

THE MANIPULATED MIND
Brainwashing, Conditioning and Indoctrination

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**Brainwashing,
Conditioning and Indoctrination**

Denise Winn



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PREFACE

The Manipulated Mind was written in the very early 1980s. The world is a changed place since then, and yet the findings presented in this book appear to apply just as much today as they did when it was written. Of course, there would have been additions if the book had been written now. There would be more research findings from psychology to enforce the ideas expressed here about influencing feelings, behaviour and attitudes. Questioning of assumptions (see Chapter 3) is a large part of what cognitive behavioural therapy is all about – a therapy which really blossomed in the 1990s and which challenges clients to look for evidence for unhelpful beliefs they hold about themselves. The current focus on fostering good parenting skills is a means of challenging old assumptions about childrearing.

Since the book was written, more cults have arisen and more have hit the headlines for disastrous reasons: Jonestown and Waco are two such disasters that leap to mind. More miscarriages of justice have come to light, because of which innocent people have spent years in prisons for crimes they never committed but felt compelled to confess to. The explosion in technology means computer game addicts willingly isolate themselves ever further from normal human contact, and the Internet offers an accessible new medium for advertising and influence. There have been more wars and more crushing examples of man's inhumanity to man.

It all adds up to further evidence for the case made in this book that we are often less self directed than we like to think. I believe the original case still holds good, even approaching two decades later.

Denise Winn
May 1999

1 INTRODUCTION

The term brainwashing made its debut in print in an article published by the *Miami News* in September 1950. The author, Edward Hunter, coined the word as a rather down – market translation of the Chinese *hsi-nao*, which meant ‘to cleanse the mind’, and used the article to claim that post-revolution China was using insidious never-before-known psychological techniques to force the Chinese into the Communist party.

He followed this up with other articles and books on the subject and, by the end of the Korean War, it seemed quite clear to the American public at least that American POWs who had collaborated with the enemy had had no choice. They were the innocent victims of a mind control exercise *extraordinaire*, a technique originally developed to persuade the Chinese of the correctness of the Communist line and then applied to enemy captives.

The ‘brainwashing’ concept was let loose on a receptive audience. It was a shock, after all, to find that so many of the American boys captured in Korea wavered rather widely from the national line. The exact number of soldiers who, to some degree, went over to the other side, varied according to the sobriety of different source material. Authors, such as psychologist expert Joost Meerloo, who are fearful of the effects of mass manipulation, cite that of 7190 US prisoners held in China, 70 per cent were swayed by Communist propaganda to make confessions or sign petitions calling for the end of the war – though few ‘remained’ Communist after the war and repatriation. Less dramatic versions of events cite one-third of American POWs taking up the Communist cause. Either way, the figure was high

enough to shock Americans into embracing the brainwashing explanation and to numb them perhaps to the equally glaring fact that few British POWs and few, if any, Turks, who suffered the same treatments, capitulated.

The repatriated American POWs became, quite understandably, a phenomenon fit for study by numerous psychiatrists and psychologists, keen to unravel what, if anything, brainwashing was and, if it wasn't, what *had* led their boys to undergo dramatic reductions in their allegiance to President and country. It has been the role of much later investigators of events to posit the idea that the big brainwashing scare was fostered by the CIA.

Hunter, who introduced the term, was, after all, a CIA employee when he wrote on the subject. Not only was he a journalist but a propaganda specialist and had also served as a 'psychological warfare specialist in the Pentagon', according to Schefflin and Opton, authors of *The Mind Manipulators*, who investigated his biographical data. He set the scene in his first book for conveying the message that the United States was under attack by an enemy using secret mind control tactics and that only through equally covert counter-activities could this threat be removed. It is not, however, the subject of this book to look at the resultant activities of the CIA as they 'investigated' the potential of hypnosis, programming, drugs, etc., to gain control of the mind. The several books which have been published on this theme seem to indicate that the CIA reaped embarrassment rather than enlightenment from its efforts.

It is relevant, however, to consider the origins of the word brainwashing because it is an interesting case of a word being coined to encapsulate a concept (for whatever reasons) and then, instead of the concept being the focus of study, the word itself becoming the target of interest. Many psychological experts and intrepid investigators have looked into the subject. Some have concentrated on proving that brains cannot be washed, end of matter. Others have concluded that brainwashing is a powerful, all-pervasive technique allowing first domination of the individual

and then domination of the world. Joost Meerloo calls it 'political conditioning' and claims:

'Political conditioning should not be confused with training, persuasion, or even indoctrination. It is more than that. It is taming. It is taking possession of both the simplest and the most complicated nervous patterns of man. . . . The totalitarian wants first the required response from the nerve cells, then control of the individual and finally control of the masses.' (From *Mental Seduction and Menticide*.)

And then there is the view, put by Schefflin and Opton, that brainwashing was, and is, an emotional scare word, serving only to prevent our having to face embarrassing or unpalatable truths. It was convenient, for example, to claim that Patty Hearst was brainwashed into taking on the aims of the revolutionary group that kidnapped her in 1974 rather than face the possible fact that even symbols of the success of the American way of life could undergo radical change.

What might now in the eighties seem an academic argument has instead become of new relevant interest, in the light of the recent proliferation of religious cults whose members, many claim, are brainwashed into joining. In March 1981 an English High Court jury decided that the Moonie cult does brainwash people (the word was used), after hearing an action brought by the cult against the *Daily Mail* newspaper which had printed allegations about 'the church that breaks up families'.

The court case has again focused attention on the concept of coercion, unwitting or otherwise, of unsuspecting people. All the old questions have once again been asked. What exactly is brainwashing? Is it possible to force any thinking person to adopt a life-style completely alien to his assumed inclinations? How does brainwashing differ from indoctrination or from the equally insidious influencing effects of advertising or the educational system? Or are they perhaps all the same thing?

Analysis of the concept 'brainwashing' has been made

difficult by the fact that it has never really been accepted as a technical word. The graphic image created by Hunter was perhaps no more than an impressionistic sketch passed down over the years to be embellished or erased according to predilection. For some the picture has very specific component parts, without all of which it could not be seen as a whole; for others it is a blurred canvas and all of human life is hidden there. Such a malleable concept can only arouse fear, contempt or confusion. According to one's definition of the word, one believes in it or one doesn't.

Robert Lifton, who made an intensive study in Hong Kong of a number of Western and Chinese civilians whom the Chinese had tried to convert to Communism after the revolution and published his findings in *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, makes a very valuable point in his introduction:

'Behind this web of semantic (and more than semantic) confusion lies an image of "brainwashing" as an all-powerful, irresistible, unfathomable and magical method of achieving total control over the human mind. It is of course none of these things and this loose usage makes a rallying point for fear, resentment, urges toward submission, justification for failure, irresponsible accusation and for a wide gamut of emotional extremism. One may justly conclude that the term has a far from precise and questionable usefulness; one may even be tempted to forget about the whole subject. . . .

