Contemporary Hypnosis (2003)
Vol. 20, No. 2, 2003, pp. 102–108

BOOK REVIEWS

A REVIEW OF *DYNAMICS OF CHARACTER: SELF-REGULATION IN PSYCHOPATHOLOGY*

By: David Shapiro

Basic Books, New York. 2002. Pp 192. Price: £18.99, $25. ISBN 0-465-09572-0

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In *Dynamics of Character: Self-regulation in Psychopathology* Shapiro builds on earlier works such as *Neurotic Styles* (1965) and extends his thnking to encompass psychosis. He boldly proposes that distortion of reality, which has been the benchmark for distinguishing between neurosis and psychosis, does not in fact differentiate them, for both involve distortions of reality. Furthermore, he advocates self-regulation as a principle therapeutic tool, thereby offering a fascinating challenge to psychology in the face of the domination today of biological approaches in treating and understanding psychopathology.

Despite the fact that I am a psychophysiologist by training, I believe his challenge is a prescient one. Not in the sense of turning one's back on neurobiology and reverting to the psychodynamic zeitgeist of 40 years ago, but rather in turning the spotlight on the psychodynamic interface with psychobiology. This is surely necessary for a complete understanding of psychopathology, though it is an orientation that is deeply out of fashion through the superficial glamour of functional brain scans. I believe that the 'permissive neurobiological substrate' (see below) is indeed essential for an understanding of much of psychopathology. This is certainly true of psychosis, while the impact of the biological substrate on temperament has profound ramifications for psychopathology in general. However, the neurobiological substrate alone is insufficient to account for most human behaviour. The time has come to consider therapeutic approaches that work through the psychobiological interface, such as biofeedback and hypnosis (at least when hypnosis is seen from my perspective), rather than the conventional modalities such as pharmacology or psychotherapy when viewed as independently working on separate dimensions. Self-regulation, which Shapiro advocates, is a key concept and one strategy for achieving this goal.

In order to explain this allegiance perhaps I should first state my own trajectory, beginning as a clinical psychologist in the 1960s and then turning to psychobiological approaches to psychopathology. These being the days of Cooper and Laing and of the 'swinging London' of the 1960s it was to London that I was drawn from my early experience in psychiatric hospitals in New Zealand, propelled to seek explanations for psychopathology in what held promise of being an informed world overseas. While guided by the same humanistic concerns as Cooper and Laing, including the barbarity of

psychiatric institutions (which proved to be so much worse in England than in the sunny New Zealand countryside), my leanings were antithetical to theirs, being towards reductionism. This was coupled with a gut reaction to the veracity of evidence such as reports that tumours or brain electrical stimulation with indwelling electrodes could apparently elicit the full repertoire of schizophrenic symptoms and behaviour. I eschewed the then popular polemic that the basis of schizophrenia lay in society or in family dynamics, and not in the patient and began instead to explore psychophysiology as the culprit – i.e. dynamic neurophysiological response in a psychological context. This was a stance that was soon to be entrenched in psychiatry, notably by the discovery of the antidopaminergic properties of conventional neuroleptics, and the rest, they say, is history, for schizophrenia research changed direction overnight powered by the pharmaceutical industry.

In those days schizophrenia was seen to be a functional disorder, as distinct from an organic disorder of the brain. A functional perspective is now being revisited by this reviewer in the sense that functional neurophysiology is held to be altered under the impact of both the social context and personality dispositions created by the interplay of nature and nurture. Mine is not the nihilistic view of much of contemporary psychiatry, which imbues schizophrenia with structural and cognitive deficits, but rather is the view of the brain in a dynamic state of flux, a brain with much potential for restoration and recovery. It is the view of a brain with capabilities, often exceptional ones, but juxtaposed with vulnerabilities which may lead to tragically disabled lives, both for the sufferers and their families (Gruzelier, 2003a). One implication of this dynamic neurophysiological viewpoint is that we have a brain with capabilities for enablement (Gruzelier, Hardman, Wild, Zaman, Nagy and Hirsch, 1999; Gruzelier, 2003b); a brain capable of learning self-regulation via the techniques of hypnosis, neurofeedback, cognitive and psychodynamic therapy. It is here that the reviewer joins minds with *Dynamics of Character: Self-regulation in Psychopathology.*

Returning to the 1960s, in the USA of flower power on the West coast and the psychoanalytic ambiance and heritage of the East coast, David Shapiro published (in New York) *Dynamics of Neurosis* (Shapiro, 1965). His thesis proposed that it was the psychological structure of the pathological character, i.e. styles of thinking, attitude and action of the various neurotic conditions, that determined the form of characteristic symptoms. Not the unconscious, as psychoanalytical thinking would have it, and not the neurobiological underpinnings, such as hemispheric specialization or fronto-limbic systems as has been explored since.

From a characterological understanding 'it may be possible to understand the varieties of psychopathology, with their enormously diverse symptoms, as variations of the mind's organizing and regulating system. This structural or characterological understanding, therefore, points in exactly the opposite direction from the current psychiatric aim of establishing specific neurophysiological causes for discrete conditions' (p.6).

