BOOKS

DIANETICS: The Modern Science of Mental Health
by L. Ron Hubbard

Hermitage House, New York, $4.00

Reviewed by Charles E. Bures, Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Psychology

DIANETICS PROMISES anyone a new personality and a new life at the cost of little effort and even less knowledge. This promise alone, well-publicized, is enough to attract a wide and enthusiastic public. What is Dianetics and how important is it?

The main popular emphasis has been on the practice of Dianetic therapy, but Hubbard's sketchy theoretical facade for this practice might well be outlined first . Briefly, Hubbard claims that the mature adult has three minds: reactive (engramic), analytical (conscious), and somatic (motor-effector). The reactive mind begins, presumably, with conception. It records physical pain or painful emotion (*whose?*) in the cell tissue of the zygote and of succeeding developmental stages. And it "thinks only in identities." *(What does "thinking" mean here?)*

The recordings of the reactive mind are called engrams, and it is stated that none are ever lost. Engrams may be pre-natal or post-natal. Some pre-natal engrams are caused by pain resulting from physical contact. Others are the recording of verbal interchanges, somehow "overheard" by the pre-natal denizen, and presumably recorded if they are detrimental to his welfare. Engrams can be reactivated by similar circumstances, and then operate as inhibiting commands on all other human functions.

How is it done?

Hubbard offers no evidence as to how speech can be recorded on cell tissue (later to be reclaimed and verbalized), nor does he attempt to explain how physical pain alone, after being recorded, can function as a command. In fact no acceptable evidence exists for such phenomena, assuming even minimal meaning.

With the maturation of the nervous system, analytical mind develops. It includes the center of awareness, all computational ability and all standard memory experiences which are not engramic. *(Note the implication that all important rational functions of this mind are computational.)* We are told that Dianetics has discovered that analytical mind is "inherently perfect" (errorless). Only the aberrative effects of engrams prevent our using this perfect, errorless instrument of rationality for a fuller, richer life. Engrams are the single source of all irrationality, all psychosomatic illness, all unethical behavior. (More recently it has been reported that the group contends that all disease is psychosomatic unless proved otherwise!)

Dianetic therapy requires an auditor and a patient. One of the alleged discoveries of Dianetics is the ability of anyone to *return* along his time track to contact earlier recordings. This is not standard remembering, it is claimed. In a relaxed state (reverie) the auditor tells the patient to return to engrams, to reduce them by repeating their content until they disappear. They appear refiled in the standard memory bank of analytical mind, accessible to remembering.

In the clear

With all engrams erased and refiled one becomes a "clear"; if only the more serious engrams are erased, one becomes a "release." *(Does a clear have to be retrained or is his perfect rationality immediate?)* Since engrams are the *sole* source of aberrations, the clear is presumably an errorless computer, ethically good and optimally healthy. Hubbard writes as if he is speaking from study of a number of cleared cases, but no data are given on the size of his sample, if any.

A wider context for this system is provided. The single fundamental principle is Survival, the "dynamic principle of existence." This dynamic principle has four separate dynamics: survival of self, offspring, group and Mankind. Rational behavior is the harmonizing of these four dynamics. The drive for survival is inherent in the individual. Hubbard states, "It is a new thought that Man is motivated *only* by survival." This is one of many new thoughts rediscovered by Hubbard.

A reward (pleasure) is provided as an incentive for the survival drive —even though this drive is inherent and necessitous. Yet the ethical theory is summed up: "The best solution to any problem is that which