'Yet to do so would be to overlook one of the major problems of our era – that of the psychology and ethics of directed attempts at changing human beings. For despite the vicissitudes of brainwashing, the process which gave rise to the name is very much a reality.'

Several psychological experts who examined the American soldiers who were repatriated from Korea concluded that brainwashing was not a new technique but the clever combination of many, each familiar and comprehensible on its own. This present book, aided by the more recent findings about human behaviour that have emanated from the

field of psychology, aims to look at those processes which, in sum, have variously been described as brainwashing, to see how each, individually, operates to influence us all in our daily lives. How far do indoctrination, conditioning, need for social approval, emotional dependency and much else prevent us from being as 'self-directed' as we like to imagine?

Demystifying brainwashing, the ultimate change process, can perhaps serve to highlight much about the workings of the ordinary human mind. For the factors that can be combined to force such sudden change are perhaps equally responsible, in their various combinations and unconsciously over time, for the formation of our characters in the first place. It may make us question the foundations instead of the facade.

I am grateful to all the authors of the many books on brainwashing, indoctrination and conditioning that are reviewed in the following pages and should like to recommend the reader to the full bibliography at the back of this book, as all make fascinating reading.

2 BRAINWASHING

To isolate the components of the so-called brainwashing process, it is necessary to take a detailed look at what went on in the Chinese prisoner of war camps in Korea. The American soldiers, repatriated in 1953, who had seemingly collaborated with the enemy and adopted a Communist viewpoint albeit briefly, were not the first to focus world attention on the phenomenon of sudden political conversion. Between 1936 and 1938, Stalin's Moscow Show Trials, where top Bolshevik figures publicly confessed to utterly fantastic crimes that they couldn't possibly have committed – and even seemed to have willingly adopted their prosecutors' view of them as scum – caused alarm to ripple far abroad. That staunch revolutionaries could suddenly have been transformed into grovelling repentants was unthinkable. That some insidious process was at work became a reality for the Americans when their own men later succumbed to the Chinese and made equally fantastic confessions, in some cases, that the Americans had been engaged in biological warfare against the Communists. So the experts were called in to try to find explanations.

Their detailed analyses of the characters of the men, the stresses they were obliged to undergo and the tactics used by the Chinese provide the most comprehensive picture of what has been called brainwashing. In later years, claims made in court that individuals such as Patty Hearst or members of cults had been brainwashed have all been based on the findings arising from Korea.

Different experts have placed differing emphases on the events that occurred and have sometimes offered up differing conclusions. It is worth reviewing their evaluations and drawing together all the common threads

Edgar Schein, an MIT psychologist, gathered his data in August 1953 at Inchon, Korea, when the repatriates were being processed, and on board the USNS *General Black*, when the men were *en route* back to the United States during the first two weeks of September. In an article called 'The Chinese indoctrination program for prisoners of war: a study of attempted "brainwashing"', published in *Psychiatry* in 1956, he outlined what had happened to the soldiers in Korea, as told by them to him, and drew his own conclusions. He claimed, as a result of his investigations, that there was nothing new and terrifying about Chinese brainwashing techniques. They had, in effect, combined a number of traditional and well-known ploys to weaken resistance, such as group discussion, self-criticism, interrogation, rewards and punishments, forced confessions, exposure to propaganda and information control. What was new was not the method but the manner of combining, in a systematic fashion, a variety of tried and tested methods.

The following description of events experienced in Korean POW camps is drawn from Schein's published version.

The Chinese attitude to their captives differed even at the outset from that of the North Koreans. Whereas the latter were brutal to their prisoners, took their clothing away, deprived them of regular and sufficient food and meted out heavy punishment or death if a prisoner tried to resist them, the Chinese welcomed captives with warmth, even congratulating them for having been 'liberated'.

Over the next weeks and months, however, the soldiers suffered severe physical and psychological pressures and implicit in most of what the Chinese said or did was the suggestion that these stresses would be removed and life be much happier if they took up a more 'cooperative' attitude to their captors.

The men had to undergo long marches, lasting maybe two weeks, *en route* to the prison camp assigned for them. During the march they received little food and, in the interests of survival, were forced to compete with each other for what scant food, clothing and shelter was on offer

which, Schein says, made it impossible for them to maintain group ties. Throughout, the Chinese raised the men's hopes by promising improvements in conditions (though stays in temporary camps along the way were no improvement whatsoever) and then dashed them by 'explaining' that the UN was being obstructive or that too many prisoners were being uncooperative and therefore all would have to suffer. Propaganda leaflets were distributed and the men were forced to sing Communist songs.

Permanent camp, when it was finally reached, however, forced the men to suffer physical and psychological stresses far beyond what they had so far endured.

(Schein does not here detail the physical tortures imposed on the men but Meerloo lists a number that were included in official American and British reports. These included:

1. Standing to attention or sitting with legs outstretched in complete silence from 4.30 till 11 pm and constantly being woken during the few hours allowed for sleep.

2. Enduring solitary confinement in boxes 5' x 3' x 2'. One soldier was known to have spent six months in such a box.

3. Having liquids withheld for days 'to help self-reflection'.

4. Being bound with a rope, one end of which was passed over a beam and then around the neck, like a hangman's noose, the other around the ankles. The prisoner was then told that if he slipped or bent his knees, he would be committing suicide.

5. Being forced to kneel on jagged rocks, with arms stretched up above the head, holding a large boulder.

6. Being obliged, in one camp, to hold in the mouth a slim piece of wood or metal that a jailer pushed through a hole in the cell door. Suddenly the jailer would knock the outer end of the wood or metal sideways, usually breaking the prisoner's teeth or splitting open his mouth.

7. Being forced to march barefoot on to a frozen river, where water was poured over their feet. Prisoners then

had to stand for hours, frozen to the ice, reflecting on their 'crimes'.)

According to Schein's account the prisoners had to get up at dawn, exercise for an hour and then, after cereal or potato soup for breakfast at 8 am, spend the day at assigned duties or undergoing indoctrination. Whether a midday meal was served or not depended on the prisoner's 'attitude'.

Living groups comprised ten to fifteen people and the Chinese were careful to separate the men by race and rank so as to undermine the established structure of the group, particularly by removal of leaders. Bearing out the insistence from the Chinese that rank was irrelevant, they were all of one brotherhood now, sometimes very young or bumbling prisoners were put in charge of the rest. If any spontaneous semblance of order arose among the men, the Chinese broke up the group.

Personal affiliations and ties were consistently weakened. The men were not allowed any religious expression and often their mail from home was withheld, though the Chinese maintained that no one was writing because no one at home cared what happened to the men.

Throughout, the Chinese were attempting to recruit men to so-called peace committees. Those that joined then had to play a part in the indoctrination by trying to prevent resistance among the other men and to produce propaganda leaflets to aid the cause, but under the guise of camp recreation activities. Awareness that this was going on made such groups as did form among the men weak and unstable because of fears that informers might be in their midst.

Schein divides the Chinese attack on the Americans' beliefs, attitudes and values into two kinds: direct and indirect.

