

# HEREDITY, ENVIRONMENT AND EVIDENCE: AN EXCHANGE BETWEEN HANS EYSENCK AND NICK ELLIOTT

Following the publication by the Libertarian Alliance of *Hans Eysenck: An Assessment*, by Nick Elliott (Psychological Notes No. 1), we are delighted to publish Professor Eysenck's rejoinder to Elliott's criticisms of his work, together with Elliott's response.



## HANS EYSENCK: REPLY TO NICK ELLIOTT

It is difficult to reply to *Hans Eysenck: An Assessment* by Nick Elliott, because it is clearly written by someone who is unfamiliar with the evidence, the present position, and is quite willing to make wildly erroneous statements. To imagine that the view that intelligence is largely determined by genetic factors, and in turn, influences very powerfully educational achievement and social position, is in any way due to me or associated with me is manifestly absurd. It was already firmly established before I came into psychology; I have never done any active research in this field, and a recent survey by the American Psychological Association among educational and genetic experts revealed that there was practically unanimity on all these points. To call the matter "controversial" is now quite meaningless.

Mr. Elliott states that the evidence to show that movements in and out of social classes are significantly dependent upon intelligence is "drawn largely from the dubious evidence provided by Cyril Burt"; this is quite untrue. Burt has provided no evidence on this point, which comes exclusively from other sources. Elliott suggests that regression to the mean may be responsible, but this is nonsensical as we are dealing with the bright and dull offspring of one set of parents, and their respective fates; regression is irrelevant. How

can one argue with, or take seriously someone who makes such elementary mistakes?

When Elliott concludes that "The debate about heredity/environment hinges upon the interpretation of what is fairly ambiguous evidence", he is simply contradicting the usual verdict of experts on behavioural genetics and education.

He is no more aware of the present situation when he discusses behaviourism as "the attempt to explain all human conduct within a framework of stimulus-response". Modern learning theory and modern versions of behaviourism are almost exclusively concerned with S-S types of conditioning, i.e. cognitively mediated associations between stimuli; very few present behaviourists attempt to do what Elliott says they do.

Elliott's account becomes positively comical when he suggests that I advocate the idea of a separate "criminal class". My whole theoretical development has been based on the well-known threshold model, which postulates a graded continuum from completely non-criminal and altruistic to completely criminal and anti-social, with any given type of criminality arising after a certain threshold has been reached on this continuum. I believe no more than he does in a separate "criminal class".

Elliott is equally inaccurate when he discusses my views on sex, violence and the media (without even mentioning the book I wrote with David Nias on the topic!). The evidence, to any fair-minded reviewer, is conclusive; I doubt if Elliott has read all the hundreds of articles and books which have been written on the topic, as we did, before coming to a conclusion. If he had read our book, he would see that he is quite wrong in suggesting that I advocate censorship; I would only invoke it as a last resort. And he does not even mention the true reason for that. We do not permit speech or writing calling for or encouraging aggressive behaviour against minorities, like Jews or Blacks; sadistic or pornographic videos, books and films degrade women and encourage rape and other forms of aggression and cruelty towards them. I cannot see why we should forbid the one and permit the other.

The picture Elliott conjures up of my views, and their position within psychology, is entirely idiosyncratic and bears little relation to reality. He may be right in saying that as a social thinker I am provocative rather than profound, and may have been destined for obscurity without the vilification I have attracted. Perhaps the future will tell whether he is right in this or not.

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## NICK ELLIOTT: REPLY TO HANS EYSENCK

To take the points in order:

1. I mention Cyril Burt only because Eysenck relies heavily on his evidence for his argument in *The Inequality of Man*. To quote the author:

The long-continued studies of Burt have been particularly valuable in throwing light on the relation between IQ and social class. I shall draw rather heavily on his work ...<sup>1</sup>

Eysenck himself has since described Burt as a “con-man”. In subsequent studies Eysenck has invoked other studies for which far less ambitious claims can be made.

2. “Very few behaviourists attempt to do what Elliott says they do.”

My presentation of behaviourism was based on what Eysenck attempts to do, which is to draw facile comparisons between conditioning rats human voting behaviour.

3. Eysenck protests that he does not believe in a criminal class. Having read thoroughly his work on criminality, it seems to me that what he is suggesting is a criminal class, even if not by name. What he says is that the same people who commit minor crimes, like motoring offences, also tend to commit serious crimes. In other words, criminal activity is confined to one part of the population. This sounds to me very much like a criminal class.

Call it whatever you will, I still take issue with it. I do not believe that the same people that get parking tickets also tend to be murderers. The evidence which Eysenck provides is entirely misleading: I would be happy to write a separate paper to demonstrate this.

4. I read *Sex, Violence and the Media* by Eysenck and Nias several years ago. The authors write in the final chapter:

... censorship already exists, to some extent, but it needs to be strengthened ...<sup>2</sup>

How can Eysenck claim not to believe in censorship? By inviting me to look at this book was he posing a bluff that I was expected not to call?

I doubt if Elliott has read all the hundreds of articles and books which I have written on the topic, as we did, before coming to a conclusion.

That is quite true, although I have read quite a few of them. It is no good, however, to hid behind a pile of books. I have read lots of books on Marxism, many of which are convincing were it not for the intrusion of the real world. Most of the studies on sex and vi-

olence that I have looked at involve taking away the very social restraints which in normal circumstances would inhibit people from being anti-social. The world is not as simple as Eysenck would have it, when he attempts to derive solutions as an “objective scientist”.

Eysenck may have read hundreds of books and articles about pornography, but he seems completely ignorant of what pornography consists of. According to Eysenck, “many if not most” pornographic films

Even when they do not overtly depict scenes of violence and degradation of women at the hands of men, such as rape, beatings, and subordination, the tone is consistently anti-feminist, with women only serving to act as sexual slaves to men, being made use of, and ultimately being deprived of their right to a sexual climax - in the majority of such films, the portrayal ends with the men spraying their semen over the faces and breasts of the women.<sup>3</sup>

This idea of porn is completely fanciful. Films of this nature are already illegal in Britain. I can only think that a large proportion of the books and articles which Eysenck has read were written by radical feminists, and that he has taken their imaginative depictions at face value.

Britain has the strictest censorship laws in Europe, added to in recent years by a law banning the sale of “video nasties” and by government pressure on broadcasters. And yet, the two classes of crime which have risen most are crimes of violence and sex crimes. No evidence can be drawn from this to support the case for censorship.

### NOTES

1. H. J. Eysenck, *The Inequality of Man*, Temple Smith, London, 1973, p. 137.
2. H. J. Eysenck and D. K. Nias, *Sex, Violence and the Media*, Temple Smith, London, 1978, p. 255.
3. *Ibid*, p. 258-259.