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A Textbook on Mental Health: Foundation of Human Behavior

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A TEXTBOOK ON MENTAL HEALTH

FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN BEHAVIOR. By Louis Kaplan. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965. xii, 368 pp.

This is a typical textbook on mental health, written by an educator for undergraduates. There is little that is extraordinary about it and its main function will probably be as an outline or syllabus to be followed by the college teacher of an average freshman class.

The author makes an interesting distinction between adaptive and adjustive behavior. Adaptive behavior leads to the immediate reduction of tension. Whether it is also adjustive depends upon whether this relief facilitates or impedes future adjustment. Thus the tense student may find tennis adaptive insofar as it releases tension but it may be maladjustive if a continued habit of escape prevents the student from facing up to his problems.

While such a distinction incorporates well the clinical view that all behavior, even the neurotic and psychotic, is adaptive, nevertheless even the author's concept of "adjustment" does not seem to be adequate to explain the more recent views on mental health. Recent psychotherapeutic theories, under the influence of existentialism, place much more emphasis than the author on the importance of finding "meaning" in life, a concept which is more positive than that of adjustment.

To find life's meaning implies the discovery of a value large enough to encompass the whole of life itself. It gives direction to life, whereas adjustment seems to be nothing but "permanent solutions to permanent problems," or in other words no solution at all.

The book presents the interrelationships among physiological, psychological and social processes that enter into adjustment. Proper emphasis is given to the self concept and the way it enters into maladjustment. The book ends with a summary of mental hygiene activity in the U.S.

Philippine users of the book will have to be on the alert against directly applying what they read to the Philippine scene. Most of the conclusions from research findings cited in the book were drawn from the American milieu and need not necessarily apply in another culture. Nevertheless, since the book gives many references the student is able to look up the original bits of research and make his own interpretations and applications. Cultural differences can provide materials for discussions.