Direct methods included daily lectures two to three hours in length, the content of which was concerned with disparaging the United Nations, and the United States in particular, and praising Communist countries; forcing prisoners to sign peace petitions and confessions; and making radio appeals and speeches calling for peace. Schein notes that

individual confessions regarding the United States' use of germ warfare were particularly damaging to the men who heard them. Whereas most found the lectures naïve and inaccurate, they were more profoundly impressed by explanations of how these bombs had been used by America, put to them by a couple of their own officers who actually travelled from camp to camp for this purpose. Men who had formerly believed the germ warfare accusations to be pure propaganda found themselves questioning their validity after all.

Indirect methods included interrogation on American military techniques which were heavy on psychological pressure. The interrogations might last for whole weeks, with the interrogator actually living with the prisoner and being extremely friendly towards the man. During interrogation, statements made by a prisoner were reviewed repeatedly, in the demand that the prisoner resolve all inconsistencies between early and later versions. When a man refused to answer questions, he might be forced to copy down someone else's answer into a notebook. What might have seemed to the man an ineffectual way of trying to make him change his own opinions to those he was writing was in fact used for a very different purpose: his writings were shown to other prisoners to dupe them into believing that he had voluntarily composed them himself.

All the men were regularly made to 'confess' before each other or to criticise themselves in public if they broke the rules of the camp. (There were very many trivial rules.) Prisoners found this particularly humiliating.

The Chinese made the most of the effects that the use of rewards can bring. Prisoners who cooperated were offered special favours, food, clothing. Others were tantalised to cooperate by promises of repatriation. The men were also so starved of contact with their families that they would willingly incorporate propaganda peace appeals into their letters home, as they were an insurance that the letters would be sent. Some made propaganda broadcasts purely as a way of letting their relatives know they were alive.

Whatever the motive, the effect was that other prisoners suspected they had fully cooperated with the enemy and became mistrustful. So many who lost the friendship of the group continued to cooperate for real.

Schein saw the Chinese tactics as working, in so far as they did, because of the following reasons.

The soldiers first had to contend with immense and debilitating physical privations. In this weakened state, they had to cope with the severe psychological pressure of fear that they would never be repatriated at all or that they would die or suffer terrible reprisals. They were also in a position where their normal beliefs, values and attitudes were consistently being undermined by their captors, thus preventing their maintaining a strong and constant sense of self. The confusion induced could in no way be alleviated by validating themselves against their peers, as group ties were systematically destroyed. Each man was alone to question his role in life. Mutual distrust, fostered by the known existence of informers and the feared existence of informers where perhaps there were none, could only confirm each man in his isolation. The confusion, if it became insupportable, could be alleviated in one sure way: collaboration with the Communists. For that was the only 'certainty' on offer.

The Chinese, for their part, consolidated their gains by other specific psychological tactics. They used repetition to break a man down, making their demands and accusations over and over again until, worn out, prisoners gave in. They operated a careful pacing of demands, starting with trivial requests and gradually working up to the highest demands. They forced the prisoner to participate in his own conversion. Listening quietly to lectures was never enough, the man had to make responses, verbally or in writing. Finally, by couching their indoctrination in the guise of a plea for peace, the Chinese were able to appeal to the all too worn down and war weary soldier.

Schein's view was that no one stress is entirely responsible or overly responsible for the breakdown that can lead

to so-called brainwashing. Drs Lawrence Hinkle Jr and Harold Wolff have asserted, however, that the Chinese made a concerted effort to produce particular emotions in a particular order, which then led to capitulation and collapse. They listed them in an article in the *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* in September 1957. The emotions to be aroused were: anxiety; suspense; awareness of being avoided; feelings of unfocused guilt; fear and uncertainty; bewilderment; increasing depression; fatigue; despair; great need to talk; utter dependence on anyone who befriends; great need of approval of interrogator; and increased suggestibility. This all culminated in confession, rationalisation of confession and final profound relief.

The US Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry in 1956 held two symposia on forced indoctrination, to which Dr Wolff presented research. He outlined eight of the Communists' methods for achieving the above ends. The description here is based on that in Peter Watson's excellent book, *War on the Mind*.

1. The Chinese enforced trivial demands, such as the keeping of insignificant rules or forced writing, to accustom the prisoners to being compliant.

2. They took pains to show the prisoners that they were in total control of the latter's fate, pretended to take cooperation for granted and tantalised them with possible favours. From this prisoners learned the uselessness of trying

3. Occasionally the Chinese would offer favours when they could least be predicted, rewarded any show of cooperation, promised better conditions or demonstrated unexpected kindness, all of which served to give the men motivation to comply and to prevent them from adjusting to deprivation.

4. Threats of torture, death, no return home, isolation, interminable interrogation or threats against family and friends served to deepen the men's fears, anxiety and despair.

5. Degradation, such as the prevention of personal hygiene, humiliations, punishments, insults, foul living con-

ditions and no privacy had the effect of making continued resistance seem pointless and counter-productive. Forced to be concerned only with the most basic of values, it seemed that compliance could not but help raise self-esteem.

6. By forcing the men to be in darkness or bright light, in an unstimulating environment without the diversion of varied food or books or freedom of movement, the Chinese could force the men to dwell on their captivity, with the resultant confusion arising from excessive introspection.

7. Complete or semi-physical isolation served the same ends, as well as depriving the victim of any social support other than that of his jailer, on whom he became increasingly dependent.

8. Physical pressures, such as semi-starvation, induced illness, sleep deprivation, prolonged periods of standing or interrogation and constant tension, all worked on the men until they were mentally too weakened to resist.

In an article published in *The Manipulation of Human Behaviour*, edited by Biderman and Zimmer, Hinkle explained why and how the physical stresses took their particular mental toll.

The brain's 'internal milieu', he wrote, contains a number of organic and inorganic substances in solution; disturbances in the levels of these can adversely affect the way the brain functions. Not only may the brain itself be directly affected by these fluctuations but it may also be indirectly affected when fluctuations impair other vital organs. The kinds of common conditions which may cause disturbances include sweating, water deprivation, salt deficiency, excessive water or salt, vomiting, diarrhoea and burns. Some people when extremely anxious start breathing too rapidly and this can cause chemical changes in the blood which in turn can affect the brain.

Because the brain can only use carbohydrates for energy, not fat and proteins as can other organs, it is very quickly affected by any drop in sugar levels in the blood – sometimes again caused by over-anxiety. A deficiency of B vitamins in

the diet can directly affect the brain. Indirectly, the brain can be harmed by any malfunction of the lungs, liver and heart, as the efficient working of the brain is dependent on the swift removal of all metabolic end-products present in the fluid surrounding it.

