Date: Thursday, 3 Jan 2002 00:41:11 -0700
From: Robert McIntyre <robert.mcintyre4@GTE.NET>
Subject: Re: How can you digress from the Rorschach?
Joel wrote:
I am philosophically curious about something. (For those of you who've
never been to law school, or watched PBS, this is a psychology example of
the kind of obnoxious questions I used to ask my law students.)
Suppose, for argument's sake, that someone's "thinking" is measured
perfectly accurately by the Rorschach as floridly, completely, and
egregiously psychotic. Suppose further that their behavior in all
essential spheres, well observed and reported by numerous credible
observers, is within normal limits. Are they mentally ill, or, more
accurately, would you give them a diagnosis of mental illness, and if so,
why?

Joel,
What does it mean that *thinking is measured perfectly accurately*? Do
you mean that your example assumes that the R provides valid measures of
psychotic thinking? By diagnosing mental illness or not, do you mean
diagnosing psychosis or not? I will assume that you do.
If the just noted assumptions were all true, I would reason as follows.
The R, although containing valid measures of psychosis, can still be
incorrect in a given case as diagnostic validity of a measure means that the
measure is capable of generating valid diagnostic hypotheses about an
individual that can be inferred. These hypotheses are not identical with
diagnostic facts about that individual. The diagnostic facts about the
individual are what is directly observed, not inferred.
In your example, the facts are that the individual is normal while the
testing hypotheses encourage an inference that the individual is psychotic.
In light of this contradiction between facts and hypotheses, I would go with
the facts and not diagnose psychosis; reasoning that because the validity
coefficient is never equal to 1.0, no matter how valid a test measure has
been demonstrated to be in research, it must sometimes be incorrect in a
given instant case. When clear facts about one's functioning contradict the
test measure, I would be persuaded that this is an instant case in which the
test measure generated a false positive outcome.
Were you to present an example containing the facts of observed
functioning as not clear, or some observed oddness in functioning seemingly
evident, then I would be more inclined to make the inference suggested by
the testing data which your example stipulates is valid, provided the
hypotheses the testing data generates accounts for the ambiguity of
observations.
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