

HANS EYSENCK: AN ASSESSMENT

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Hans Eysenck is one of those few professors to venture from the insular world of academia into public controversy. Indeed, Eysenck at times seems to revel in the role of devil's advocate. For a long time he has written books which popularise his own brand of psychology. The main reason why he has become a controversial figure is that he is never reticent about stating his own political opinions in these books. He achieved infamy among the left for supporting the position that blacks have a genetically transmitted intelligence handicap.

While the left are busy exorcising right-wing Satanic forces, his real politics often go unseen. For his sins on race Eysenck has been condemned as "right wing". In fact, there are two fundamental paradigms in his psychology. One of these is hereditarianism, a theory that differences of intelligence are to a large extent inborn, and it is this that has given Eysenck his political pigeonhole. But the more radical side of Eysenck's politics is taken from the other fundamental, which is behaviourism. In

this sphere, some of his conclusions would more commonly be described as "left wing" — such as his view that criminals are not responsible for their actions. To be objective, the conclusions which Eysenck draws from his hereditarianism are relatively mild and cautious, whereas his mode of behaviouristic politics is ill-considered and objectionable.

HEREDITARIANISM: CLASS AND RACE

Hereditarianism is the theory that different amounts of intelligence are a biological inheritance from the genetic combinations of parents. Evidence cited to support this theory comes from studies of twins. Twins are either monozygotic (or MZ: twins originating from the same fertilised zygote, in other words, identical twins), or dizygotic (DZ, or non-identical twins). If heredity is of no importance in determining intelligence then there would be no systematic difference in the similarities of intelligence between MZ and DZ twins. In fact, Eysenck argues, MZ twins show much greater similarity in their intelligence, indicating the importance of inherited genes. Studies have also been made of MZ twins raised separately; if heredity was not important then there would be very little relationship between their intelligence levels; Eysenck claims that identical twins raised separately exhibit very similar levels of intelligence. Other evidence comes from orphan studies, where adopted children were found to be much closer in intelligence to their natural parents than to their adopted parents. From all this the conclusion is that 80% of the variation of intelligence between individuals is explained by heredity, or in other terms (taking the square root of this figure) heredity, as an explanatory factor, is twice as important as environment.

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FOR LIFE, LIBERTY AND PROPERTY

This theory of psychology can rise or fall on its own merits. Those who believe in it are not concurrently committed to any political standpoint: Eysenck likes to relate the example of J. B. S. Haldane, who propounded all this, and yet endorsed a brand of leftist politics rarely associated with this psychology. Personally, I have not taken the trouble to make up my mind in this debate *because I do not think it is decisively important*. It is a recurrent mistake or trick slipped in by Eysenck to imply that his own conclusions must necessarily follow.

If there is this inbuilt difference between intelligences, and if intelligence is a major determinant of achievement, then a class-based society is inevitable and functional: this is the basis of Eysenck's theory of class. He quotes evidence to show that movements in and out of social classes are significantly dependent upon intelligence. Regard this evidence with circumspection, for it is drawn largely from the dubious evidence provided by Cyril Burt, and Eysenck is rather impatient to dismiss other explanations. However, there is in any case another factor at work which dilutes the rationale. Over time, apparently there is a regression to the mean as offspring are less intelligent than their highly intelligent parents, or more intelligent than their very dull parents, and so on. Regression means that in six or eight generations the influence of the original genetic forebear is wiped out. So, there will be a continual change in the composition of intelligence classes, and at any one time there will be many people, in the process of regression, who are in a higher or lower class than they should be. A justification of a class-based society is never likely to be popular with socialists, particularly when the author explicitly condemns socialist equality as an impossibility. But what precisely does Eysenck conclude? Although he says that some class differences are inevitable he does not think that they all are, and he seems to look favourably upon a society with more opportunity for class mobility. This is one instance where Eysenck seems to have decided to be unprovocative and reasonable.