The 'brain syndrome', as it is termed, describes the progressive mental deterioration that occurs when the brain is seriously impaired. Initially a patient is restless and overtalkative, then gradually he becomes delirious, confused and finally loses consciousness. In the early stages, however, there is no obvious sign of brain damage. The patient manifests mainly emotionality, depression, irritability, jumpiness or tension, all of which could be attributed to particular life circumstances. Speech deteriorates slightly and he gets a little vague and forgetful, but the patient can still perform intellectually, if a little less efficiently than usual. Hinkle says:

'In this state the subject may have no frank illusions, hallucinations or delusions but he overvalues small events, misinterprets, blames others and accepts explanations and formulations which he might reject as patently absurd under different circumstances. He does not confabulate but he may be willing to state that a report is "clearly true" or that an event "actually occurred" when in fact the report merely could be true or the event might have occurred. His intellectual functions, his judgement and his insight decline to a similar degree.'

Hinkle suggests that, as the prisoners in Korea were all kept in bad conditions, they might well have suffered these initial stages of the brain syndrome. Also, as the brain needs information of various kinds to process and to keep it active, periods of isolation or the repetitive carrying out of only one mental activity as a work duty were likely to tire the brain and cause it to deteriorate although, again, the effects would not be immediately obvious.

Despite the fact that such physical tolls on the brain must affect its functioning, Hinkle points out that deterioration

does not occur at the same rate in all people. He believes that the personality of the individual plays a strong part in determining who holds out longest.

‘In short, the brain, the organ that deals with information, also organises its responses on the basis of information previously fed into it. This information, in the form of a personality developed through the experience of a lifetime, as well as immediate attitudes and the awareness of the immediate situation, conditions the way the brain will react to a given situation. There can be no doubt that personality, attitudes and the perceptions of the immediate situation seriously influence the ability of a brain to endure the effects of isolation, fatiguing tasks and loss of sleep.’

Not only does personality affect when brain syndrome starts, it also affects the form that syndrome will take – determining whether a particular man will become talkative, withdrawn, anxious or angry, paranoid or trusting.

He ends by saying, ‘Disordered brain function is indeed easily produced in any man. No amount of “will power” can prevent its occurrence.’

Psychologist Joost Meerloo draws on psychoanalytic and conditioning theory to explain the brainwashing of the American soldiers. He coined the term ‘menticide’ to describe it. Meerloo was a one-time chief of the Netherlands Forces psychology department who became an American citizen in 1950. He was called as an expert to give evidence to the military inquiry on the Colonel Schwable case. (Colonel Schwable, an officer of the US Marine Corps, ‘confessed’ in Korea that America had been carrying on bacteriological warfare against the enemy, citing supposed missions, meetings and strategy conferences as well as naming names.)

Meerloo’s position is that successful menticide techniques make full use of people’s deep underlying guilt feelings and their unconscious need to be conditioned by and conform to traditional patterns. He believes people fear the freedom and the conflicts that complete autonomy brings.

He actually claimed that the Chinese capitalised on the findings of Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov in regard to conditioned behaviour. Pavlov discovered that he could make dogs salivate when they heard a bell. By ringing a bell whenever he gave them food, he led them to associate the two events. He had 'conditioned' an unnatural response. He went on from this discovery to find out much about conditioned behaviour (see Chapter 4) and the circumstances that could facilitate or impede it.

One such finding that Meerloo believes the Communists picked up was the fact that conditioning could most easily be effected if the process was carried out in a quiet environment with few distracting stimuli. Political victims, therefore, were more easily conditioned if kept in isolation from each other.

It was Pavlov who first found that some animals learn more quickly if they are rewarded for doing so, by affection or the giving of food, whereas others responded more effectively if they suffered a painful penalty for mistakes. The differences, Meerloo suggests, are likely to be related to the nature of earlier conditioning by parents. As, in people, the effect might be that one person could resist indefinitely in the face of punishment whereas he could easily be won over by rewards, interrogators could not use rewards and punishments indiscriminately if they wanted results. They knew that they had to find out first which category their prisoner belonged to.

The use by the Chinese of boring repetitive routines was based, says Meerloo, on the Pavlovian finding that any kind of previous conditioning, no matter how strong, could be rendered ineffective – inhibited – by boredom.

Finally, he suggests that the Chinese developed a suggestion made by Pavlov that weak, secondary stimuli could also have conditioning qualities – the tone in which words are spoken being as effective as the actual words used for shaping behaviour. Pavlov didn't pursue this area of thought far but, in the 1950s, the role of linguistics in mass indoctrination was studied by other Russian physiologists.

Meerloo is careful to state, however, that it is too simplistic to believe that permanent changes can be made to a person's thoughts and behaviour just by straightforward application of Pavlovian theories of conditioning. He does believe that it can be a powerful means for capitalising on the deeper emotional insecurities of man, once aroused. For instance, in isolation, when a prisoner is closed off from the world and deprived of the usual range of stimuli from the senses, his mental activity changes. He starts to dwell on long forgotten anxieties that rise to the surface and his fantasy life grows more real than his real life. In that state he is vulnerable, as he cannot check the validity of his feelings and fantasies against ordinary reality.

In fact, far from saying that conditioning of behaviour is the main thrust of brainwashing techniques, Meerloo emphasises that a human being's own basic drives and needs can lead him unwittingly to take a part in the brainwashing process. Need for companionship doesn't disappear when a guard or an interrogator is the only person available who could possibly offer it. Few personalities, he says, can resist the need to yield if they are suffering overwhelming loneliness. The first step towards yielding may well be that the prisoner, when in isolation and convinced, by the enemy, that everyone has deserted him, accepts and even welcomes the jailer as a substitute friend.

Similarly, the victim may have to 'pay' for his capitulation, his (to himself) unforgiveable need to draw comfort and friendship from whatever source he can, by becoming even more cruel to himself than the inquisitor could be. This passive attempt at annihilating the enemy adds even more stress to an already intolerable load: the prisoner is fighting himself as well as his captors, leaving himself doubly weakened.

Just as successful brainwashing cannot be achieved by the cold application of techniques that take no account of the prisoner's personality, his fear, insecurities and basic needs, so, says Meerloo, training soldiers to withstand physical tortures is for similar reasons ineffective as a

method to help them resist being brainwashed by captors. It is not physical torture that is the most effective weapon of brainwashing; the very teaching of evasive techniques to withstand torture can itself induce psychological reactions in the soldiers so trained that can work against their resistance, not for it. The aroused anxiety and the dread anticipation, knowing what may happen, can lead a prisoner to capitulate all the sooner. It is only by applying effective mental strategies that anyone can resist and those mental strategies have to be drawn from a balanced perspective on life. Without that perspective operating in ordinary daily life, they cannot be pulled out of the hat ready to apply when or if one suddenly finds oneself in a powerful coercive and unnatural milieu. (See Meerloo's *Mental Seduction and Menticide*.)

Robert Lifton's study of brainwashing techniques (which he termed thought reform) also relies for its conclusions on psychoanalytic theory. Lifton took part in the examination of the American POWs on the troopship back to the United States but his real work began when he went to Hong Kong and interviewed in depth a number of Western and Chinese civilians who had been living in China at the time of the Communist takeover in 1948. Subsequently they had escaped to Hong Kong. In his book *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, he described and assessed the experience of fifteen Chinese intellectuals who had undergone reform in universities and revolutionary colleges and twenty-five Westerners who were believed by the Chinese to be antagonistic to the Communist régime and underwent reform in prisons.