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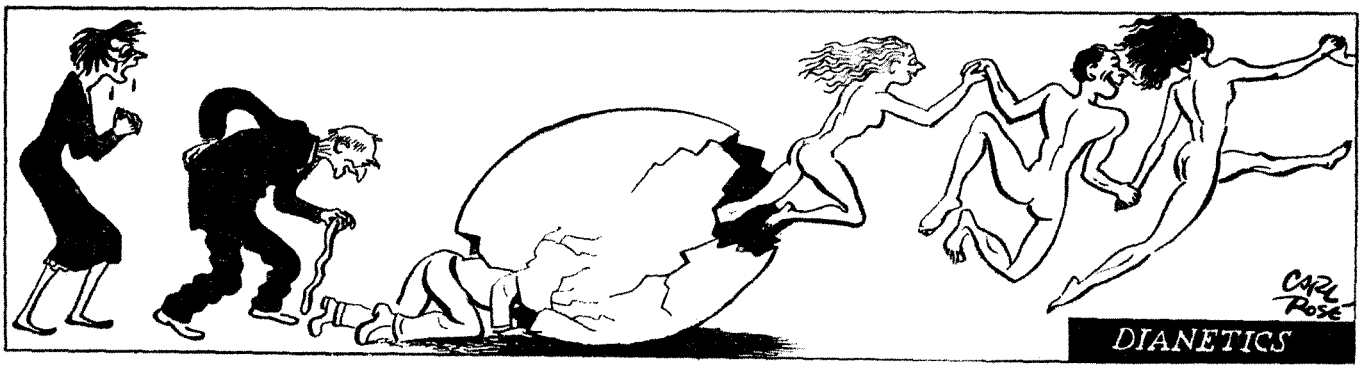

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will bring the greatest good to the greatest number of human beings." To effect all of these things calls for a pre-established harmony!

Criticism of Dianetics should begin with the main point of emphasis, practice. It is urged above all else that anyone who will try Dianetic therapy will be convinced, for "It works!" One basic confusion evident in this contention is the identifying of practice and confirmation (validation). This confusion is not an exclusive possession of this system. It fits well into the practical temper of American culture, where the term "theory" is often a smear term. This is a misreading of pragmatism, and in the extreme it is a false identification of knowledge and value.

Practice in psychotherapy is control of a psychological situation toward a goal. Values enter the picture in the form of a preferred goal, e. g., improvement of human effectiveness. Knowledge enters in terms of the control process and the prediction that such controls will attain the goal.

The criteria for Dianetic method and the alleged results are described and explained by means of certain concepts. Since Hubbard regards his system as an autonomous science of mind, it is clear that his sole source of data is the introspective reports of patients undergoing therapy. This is the main implication of the "It works" attitude. Systems based *entirely* on introspective reports are regarded by careful students of psychology as uncontrollable. They have no predictive value for *behavior* of the whole person. What happens is that behavioral terms are smuggled in. But this is psychology, and Hubbard states that Dianetics is *not* psychology.

Obviously, in Dianetic therapy something happens. The terms of Dianetics do not give us any information as to *what* happens, because two fundamental steps are omitted. First, the concepts must be operationally analyzed to give them meaning. Hubbard seems completely innocent of this requirement. Further, when we know what we are talking about, then we must accumulate objective evidence for confirmation of our assertions. Evidence already exists for such phenomena, but Hubbard is so convinced that his discoveries are new and original that he will have none of the old evidence, nor does he give any for his contentions.

"It works"

Despite many statements that the system rests on precise axioms, demonstrated natural laws, measurable entities, scientific facts, no reliable evidence supports these claims. Instead, we are told "It works." Evidence exists that Hubbard regards professional scholars as obstructionists and dolts. For whatever motives, it was more profitable and safer to issue an undocumented volume, with promissory notes on evidence. Believing himself in possession of many incredibly simple discoveries, Hubbard apparently also felt that the usual scientific amenities were unnecessary. This in the face of qualified opinion that amateurish meddling with human minds is dangerous.

Since Hubbard has denied to critics that his system rests on a mechanical analogy, it is instructive to point out that engineer Hubbard relies heavily on the analogy of computing machines. The mathematical biophysicists and the cyberneticists have recently attacked phases of psychology and sociology by means of neurological or mathematical models. This approach does have some heuristic advantages, but it must be handled with caution. Such theoretical models are greatly over-simplified today. They are working hypotheses, not yet "scientific facts." For one thing, such models are usually based on microscopic (neural) events. Human behavior, especially of the whole person, is macroscopic. No existing model, based on an analysis of microscopic events, does justice to macroscopic data.

Hubbard's concept of analytical mind is undoubtedly such a model. There is little doubt that he confuses his model with observable macro-level behavior. This tricks him into a thoroughly out-moded instinctivist position, with all major postive components inherent in the individual. It has taken careful scientists two generations to overcome a similar nineteenth century position.