Now to the issue which made Eysenck an academic outlaw — differences of intelligence between races. What Eysenck argued was that there is a difference between blacks and whites of fifteen IQ points (as well as differences with other racial and cultural groups, such as high intelligence displayed by Jews), which is attributable to genetic acquisition.¹ Please note that Eysenck stressed that these differences are group averages, they do not demonstrate that the intelligence of any one individual is higher or lower than other individuals from other racial groups. Note also that he does not attempt to assign status to individuals by the criterion of their race:

... equality of opportunity, and equality as a citizen, are not dependent on identity of genetic endowment; these are human rights, of universal validity, which are independent of biological and other scientific findings.²

Eysenck is not a "racist". The evidence should stand or fall on its merits, and is not an attempt to denigrate

blacks. Some have taken the position that, whatever the evidence, the truth should be suppressed, in case it gives intellectual ammunition to race-haters, like the earlier Eugenicists. Probably more significant is the indignation aroused by Eysenck's comments on education policy. Eysenck was very critical of the policy which placed unintelligent blacks in school classes with more intelligent white children. This, he said, would help no-one because the black children would be unable to understand the lessons, and so would become restless and disruptive, so that non-one would learn. Experience has proved him right, but at the time he threatened a sacred dogma. Notice that the criticisms did not rest upon any assumption about intelligence heredity; a thoroughgoing environmentalist could have made exactly the same point.

The debate about heredity/environment hinges upon the interpretation of what is fairly ambiguous evidence.³ If one conclusion can be drawn, it is that the debate is not as vital as those who have felt compelled to take sides have supposed. My suspicion is that Eysenck exaggerates and misleads. I say this because he certainly does exaggerate and mislead in the evidence he presents on crime and personality — more on this below. Thomas Sowell reveals that racial intelligence differences are at least partially determined by economic position, because as groups progress their average IQ scores rise as well:

Jewish soldiers in the U.S. army during World War I scored so low on mental tests that a leading authority considered this evidence to "disprove the popular belief that the Jew is highly intelligent". But just as Jews rose spectacularly in the economic sphere so did their mental test scores, which now exceed the U. S. national average.⁴

To reiterate, Eysenck's deductions do not condemn classes and races to inferiority. The claim that intelligence variations are acquired genetically is open to debate, but it is mistaken to think that this debate is important in determining what rights and opportunities there should be. Eysenck is quite specific in advocating attempts to correct intelligence deficiencies. Anyone who challenges the Marxist line on race is abused as a nazi — Eysenck is a victim of this slander.

BEHAVIOURISM: POLITICS AND CRIME

Behaviourism is the attempt to explain all human conduct within a framework of stimulus-response. The process by which conduct is determined is known as conditioning. The most famous demonstration of conditioning was the Pavlov experiment: for many days a pack of dogs were given food after hearing the sound of a ringing bell. One day the bell was rung with no feeding, and the dogs were observed to salivate, as if they had been given food. Another well-known case is the "Little Albert" experiment. Albert, a child of eleven months, was subjected to the presence of rats, at the same time that a loud noise was made. After this was repeated several times, Albert became upset when the noise was made, even with no rats present. Behaviour-

ists see behaviour as conditioned in the same way: a repeated association of a factor with an unpleasant sensation makes that factor a stimulus to be avoided. The opposite applies to stimuli which are associated with pleasant sensations.

A rat in a box which receives food when it presses a red lever and an electric shock when it presses a blue lever will very soon press the one and avoid the other. Similarly, voters who receive benefits from one government and have their status position lowered by another government will very soon learn to vote in accordance with their own interests.⁵

It is perfectly obvious that people will often support political parties which advance their selfish interests. But it is quite unnecessary to import behaviourist method to explain this. People are selfish, but they are often consciously selfish rather than mechanically selfish. In fact, it is quite impossible for behaviourism to incorporate voting behaviour. What people vote for is expected monetary benefit, which has no direct sensory influence (money itself is a concept, and concepts are given no quarter in behaviourism). There is no such thing as solidly tangible self-interest; it is all a question of interpretation. I might, for example, support more immigration, on the grounds that it will be an economic benefit; or I might oppose immigration because I think it will jeopardise my job. The position which I take in such a debate will depend upon how I anticipate the likely effects of different governments; it will rest upon my own set of beliefs about the way the world works. Also, what different people perceive as a benefit is subjective: some people will regard the Falklands War as beneficial, even though there is no monetary benefit.