One of the Westerners was a Frenchman, Dr Charles Vincent, who had lived and worked in China for twenty years before his arrest. Accused of being a spy, he was in prison for three and a half years. Of him and another prisoner, Father Luca, both of whom were trapped into making extensive confessions of acts never carried out, as well as unfounded denunciations of friends, Lifton said:

'... Their environment did not permit any side-stepping:

they were forced to participate, drawn into the forces around them until they themselves began to feel the need to confess and reform. This penetration by the psychological forces of the environment into the inner emotions of the individual person is perhaps the outstanding psychological fact of thought reform.'

Lifton identified the processes at work as follows:

1. *Assault on identity* Dr Vincent was told that he was not a real doctor, Father Luca that he was not a genuine Father. Both as they began to lose their bearings started to question what and who they were.

2. *Guilt* Both men found themselves condemned by an infallible environment. They became so permeated by an atmosphere of guilt that the accusations being levelled at them merged with subjective feelings of sinfulness and having done wrong. They knew they were guilty of something, they felt very guilty, and gradually grew to believe that punishment must be deserved.

3. *Self-betrayal* The denunciation they were forced to make, of friends and colleagues, had a dual effect. It increased their feelings of guilt and shame. But, equally fundamental, by denouncing all those with whom they had associated in their lives, they were effectively denouncing all that their lives had been up till that point. They were not so much betraying friends as being forced to betray the vital core of themselves.

4. *Breaking point* The combined effects of severe guilt, shame, and self-betrayal led them to feel alienated from themselves. They began to fear total annihilation and as everything that happened fanned rather than dispelled that fear, they moved inexorably towards breakdown.

5. *Leniency* The inevitability of total annihilation would suddenly be overturned by a showing of unexpected leniency on the part of their captors. A brief rest from interrogation, a brief encounter in which they were treated momentarily as individuals, summoned for the men a spark of renewed identity. Suddenly, annihilation was not the only

outcome they could envisage. Annihilation could – and now must – be avoided and there was only one immediate way to achieve that. For a man in such a position, said Lifton, ‘the psychological decompression of his environment serves to win him over to the reform camp’. The men virtually became grateful participants in their own reform.

6. *The compulsion to confess* Confession, in that it offered a way to resolve the overwhelming guilt engendered, gradually became more and more attractive. The compulsion to end the horrors of confusion and identity loss by owning up to that guilt was finally irresistible.

7. *The channelling of guilt* The amorphous, formless guilt that had been drawn from within them could be given an understandable form if they adopted the ‘people’s standpoint’. Their guilt could be attributed to a life of wrong action created by a wrong ideology.

8. *Re-education: logical dishonoring* To achieve ‘true’ re-education, the prisoners had to extend their self condemnation to every aspect of their former lives – to see their lives as a long series of utterly shameful acts.

9. *Progress and harmony* The rightness of their new, reformed position was reinforced by the many emotional needs that were met as a result of their holding it: they could feel group intimacy in their living and working, they could participate in pursuing a common goal, they could experience the relief of solving all problems, resolving all confusion. Instead of alienation, they could experience themselves as in harmony with their surroundings.

10. *Final confession and rebirth* In this new spirit of harmony, the men were fully ready to supply with conviction statements about what they now were and what they had rejected. They experienced a virtual rebirth.

Lifton claimed that, in all the cases of apparent conversion, similar emotional factors seemed to be played on: particularly, a strong and readily accessible negative identity, an unusually strong susceptibility to guilt, a tendency towards identity confusion (particularly if a cultural out-

sider) and an all-or-nothing type of emotional set.

Particularly interesting, however, was Lifton's finding that those who appeared to resist reform during their prison experience had similar characteristics. They also had the tendency towards needing to go wholeheartedly one way or the other and, by their habitual use of denial and repression to keep themselves in check, ended up in the situation where those least threatened by the power of the brainwashing techniques actually feared they were in most danger of capitulating to them. Although they were seemingly resisters, they were in a constant struggle against the desire to capitulate.

Lifton pinpointed the features which seemed to him to be characteristic of ideological totalism and necessary for the maintenance of its hold over individuals: control over all forms of communication; mystical manipulation (totalism as a furtherance of established higher purposes); demands for purity; creation of a cult of confession; stress on 'sacred sciences'; loading of language (what Lifton calls thought-terminating clichés); putting doctrine above the person; and the 'dispensing of existence' – deciding those who have a right to exist and those who don't.

Schein, Hinkle, Wolff, Meerloo and Lifton all agree that personality was an important factor in whether an individual capitulated to or resisted Communist influence. All have said, in one form or another, that those with well-integrated, stable personalities were the ones least susceptible to psychological pressure. However, Dr William Sargant, a British psychiatrist, believes that what happened in Korea was just one form of the sudden conversion syndrome, a phenomenon which can be explained by physiology alone. Personality, in so far as it plays a part in Sargant's thinking, dictates not ability to resist but length of time it takes to collapse. People of stable personality may take longer to fall, he says, but far from being immune, they are the most likely to remain faithful longest to their newly implanted convictions. (He believes that had it not been for language difficulty and a certain subtlety of technique,

the Chinese could certainly have won over more soldiers.)

Sargant offers a package to explain what he sees as the inevitability of conversion once the right stresses are imposed on the brain. He explains dramatic religious conversion, brainwashing or dramatic political conversion, false confessions and psychoanalytically-induced insights by physiological events to which only certain mentally ill people are immune. He relies for his assertions on the work of Pavlov. Unlike Meerloo, he doesn't claim that the Chinese achieved what they achieved because they studied Pavlov but he does believe that Pavlov's findings regarding reactions to stress are the key to understanding any sudden conversion, political or religious. He says, in *Battle for the Mind*, where he explains his theory, 'The politico-religious struggle for the mind of man may well be won by whoever becomes most conversant with the normal and abnormal functions of the brain and is readiest to make use of the knowledge gained.'

Sargant's interest in the work of Pavlov stemmed from his experiences during the Second World War, treating shell-shocked soldiers. His reading of Pavlov threw light, for him, on why the soldiers recovered from mental breakdown if they could be induced to experience emotional discharge of an intense nature, and led him to posit that the success of religious and political conversions was based on the manipulation of the same physiological processes.