Hubbard confuses the idealized perfection of a computing machine with analytical functions of the mind, hence we have errorless rationality in the "clear". Error, then, can be attributed to a single source, the engram. Hubbard can believe that human salvation is so very simple only because the complex problems are hidden to him by his instinctivist solution. Others, more aware of the results of the last century, know that relinquishing instincts, through sound operational analysis, introduces all the complexity of socialization and cultural relativity.

Reminiscent of the early days of psychoanalysis is the manner in which Hubbard seeks to secure his system against attack. To the early orthodox analysts—and even to a few today — criticism indicates unconscious resistance. The critic needs analysis to see the light. To Hubbard, any critic must have aberrant engrams. This is a confusion of psychological states with logical principles of validation. This stand also violates a basic scientific tenet, namely, that data must be open to alternative explanations. Hubbard's position gives a closed system of undeniable evangelical advantages, but

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one that is confused and essentially meaningless.

Hubbard openly disavows metaphysics and mysticism, yet he makes Bergson's "life force" the foundation of his whole viewpoint. He seems unaware that this is a wholly discredited metaphysical concept, inapplicable by scientific standards of operational analysis. The author mentions that Darwinian evolution was his first inspiration toward Dianetics, but with his instinctual and metaphysical basis, it is not strange that he ignores natural selection.

This book is carelessly written. Even some of the adherents to Dianetics admit this. A typical careless statement is the following: "Dianetics is *not* psychiatry. It is *not* psychoanalysis. It is *not* hypnotism. It is a science of mind and needs about as much licensing and regulation as the application of the science of physics."

This has been excused by some as simply enthusiastic propaganda. But internal evidence shows that this is an attempt to inflate the originality of the thesis at the expense of more solidly established knowledge, and possibly to sidetrack criticism from the directions indicated. Such insulation can only lead to a cul-de-sac by eliminating both validating evidence and the prediction of the behavior of the whole person.

Novelty is not enough

Controversy over this book indicates a widespread popular belief that novelty alone entitles a thesis to serious consideration. Partly this arises out of the publicized open-mindedness of the scientific attitude.

Novelty is of two kinds: novelty of data and novelty of theory (or explanation). Hubbard claims great originality for his data. Are his data novel? Qualified scholars believe they are an uncritical rehash of known facts in new terminology. Novel terms do not guarantee novel data. Here is where careful meaning analysis is paramount. After meaning analysis has settled whether data are novel, then we may ask if the explanation is novel.

Alternative explanations of empirical facts are always possible. Here recognized experts have a prior right to be heard over one who advances an insufficiently supported hypothesis. Counting noses of adherents is not evidence. Hubbard protests that he is scientific, but his main support consists of the lame position that others have made complex what is really a simple matter. Some mastery of the constructive achievements of other scholars is necessary, and this is a naive book because it reveals a profound innocence of the major advances of the past century.

A characteristic feature of Hubbard's writing is the exaggeration of his own originality by implying that his predecessors were virtual morons. Here is a random selection that speaks for itself:

Hubbard remarks that, while it has long been felt that facing reality is necessary for sanity, no one had conceived that perception is the line of communication to reality. Again, he holds that the value of recall for the business of living has occupied scant attention. Finally, for the biologically literate: "it has been poorly considered in the past that a set of survival characteristics in one species would not be survival characteristics in another."

Such opinions are typical, not exceptional.

What's it worth?

This author is so out of touch with contemporary achievements in the fields into which he ventures that, in the reviewer's opinion, this work does not merit serious attention. It is given critical attention here only because of the uncritical following it has attracted. If there are any suggestions of value in this movement, they will be supported by continuity with past efforts, not by evasion of intellectual responsibility.

In summary, Dianetics mistakes a highly over-simplified model for a solution to important human problems. It disregards operational analysis and search for adequate controlled evidence in the proper directions. Because of its archaic metaphysics, its outmoded exclusive emphasis on survival, and its discredited instinctivism, it pays only lip-service to the established social and cultural contributions to human personality. Its assumption of inherently perfect rationality masks for the gullible the effort, the learning and the critical attitude that are necessary for a balanced rational approach to life problems. Everything attempted here has been done better by others and with a proper sense for the protection of the uninformed.