Hans Eysenck's theory of criminal behaviour is based on two propositions:

1. That conscience is a conditioned reflex. Certain actions are inhibited due to the conditioning effect of punishment. Punishment instils moral standards which associate "wrong" actions with painful sensation.
2. There are individual biological differences which determine susceptibility to conditioning. Where individuals are relatively introverted or extraverted, extraverts are more resistant to conditioning, and so are more likely to stray into immoral activity.

If there is this set group of people with the criminal tendency, then, Eysenck reasons, it will be the same people who perpetrate all crimes, i.e. speeding motorists are also more likely to be bank robbers. He sets out to prove this with evidence from the criminal records of driving offenders, with the aim of disproving the popular belief that:

Most road offenders are ... otherwise respectable citizens who may have been victims of accidents, momentary carelessness, or simply bad luck ... One type of crime, that of the road offender, is specific and in no way related to another type of crime, that of the habitual criminal.⁶

He quotes evidence from 653 cases of causing death, reckless driving, driving under the influence of alcohol, driving while disqualified, and failure to stop after an accident. Over a fifth of these transgressors were found to have criminal records for non-motoring offences. This appears to be convincing, but look again for the sleight-of-hand. When people think of driving offenses as being the result of bad luck, they have in mind parking tickets, not running down pedestrians. There are no minor offences in Eysenck's statistics. For the separate offences, the proportions with criminal records vary widely, with, for example, 9.4% of those who failed to stop after an accident (the figure for the whole national population is 10%), and the exceptionally high figures, causing death and driving while disqualified, bias the average upwards: if these two statistics are omitted then the total proportion falls to 16%, not remarkably higher than the figure one would get from a random sample of the population.

More generally, the whole idea of a separate "criminal class" is difficult to sustain. Most people violate the law in a small way — by dropping litter, gambling in private card games, drinking in a pub after hours, making private telephone calls from work. If all these offences are to be included, then a very large number of people have a 'psychotic, neurotic, ruthless and aggressive' predisposition, and the criminal class is very large.

Unless there was a sudden change in the genetic composition of the population, then heredity does not explain rises and falls in the amount of criminal activity. Instead, Eysenck looks to conditioning. He attributes rising crime rates to stimuli which breach moral standards by forming pleasurable associations with aggressive action. Violence and sex on television are made more acceptable, Eysenck argues, because they are viewed in surroundings of comfort. It acts as a form of deconditioning to dissolve the barriers made by a conditioned conscience. On this question, Eysenck uses the same apocalyptic language as the blue-rinse school of Tories:

If I were asked by some Martian invader how one could best destroy the human race without overt show of arms, I would have to say that the destruction of the moral and ethical standards which alone maintain a society would be the best method, and in order to achieve this aim I would have to say that the unrestrained and continued showing of violence on television and film screens throughout the country, day in and day out, was by far the cheapest way.⁷

To encourage civilised behaviour, remove the negative stimulus — censor the media. For those who have already transgressed, pain and pleasure treatment must be used to erect a conditioned conscience. What he has in mind here is a token economy within the prison, of the sort practised by Alexander Maconochie on Norfolk Island. Prisoners are given tokens for good behaviour and hard work, and in this way they are conditioned into the contingencies of co-operative living. In this, as in every-

thing, Eysenck is an unashamed determinist: criminals have no choice, buffeted by nature and nurture.⁸

Removing the conscious mind from decisions leads Eysenck to futility. He would have us believe that law-abiders learn their good behaviour from an ongoing procedure of naughty naughty — slapped wrist, good boy — gold star. Given that for most crimes the chances of receiving punishment are small, it is perhaps surprising that so many people do stay within the bounds of legality. It would be interesting to pin Eysenck down on whether behaviour is conditioned only by material stimuli, or by less tangible influences as well, like moods and sentiments (strictly behaviourism can only admit the former). Often he assumes that only physical influences are important, as when he likens voting behaviour to feeding rats: man becomes a kind of human amoeba, blindly stumbling around looking for morsels of food and shying away from fires and sharp objects. If this is the way people carry on, then it is remarkable that people respect laws where there is no physical punishment for breaking them. On the contrary, prisons provide food and shelter for no work — there should be queues of human amoebas waiting to get in!