In the course of his work on conditioned learning in dogs (see Chapter 4 for a full explanation of conditioning), Pavlov started to make discoveries about the dogs' reactions to stress. He found that his dogs could be divided into four temperament types. The first two he called 'strong excitatory' and 'lively', the second group being less extreme in their excitability, but both groups likely to respond to stress by showing heightened excitement and aggression. The other two types were more passive in their reaction. One Pavlov termed the 'calm imperturbable' type, the other the 'weak inhibitory' type. This last group tended to react to stress with extreme passivity in order to

avoid tension. Strong experimental stresses reduced such dogs to a state of paralysis and an inhibition (or blocking) of brain function. However, Pavlov found, the other three types of dogs, if exposed to more stress than they too could stand (the amounts being higher than for the weak inhibitory type), also reached a state of brain inhibition. He decided that this inhibition must therefore be a protective mechanism designed to protect the brain when the system was pressed beyond all endurance. Which category a dog fell into was decided, he believed, by environmental stresses to which it had been exposed right from birth and to which it had been conditioned to react in particular ways, in accordance with its own temperament. Lively and calm, imperturbable dogs could withstand much more stress than either strong or weak excitatory types.

The inhibition which occurred when all dogs had passed their limit of endurance (Pavlov called it transmarginal inhibition) had definite stages of build-up, signalled by particular abnormal behaviour patterns. Pavlov found that he could induce brain inhibition by imposing four different types of stress and monitor the development of the abnormal behaviour.

To induce the intolerable stress, he would increase the voltage of electric shock applied to the dog's leg as part of its conditioning process. If the shock was too strong for its system to tolerate, the dog started to break down. Another method was to signal the arrival of the dogs' food and then make them wait a long time for it to appear. The dogs reacted very quickly to waiting under stress. Thirdly, he might confuse the dogs by giving them conflicting signals, so that the dogs became uncertain what to expect. Finally, he might induce stress by physical means, such as overworking them or depriving them of food.

Pavlov found that if he first wore down the dogs in one or more of these ways, new conditioned behaviour patterns – such as responding to a given signal in a given way – were much easier to implant. However, whereas the weak inhibitory type dogs broke down much faster, they were likely to

forget those new behaviour patterns once they recovered. The dogs that were harder to break down were more likely to hold on to the behaviour patterns for a long time after. Pavlov presumed that, due to temperament, they held on to the new patterns as tenaciously as they had once held on to their old ones.

During this whole process, Pavlov isolated three distinct stages that led on to collapse as extreme stresses mounted. First came what he termed the 'equivalent' phase of brain activity, when a dog would react in the same way to all stimuli of whatever strength. (Pavlov measured this by saliva production.) One might equate this with the familiar phenomenon of a person reacting no more strongly to an important experience than to a trivial one: the exhausted woman who receives a cup of tea and the news that she has won the football pools with equal mild pleasure.

When exposed to even stronger sustained pressures, the dog would move into what Pavlov called the 'paradoxical' phase. Here, the brain would cease to react to strong stimuli at all, as a protective measure, while still capable of responding to mild ones. This therefore gave rise to a circumstance which, in humans, could be manifested as an inability to cry on hearing of the death of a loved one but to be intensely irritated and upset by the loss of an ear-ring.

The third and final stage of brain inhibition Pavlov called 'ultra paradoxical'. Now the dog reacted with a positive response where normally it had a negative one and vice versa. For instance, it would try to elicit affectionate attention from a laboratory assistant it had previously disliked, and attack one it had previously been fond of.

Once these three stages had been set in train, Pavlov noticed, the dogs often behaved in a hypnoidal fashion. Sargant remarks that clinical reports of patients under hypnosis often reveal them to act in ways consistent with Pavlov's inhibition phases.

A final unexpected discovery occurred for Pavlov when his dogs were nearly drowned during the Leningrad floods, as they were trapped in their cages. At the last

minute a laboratory assistant was able to rush in and save them but the terror of the experience, a stress beyond all stresses, produced yet another brain response. The dogs forgot all that they had been taught by conditioning up to that point. That is, all the conditioned reflexes that Pavlov had implanted in them had vanished and it took months to restore them.

Pavlov believed that the higher centres of the brain in dogs and in humans were in a constant state of flux between excitation and inhibition; that when one part was highly excited, another area was inhibited as a result. For instance, a person undergoing an ecstatic experience may be temporarily oblivious to pain. He also noted that one part of the brain cortex which had been over-excited might become fixed, leading to a pattern of repetitious movements or behaviour. He thought this might explain, for example, obsessional thinking.

Sargant uses these findings from Pavlov to extrapolate about the mechanisms of recovery from shell-shock, religious conversions, and the eliciting of false confessions. (He maintains that those who believe the exercise of will-power is sufficient to beat the brainwashers are sadly mistaken. Active resistance only puts yet more pressure on the brain and speeds breakdown.)

After his reading of Pavlov's work, Sargant says he became aware how far the behaviour of shell-shocked soldiers whom he was treating at the time accorded with Pavlov's inhibition stages. Some, for instance, might be suffering severe fright paralysis of the limbs. If they tried to move them, they couldn't. But if they were thinking about something else, they were amazed to find that they *could* move the paralysed limb – an example of the paradoxical stage, says Sargant.

Men who came to the clinic in a state of nervous breakdown and emotional paralysis could be released from their suffering if Sargant induced an abreaction – an intense emotional discharge. This might be achieved by giving them a drug to help lower their defences and then coaxing them

to talk of the experience they had had and which they had, till now, repressed. If the soldiers could be drawn to the limits of their endurance in this way, they experienced a sudden intense outpouring of their feelings and a reliving of the events in question, an exhausting experience that led them finally into emotional collapse. When they came out of it, they were like different men. They could see what had happened in perspective, they could face up to the horrors and fears they had undergone in the trenches.

The principle of emotional discharge, the release of locked-in emotions, is behind most modern psychotherapies. However, Sargant makes a significant point. The abreaction could be induced even if the events being reacted to were implanted by the doctor and had never happened. For instance, the doctor might ask the patient to describe himself fighting his way out of a burning tank and the patient would eventually experience emotional collapse, even though the event had never happened. What is vital, to Sargant, therefore, is not the unblocking of repressed memories and their concomitant emotions but the build-up of stress to its extremes, by whatever means, with a view to eliciting a freeing emotional discharge.

After the abreaction was over, the men lost their fright paralysis or whatever compulsive behaviour pattern had been established. All that neurotic behaviour had been knocked out by the collapse. Sargant sees this as akin to what happened with Pavlov's dogs.

In using Pavlov's findings to explain seemingly inexplicable religious and political conversions, Sargant stresses the suggestibility state that is engendered as a result of extreme anxiety. He recalls how the terrors of the Blitz enabled large numbers of people to believe unlikely stories, such as the rumours following Lord Haw-Haw's broadcasts from Germany. Sargant relates such occurrences back to Pavlov's finding that, once extreme stress was induced, dogs could be made to give up their old conditioning in order to take on the new set of responses conditioned by the laboratory assistants. And, if they were of balanced

temperament, they would hold on to those new behaviour patterns as firmly as they had resisted losing the old.

Sargant sees this mechanism working in revivalist meetings, where extreme emotional stress induced by the preaching, the atmosphere, the guilt and fear, led to collapse and then adoption of the new thinking. Similarly, in Korea, the Chinese in effect used the same breakdown system to implant a new set of beliefs. Pure intellectual indoctrination, he says, would be useless.

