

Book Reviews

STUDENTS AT RISK

Student Casualties

By Anthony Ryle. Pp. 152. (Allen Lane (Penguin Press): London, September 1969.) 30s.

At a time when problems of student malaise and failures of communication in our growing universities are matters for continuing concern, Dr Ryle's account of student casualties is most opportune.

As the director of the Sussex University Health Service, he has specialized in the understanding and care of the student who is failing to cope with the demands of university life and in this book he gives a lucid account of student mental health problems. In doing so, he has added to our understanding of academic failures, under-achievers and drop-outs, while recognizing how little firm knowledge we have as yet in this field. Considering the cost to the community and in personal disappointment which is implicit in a wastage rate from higher education that can be as much as one in six, the importance of continuing this research can hardly be exaggerated. The high incidence of minor emotional illness, which he says is twice as common in women as in men, is not peculiar to Sussex. In a paper not yet published, Dr C. Davies followed, for 3 years, the 1,516 students entering the University of Sheffield in 1965 and found an overall psychiatric morbidity of 27 per cent with an incidence of 21.9 per cent in males and 40 per cent in females.

The problems of transition from school to university are well discussed in relation to genetic factors, family background and other cultural influences, as well as to the neurotic problems that arise if normal adolescent development is blocked. The main thesis of the book is that this blocked development leaves the individual with false assumptions about himself and other people, and that it is only by the painful interaction with others who refuse to collude with his cramped construction of the world that the individual can complete his development. This may require the skills of the psychotherapist but can occur "spontaneously" in a favourable milieu. A high rate of personal breakdown and of academic failure suggests that there is something wrong with the practices of the university.

Ryle notes that students on career-oriented courses are less likely to suffer psychiatric disturbance than those on courses that do not lead directly to a clearly defined job after graduation. Career-oriented courses tend to attract students who accept society as it is and seek primarily to qualify for a place in it; they are taught by staff who share this view, and for both the goals are clear. For them, "finals" are likely to be the gateway to a wider world and not the voice of doom as it is for many who have come questing, been taught to question and seek in doubt to qualify for they know not what.

Experience at other universities confirms Ryle's view that special arrangements to permit vulnerable students to sit important examinations under sheltered conditions do not lead to abuse. It may be a better way to humanize the examination system than "continuous assessment", which can too readily create the emotional pressure of a continuous examination for the anxiety-prone student.

On sexual conduct and student pregnancies, Ryle suggests that peer-group pressure is the chief determinant of student attitudes and behaviour, and that the university's only direct function is to ensure that students have access to tutors, doctors, chaplains and others from whom they can draw on adult experience in making up their own minds on these matters. On the difficult question of the illegal use of drugs, he favours civil action through the police and the courts rather than action through the university's own internal disciplinary machinery.

With the present shortage of psychiatrists, especially psychotherapists, few student health services can carry out the thorough psychometric assessment of all students that is carried out at Sussex, but all can benefit from the results of this intensive study and apply it in some measure in their own universities, though many will feel that psychotherapy can safely remain only a small part of total patient care.

This book is clearly written, free from jargon, and can be warmly recommended to all who work with students and with school sixth forms—and not least to students themselves.

P. W. W. GIFFORD

PEOPLE ON THE GO

Human Motivation

By M. D. Vernon. Pp. viii + 190. (Cambridge University Press: London, September 1969.) Cloth 45s (\$7.50); paper 13s.

AFTER a fruitful career spent in the translucent waters of visual perception, Professor Vernon has boldly ventured into the murky depths of human motivation, but not without some trepidation. She justifies her entry into an unfamiliar zone on the ground that psychologists, undeterred by difficulties, have a social obligation to try to understand human motives.

She brings to this book, an introductory text, her capacity for clear and meticulous description and exposition, and the pages are closely packed and conscientiously well documented. It is not her fault if much of the literature she has to rely on is woolly, and some of it hardly more than jargon masquerading as science.

Motivation is described as "a kind of internal force which arouses, regulates and sustains all our more important actions". This suggests that our less important actions are unmotivated, which is a little puzzling. The nature of the "internal force" is undefined, but we are told (page 129) that there are types of motivation, such as pleasure and variety, social conformity and self-display, although the precise relation between the "internal force" and the "types" is left in the dark.

The author roams widely in her quest, and takes in the development of motivation, biological needs, emergency reactions, emotions, activation and exploration, social behaviour, frustration and individual differences. In a brief appendix, she touches on methods of assessing motivation, but she does not seem to think these very satisfactory.

The importance she attaches to motivation will readily be endorsed by the plain man who looks to psychology chiefly for an answer to what makes people tick. This is a crucial question whether in reference to familiar activities or to the more exotic actions of the politician, tycoon, mountaineer, gambler or suicide. The implied model of the plain man is that of an internal clock-like mechanism which only needs to be located for the riddle to be solved. But are we really much wiser if we think, instead, in terms of an "internal force"?

Critical as she undoubtedly is from time to time, Professor Vernon is perhaps a little too gentle for the harsh world of facts and values. In particular she is too tender with the literature on so-called "achievement