Crimes motivated by profit are one clear piece of evidence against Eysenck. In the case of some property crime the ill-gotten winnings exceed the possible cost of incarceration.⁹ The decision to be a criminal is consciously rational. The profit-making criminal will not be reformed by a token prison economy, nor by the most rigorous attempts at conditioning, so long as the real-world incentives remain unchanged. This is one illustration of the *conscious* criminal act.

When it comes to sex and violence in the media, Eysenck is at his worst, hiding ambiguous evidence and unsubstantiated opinions with the respectability of scientific wordage. He is candid in admitting that in countries where commercial sex has been tolerated there has been no collapse into iniquity. At the same time he is willing to rely upon the evidence of artificial reconstructions.

Experiments usually take the form of showing to children a scene of violence, and then observing them to look for any imitative behaviour. In a well-known study children were shown a life-size clown being attacked by a man; when these same children were left alone with a man dressed as a clown they were violent towards him. The defects in all experiments of this kind is that they remove the very controls which in normal circumstances would inhibit violence. Parents would normally admonish a child who abused toys or assaulted other children. Other tests have revealed contrary evidence. The evidence is at best ambiguous, and Eysenck is dishonest in drawing unequivocal conclusions.

Eysenck's ploy is to present evidence shrouded in academic language which he then states to be "scientific". He follows this with his own opinion. He makes the pretence that his opinion is in some way objective and scientific, and that it is the only opinion which can be drawn from the evidence.

It would not be at all inconsistent to accept that TV violence conduces real violence, and yet reject censorship. People should be punished for what they do, rather than for what they might do. Hence, it would be completely unjust to punish someone who has watched a violent film because they might then become violent. Eysenck is too hasty to call in the state.

Although Eysenck has suffered from being defamed by the left, it has given him public prominence and an audience for his opinions. As a social thinker he is provocative rather than profound, and may have been destined for obscurity without the vilification he has attracted. Critics have always been on a false scent in looking for racist sentiment behind the intellectual frontage. More invidious is his effort to detach the conscious mind from human action. People are not borne along helplessly by the pressures of their environment, and their real free-willed behaviour can never be encompassed by a theory which presumes that they are.

NOTES

1. H. J. Eysenck, *Race, Education and Intelligence*, Maurice Temple Smith, London, 1971.
2. H. J. Eysenck, *The Inequality of Man*, Maurice Temple Smith, London, 1973, p. 22.
3. For some arguments on both sides of the debate see *Intelligence: The Battle For The Mind, H. J. Eysenck versus Leon Kamin*, Pan Books, London, 1981.
4. Thomas Sowell, *The Economics and Politics of Race*, William Morrow and Co., New York, 1983, p. 146.
5. H. J. Eysenck, *Sense and Nonsense in Psychology*, Pelican, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1968, p. 274.
6. H. J. Eysenck, *Crime and Personality*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1964, p. 275.
7. H. J. Eysenck, *Psychology Is About People*, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972, p. 264.
8. "In every person's life it is his heredity and the environmental influences which have been brought to bear upon him that determine his conduct. He is not responsible for the one nor for the other. In what sense, then, can we say that a person is responsible for the actions which he undertakes?" *Crime and Personality*, p. 176.
9. See Gregory Krohm, 'The Pecuniary Incentives of Property Crime' in S. Rottenberg (ed.) *The Economics of Crime and Punishment*, American Enterprise Institute, New York, 1979.