety of situational contexts. This is very reminiscent of Ryle's "fitness for what?" Experimental psychologists have emphasized the subjective element which colors most definitions of mental health and have confined themselves to demonstrating statistical rather than ideal norms.

Cultural anthropologists have naturally emphasized the important role of tradition and communal value-systems in defining normal human be-

havior; but several authors, including Paul Halmos (whose book *Towards a Measure of Man* is the only conspicuous omission from this well-documented work) have argued that there are certain physiologically determined forms of mental disorder which are recognized as abnormal in every society. On the whole, sociologists, like clinicians, have found deviance easier to define and study than normality. Coser has justified this by arguing that deviance helps to make explicit and indeed to reaffirm the positive values of the society in which it occurs.

In the biosciences, an earlier preoccupation with clear-cut, identical norms has given place to an appreciation of the range of individual variations. This is perhaps most vividly shown in modern genetic theory, particularly in biochemical genetics, which shows how insistently differences in small details (for instance, in the inheritance of different minor enzyme systems) preserve diversity in a seemingly uniform gene pool. This has led to the acceptance, in most biological fields of study, of the concept of a range of normal findings, with a high statistical probability that a given individual will exceed the range in some of his attributes.

Having reviewed the whole field, the authors summarize the numerous definitions of mental health under the headings Normality as Health, Normality as Utopia, Normality as Average, and Normality as Process. Although they avoid committing themselves, there is an implied endorsement of the last point of view.

In a rather cursory excursion into ancient philosophy, attention is drawn to Plato's exalted view of the role of the philosopher in human affairs. The rhetorical question is put, "Must it logically follow that the present-day psychiatrist, who has been trained in the 'ordering of the mind,' and the psychoanalyst, who has undergone personal analysis, should consider it their moral duty to direct the mental health of the populace?" The authors neither endorse nor categorically reject this alarming proposition, although they eventually state that most of their colleagues would repudiate such a role.

The monograph concludes with the following engimatic sentences: "We have not offered a 'substantive' definition of normality. We believe that the process of definition is currently the responsibility of the individual investigator who, understanding the array of possible definitions, can employ knowledge rather than arbitrary ignorance to formulate his own definition."

On a purely pragmatic level, this book will be of value to all practicing psychiatrists by compelling them to think about their own concepts of normality, which are usually held in a vague, if not self-contradictory form; it is particularly valuable, at a time when psychiatry is reaching out to many underprivileged groups, to be reminded how easily one's own judgments of normality can be colored by the values currently prevailing in the particular section of society to which most psychiatrists belong.

G. M. CARSTAIRS
Royal Edinburgh Hospital, Edinburgh, Scotland

Plants Used by Man

Franz Schwanitz's **The Origin of Cultivated Plants** (Gerd von Wahlert, Transl. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1966. 183 pp., illus. $4.75) is at least the second book to appear with this title. The first was written by Alphonse DeCandolle and appeared in 1886. DeCandolle's efforts were directed toward description of as many cultivated species as possible and toward determining the place (or places) from which these species arose. Schwanitz, following more in the tradition of Darwin's efforts, attempts to discover how plants (mostly food plants) differ in their genetic and other mechanisms from wild ones and how these mechanisms arose. His book owes a debt to the groundwork laid by Darwin, DeCandolle, and the Russian plant breeder and geneticist Vavilov, all generously acknowledged by Schwanitz.

The characteristic of cultivated plants which is primarily responsible for their usefulness to man is gigantism—witness the enlarged roots of cultivated carrots contrasted to the small, woody taproot of its wild relative (Queen Anne's lace), or the large, fleshy fruits of tomatoes (*Lycopersicon esculentum*) contrasted to the small, seed-filled fruit of the putative wild relative (*L. pimpinellifolium*). Gigantism of certain organs, a phenomenon common to many cultivated species, is caused by several different genetic mechanisms: mutation in some, hybridization in some, and polyploidy in others. Gigantism may result from increased cell size or from increased numbers of cells in the useful part. These variations, once established, are kept going by man—they seldom have any competitive ability if not nurtured, weeded, and watered. And the influence of environment (which must include man as a factor) is another critical part of the picture for the development of cultivated species.

Perhaps primitive man's biggest role in the development of useful plants was in environmental modification. Certainly he did not have a program of breeding toward a desired goal. But by chopping down competitors, keeping livestock, and by generally messing up the natural habitats, he made great strides in the development of most of our cultivated species. Schwanitz does not put it this way. To him, plant breeding is as old as agriculture. His definition of plant breeding is much broader than I would care to make it, since to me breeding involves much more knowledge of the biology of the organisms than the primitive people had. What he must mean is a sort of selection process, in which results of chance hybridization or desirable spontaneous mutation were kept going by some observant primitive farmer.

Whatever interpretation is made, however, this is an informative and useful book. A short list of general references, mostly from the German literature, is appended.

DAVID J. ROGERS
Department of Botany and Plant Pathology, Colorado State University, Fort Collins

Variety, Conflict, and Change

Animal Conflict and Adaptation (Dufour, Philadelphia, 1965. 172 pp., illus. $8.95), by J. L. Cloudsley-Thompson, in all honesty should not have been published—certainly not until a great deal more care and time had been put into its composition.

The book contains good summaries of the gross physiological and behavioral mechanisms of adaptation to various physical environments (ocean, land, desert, snow and ice); to other species (predators, prey, parasites, agents of disease); and to other members of the same species (cannibalism, territoriality, hierarchical relations, displacement activity, and so on), and these may