A proof that it is stress of any kind that is the key to conversion, rather than underlying sympathy with the new views, might be, as Sargant suggests, the fact that those who attended Wesley's evangelistic meetings and were roused to a pitch of anger and indignation at what was going on were just as likely to break down under the stress of the negative emotion – and come to, saved. Sargant also cites Arthur Koestler's account of the night he made his decision to become a Communist (he remained with the party six years). Koestler himself says that a whole series of 'grotesque events' clinched the making of a decision he had been moving towards for some time. The events in question were a heavy hangover, a broken down car, a heavy financial loss at poker and a drunken sexual encounter with a person he disliked. None of the stresses were connected with or threw light on his position as regards Communism but they precipitated his sudden decision to join the party.

Any extreme experience of emotion can make a person highly suggestible and either reverse his conditioned behaviour patterns or else wipe them out altogether, according to Sargant. The degree of stress and the individual's level of ability to withstand stress will determine the actual outcome.

Sargant does not claim that every single person can be brainwashed. He excludes certain categories of the mentally ill whose emotions are so impossible to arouse or who are so disconnected from their feelings that they cannot be brought to collapse. Such people cannot be made to abreact in hospitals, for instance.

However, he does say, in connection with brainwashing: 'Granted that the right pressure is applied in the right way and for long enough, ordinary prisoners have little chance of staving off collapse; only the exceptional or mentally ill person is likely to resist over very long periods. Ordinary people . . . are the way they are simply because they are sensitive to and influenced by what is going on around them; it is the lunatic who can be so impervious to suggestion.'

Psychological factors in the brainwashing process are not ignored by Sargant. He considers the guilt, isolation, physical weakening, etc., are all a vital part of the build up to intolerance level. But the conversion experience itself he sees as due to the physiological events happening in the brain, an inevitability of our physical make up. He therefore offers different explanations for actions which others see as based in our emotional drives and needs as human personalities.

He suggests, for instance, that 'one of the more horrible consequences' of interrogations where the victims suddenly start to feel great affection for an interrogator who has been treating them ruthlessly, is a warning sign that the ultra-paradoxical stage of abnormal brain activity may have been reached. The victim likes instead of hates his persecutor. Others, already mentioned, tend to put such seemingly contradictory behaviour down to the fact that human beings need warmth and attention from at least someone and if the interrogator is the only one around to provide it, then his will have to do. Ian McKenzie, writing on hostage-captor relationships in the *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society*, thinks that Aronson's gain-loss theory may also have some bearing: the theory suggests that increases in positive, rewarding behaviour from another person have more impact on someone than consistent, unvarying approval. Respect or liking has to be won, it can't be taken for granted. Therefore, when it is given in any little way, it means more, or has more immediate effect, than liking that exists regardless.

Sargant has been much attacked from many quarters for

his firm adherence to a physiological explanation for brainwashing and sudden conversion and the kind of examples of behaviour that he uses to support it.

Psychologist T. H. Pear, in *The Moulding of Modern Man* makes a lyrical objection. He doesn't mention Sargant by name but his approach is clearly covered by the criticism and *Battle for the Mind* is listed in the Bibliography. Pears said:

'The inventor of the term "brainwashing" deserves no thanks from anyone trying to understand the techniques, some ham-handed, some astute but sporadic and others cleverly integrated, which are given that name. The word, misleadingly descriptive, attracts those who believe that the only way to unravel the mind's workings is to grasp the activities of the brain; presumably, to explain the physical events occurring when a gramophone record is played may lay bare the whole story of Verdi's *Requiem*, including his temperament and the religion which inspired him, not to mention the mental processes of the singers and the conductor.'

Dr James A. C. Brown, a British psychiatrist who died in 1964, also thought that Sargant was rather short on acknowledgement that there is a man behind the brain cells.

His own starting point, in his *Techniques of Persuasion*, is the belief that people's attitudes in life are not all of the same strength and permanency, by their very nature. Only some attitudes can be changed by other people, others never. The deep attitudes are those which develop from an early age and create a perspective on life which rarely alters; the less entrenched attitudes are those that might more correctly be called opinions and which are much more amenable to alteration. Furthermore, what may seem to be radical changes in a person's beliefs are in fact most likely in keeping with their basic character anyway. Brown says:

'Opinions are but briefly held and likely to reflect current public feeling; in many cases they reflect rather what the individual thinks he should feel than what, in fact, he does

feel. They are readily changed and may be susceptible either to propaganda or to reasoned argument. Attitudes, on the other hand, are likely to be long-lived and do not necessarily reflect the feelings of the general public although they tend to reflect those of some group with which the individual has become associated. Ordinarily they are rooted in character traits which cause the individual to select from the flood of stimuli constantly impinging upon his senses only those which are consonant with his own deep-rooted beliefs. Although they are capable of changes which are quite real in the social sense, these changes are apt to be more apparent than profound. Thus the change from Communism to Fascism or, in the field of religion, to Roman Catholicism, is quite real socially in that these bodies proclaim vastly different doctrines which result in entirely divergent behaviour, but emotionally and from the standpoint of character all are on the same level on the authoritarian-democratic scale because all share the same attitude toward authority.'

Therefore, when he talks specifically about brainwashing he says, 'Despite their great doctrinal differences, all forms of totalism are brothers under the skin and appeal to the same type of person and those "converted" by brainwashing in any final sense are converted not in spite of, but because of, themselves.'

Brown, while acknowledging the value of Pavlov's findings about stress behaviour, rejects the interpretation put on them by those keen to show that brainwashing techniques can literally reverse human behaviour. He finds even Pavlov's assertions suspect in this area: for instance, is it such an inexplicable and sudden reversal of behaviour for a dog which liked a laboratory assistant and then gets tormented by him in experiments to turn against him afterwards? Similarly he finds suspect cases cited by Pavlovian disciples to prove the 'same' things happen in humans: a woman who suddenly wants to kill the child she loves doesn't manifest such feelings out of the blue; they were there in some form all along and were kept repressed

until they overflowed into consciousness, he says.

The Reverend Ian Ramage is upset by what he sees as Sargant's somewhat over-generous application of Pavlovian findings to events in the ordinary world. He finds large structural flaws in Sargant's reasoning – particularly as regards Sargant's claim that the religious conversion syndrome is all due to goings-on in the brain cortex. Of course it is his particular interest to disprove such a connection but his reasoning is clear and worth consideration: in his *Battle for the Free Mind* he makes a distinction between breakdown and emotional abreaction, whereas Sargant appears to link them:

'In the traumatic experiences which lead to battle neurosis and the terrors deliberately imposed in brainwashing, we may well have processes roughly parallel to the experimental stress situations imposed on Pavlov's dogs, resulting in various stages of abnormal behaviour and culminating in terminal exhaustion and collapse. However, it must be pointed out that nowhere in these experiments with dogs, as described either by Dr Sargant or by Pavlov himself, do we see anything that even looks like emotional abreaction. The abnormal behaviour of Pavlov's dogs was always the direct result of imposed stresses – *not* of the release or acting out of pent up emotion. To restore them after breakdown, Pavlov's dogs were never treated abreactively but were given simple sedation. The fact is that emotional abreaction simply will not fit in at all into the Pavlovian formula of breakdown under stress because it is psychologically and dynamically the exact opposite of such a process – it is the *recovery* from breakdown.