As he states, one of the unexpected consequences of his analysis was the apparent links between conditions such as the obsessional and the paranoid whose symptoms were conventionally regarded as distinct. In *Dynamics of Character* he takes this further. A cardinal principle is the role of a diminished experience of self-direction and personal responsibility, or *diminished agency*. This is manifested clinically at one extreme by impulsive behaviour – 'unreflective, spur-of-the-moment, planlessness' – and at the other by rigidity, behaviour under the direction of fixed internal rules.

Shapiro provides an innovative perspective in discerning affinities across the psychosis-neurosis divide. This is a perspective to which this reviewer responds, for its absence has hampered the understanding of the psychotic process through the focus on

so-called specific symptoms at the expense of nonspecific ones, such as anxiety, which are fundamental to the evolution of the psychotic process.

It also provides a new perspective, and perhaps one closer to Shapiro's heart, of expanding simplistic reasons for causation, such as childhood trauma or biological vulnerabilities, when causes are altogether more complex and have a psychological foundation residing more with psychological structure, specifically diminished agency.

Neurobiology provides a permissive substrate, say for drug abuse, but this only accounts for *incentive*.

The neurobiological studies of babies by Trevarthen (1996) provide such striking support.

> Biological foundations of temperament, of various kinds of sensitivity to the environment, and of cognitive equipment in general must affect the quality of individual experience and individual reaction from earliest infancy. Such foundations must be one determinant, not directly of psychopathology, which involves internal conflict and ramifications, but of the general form of the developing character. (p. 16)

The book is divided into three sections. The first, 'Structure and dynamics', centres on a critique of psychoanalytical mental structure and psychopathological theory, in which the author's theory has its origins. Psychoanalysis falls short because it is a theory presenting merely a catalogue of concepts, such as the ego or defence mechanisms with causes that merely move the person passively like a marionette, without sufficient understanding of symptom formation. For Shapiro, who is building on psychodynamic psychology, psychopathology is marked by self-estrangement which is due to the anxiety-forestalling restrictions of subjective life, giving rise to a diminished sense of agency, personal responsibility, and personal autonomy. Accordingly Shapiro replaces defence mechanisms with self-regulation. The causes are attitudes, thoughts and subjective states, which, though they may be unrecognized, prompt characteristic behaviour for the individual in forestalling and dispelling anxiety, and in turn determining what evokes anxiety and what must be defended against. In other words the 'consciousness-restricting functions of defense are performed by the workings of the mind that organize and give shape to consciousness in general' (p. 31).

> Affinities with hypnosis can be discerned where through self-deception objective awareness is lost sight of, and critical thinking may be suspended, and even disabled, or inhibited by coercive techniques.

In section 2, 'Psychopathology, agency and volition', his key concept for the dynamics of character – volition and its abridgement – is related to various psychopathologies: at one extreme passive-reactive, including hysterical and psychopathic impulsive conditions; at the other extreme rigidity, as in obsessive-compulsive and paranoid conditions. While this is done without reference to models in cognitive neuroscience, there is a counterpart in, say, the executive control systems and contention scheduling of Norman and Shallice (1980). Consider the following quote from *Dynamics of Character* (p. 52).

> A hierarchy of self-direction has developed in which various kinds of spontaneous reactiveness and habitual or rule-directed action, requiring little or no reflection and often less than full attention, and accompanied by a diminished sense of agency, are permitted.

This hierarchy is responsible for the diversity of characteristic behavioural styles within an individual. The concept of repression is replaced by hypertrophy in the course of development. These typify adult adaptations of anxiety-forestalling prevolitional modes which give rise to the expression of symptoms with different degrees of diminished agency or reactive immediacy. Section 2 concludes by advancing the case that

hypomania (and depression) are more than mood disorders and have ideational content interpreted as anxiety forestalling, defensive attitudes.

In section 3, 'Neurosis and psychosis', Shapiro turns his thoughts to schizophrenia, and introduces his thesis that the conventional criterion for the differential diagnosis of psychosis from neurosis, which is the loss of contact with reality, is just as true of neurosis, but to an attenuated degree.

> All of the anxiety-forestalling restrictions of motivational and emotional experiences that we see in neurotic conditions are accompanied by restrictions and distortions of the relationship with external reality. These include general and systematic distortions of cognition and judgment. (p.110)

Shapiro invites a fascinating journey, and I will not spoil the reader's education by disclosing his thesis in detail. Anyone involved in clinical hypnosis will draw inspiration from this book, even though hypnosis is only mentioned in a footnote. Furthermore, by acting upon the self-regulatory mechanisms that are dysfunctional in the psychopathology of character, perhaps hypnosis offers unique opportunities to carefully adjust and retune dysfunctional behaviour. Scholars of the experimental examination of hypnosis will have a déjà vu as their neurocognitive models slot neatly into psychodynamic thinking. As will schizophrenia researchers. They will in addition find a rich tapestry of clinical observation and theory building, perhaps last experienced in college days when encountering the pioneering descriptive accounts of Kraepelin (1886) and Bleuler (1950). There is much food for thought with which to broaden perspectives, and perhaps redirect and enrich neurobiological thinking. *Dynamics of Character* is a tour de force of insight and innovation.

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