'... When we inquire what are the common features of both breakdown and recovery which lead Dr Sargant to see both processes as amenable to similar explanations, we find that both involve something which can be described as "collapse"; and both involve striking changes in behaviour. However, an examination of Dr Sargant's own evidence will show very clearly that the changes in behaviour involved in the two processes are exactly opposite; that in the respective contexts of breakdown and abreactive recovery,

the word "collapse" means two entirely different things. . . . The collapse which supervenes as a result of intolerable strain is a condition which endures for some time and is manifest in breakdown, restriction of personality, debilitating symptoms and patterns of abnormal behaviour. . . . The collapse that supervenes at the end of emotional abreaction is a comparatively short-lived physical exhaustion resulting from violent emotional discharge. It soon passes quite spontaneously to be followed at once by healing, liberation of personality and the disappearance of neurotic symptoms and abnormal behaviour patterns.'

Ramage is referring, in the last sentences above, to the experience of the shell-shocked soldiers. He comments on the fact that Sargant seems to link the violent emotional experience of Pavlov's dogs in the flood serving to wipe out all their carefully conditioned reflexes to the emotional discharge of the soldiers which wiped out all their previous neurotic symptoms, such as limb paralysis or tics. This, Ramage says, implies that in Sargant's mind conditioned reflexes and neurotic symptoms are essentially the same.

The soldiers' neurotic symptoms were developed as a defence against facing up to what had happened to them in their war experience. Once the experience had been brought to the surface and the associated feelings expressed, the neurotic defence system was no longer necessary. Pavlov's dogs did not develop of their own free will the tendency to salivate at the sound of a bell or to associate the sight of an ellipse with a reward; they were taught to do so. The conditioned behaviour was not a defence.

Ramage does not deny Sargant's thesis altogether. He accepts that the imposition of intolerable stress can have the effects he describes and can therefore be applied to the brainwashing phenomenon. But cathartic emotional discharge leading to healing is something else – and that is what is going on, he says, in therapeutic abreaction and religious conversion experiences.

Not even Sargant has maintained that brainwashing or sudden conversions necessarily last forever. He said:

‘It is one thing to make the mind of a normal person break down under intolerable stress, eradicate old ideas and behaviour patterns and plant new ones in the vacant soil; it is quite another to make these new ideas take firm root.’

The only way to do so, he says, is to consolidate the gains made. So Wesley, for instance, after winning converts at his emotional hell-fire sermons, quickly divided his new flock into groups which met at least once a week. Other preachers of his ilk who thought their work was done once conversion was achieved soon lost most of those they had so dramatically won for God.

An effective method of consolidating the ground won by political or religious conversion techniques is to maintain controlled fear and tension, says Sargant, and cites the Chinese Communist doctrine that wrong thought is as evil as wrong action. Such a doctrine would have the highly desirable outcome that most would not dare to question the rightness of what they have come to believe as that would clearly be wrong thought – and punishable, should the wrong thought slip out unintentionally in conversation or even in one’s sleep.

Quite clearly brainwashing does not last forever – if it actually occurred in the first place – once the brainwashed individual ceases to be in the environment where the inculcated ideas are current. The American POWs who returned home did not retain Communist ideals: many, of course, may not have believed them in the first place but only collaborated to make life easier.

Lifton’s subjects, once they reached Hong Kong, did not stay ‘reformed’ either but the psychological effects of the whole process were long-lasting. Most couldn’t instantly adapt to Western life. It was as if, Lifton says, they had some psychological business to attend to, to re-enact what had happened and master it. Of course they also felt alienated in their new country as most of the Westerners had lived in China for very many years.

Years later, however, they were still grappling with powerful emotions and ideas implanted by the Communists,

although hotly anti-Communist. Many still had fears of annihilation. But some claimed that they felt strengthened because they had had the experience of testing out their emotional limits in a way few of us are ever called on to do – and they survived.

Hinkle and Wolff say that even the most thorough brainwashing can wear off in a short period. Even those indoctrinated for five years could revert in a few months, once away from the environment.

As environment and the prevailing current of opinion have such bearing on whether brainwashing effects last, Brown comes to the conclusion that, as a technique for changing beliefs and behaviour, it isn't even necessary. Social forces alone will do the work.

'... The individual will accept a substitute belief *either* because it is capable of performing the same function as the old one – for example in satisfying the need for a totalist creed which provides certainty and controls his "bad" impulses – *or* because the belief has become orthodox and it is "natural" to conform, unless he is prepared to become a social outcast. Thus in a Communist community brainwashing is likely to work but is hardly necessary, since in the long run people tend to conform because they are social; but when applied to non-totalist individuals who are returning to a non-Communist society, it will not work at all.'

He does not, however, in this comforting dismissal, take account of so-called brainwashing techniques which may be applied within a society that allows the expression of various ideologies. Individuals who join cults are prepared to be social outcasts from the rest of society while conformists within their own group. Being a conformist and being a social outcast are therefore not mutually exclusive.

To dismiss brainwashing as ineffectual in the long term is to ignore the fact, as so far shown, that the social and psychological factors and unconscious conditioning which combine to create it may each be powerful influencing forces on their own. In all the foregoing accounts of the Korean brainwashing experience, all the ingredients are

seen as roughly the same, only explanations differ.

1. The soldiers were forced to question beliefs they had never questioned. Their certainty was undermined.

2. Their behaviour was shaped by the use of rewards and other conditioning processes.

3. They were led to believe that no one at home cared what happened to them. They felt out of control and learned helplessness.

4. Degrading conditions and public humiliations served to undermine their egos.

5. They were forced to participate in their own indoctrination process by writing statements or organising camp activities.

6. Removal of their leaders left them without a clearly defined authority structure, and weakened group cohesion.

7. The Chinese, by pacing their demands and only making large requests after being granted small ones, imperceptibly won their commitment.

8. Need for friendship and approval led them to comply with their jailers.

9. Induced anxiety, guilt, fear and insecurity led to suggestibility and a need to confess.

10. The unpredictability of their captors' behavior confused their expectations and assumptions. Without a 'norm' to which they could adapt, they felt even less in control.

None of these stressors is situation-specific. Although the effects were heightened by severe physical duress in Korea, each can be seen in operation in more ordinary everyday contexts. The next four chapters attempt to show how circumstances, conditioned responses, physical and emotional reactions can all act to weaken that which we choose to regard as the unassailable self. Rather than the prey of victimising external forces, we may, if anything, be victims of our own false conceptions of what constitutes individual integrity.