

basic texts on the subject which have been produced in this country in the last decade.

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Experimental Psychology: Research Design and Analysis. 3rd Edition. By DOUGLAS W. MATHESON, RICHARD L. BRUCE and KENNETH L. BEAUCHAMP. Eastbourne: Holt-Saunders. 1978. Pp 390. £9.75.

This book is a useful elementary introduction to the design of psychological research. The presentation is of a leisurely but clear type which does not flinch from informing the reader (p. 24) that 'data is the plural form of the Latin noun, *datum*'.

In the first half of the book the reader is taken through some simple philosophy of science followed by enumeration of the different basic types of experimental design. In the second half, a handful of the most commonly used statistical tests are described. In addition, the book contains two further sections of a useful and relatively unusual type. The first deals in some detail with the presentation of a written research report. The second reviews the design of single-subject experiments, a topic of obvious relevance to clinical research.

The book in general has the advantages and disadvantages that one might expect to accrue from its unhurried pace. On the credit side, it should be easy reading for any undergraduate. On the debit side, its scope is not very wide. For example, the book nowhere mentions the use of Latin squares in experimental design, and ignores the existence of most non-parametric tests. Such omissions raise doubts about its suitability as anything other than a supplementary text.

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Sri Lanka—Cases of the Reincarnation Type. Vol. II. By IAN STEVENSON. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia. 1977. Pp 367. \$20.00.

This extremely handsome book succeeds a companion volume describing ten similar cases studied by

the author in India. Like its predecessor, it opens with a brief, clearly stated account of the beliefs concerning reincarnation held by his informants. Here, it is interesting to note the slight but significant changes of emphasis in the concepts of the Buddhist collaborators in Sri Lanka as contrasted with those of Indian Hindus. This short introduction is in fact crucial for one's approach to the rest of the work because it raises at once the key question: are Dr Stevenson's cases indeed recalling events of their past lives, or are they describing fantasies inspired by the prevailing beliefs of their surrounding culture? Fantasies which impart a compelling conviction not only to the subjects themselves, but also to the 'investigators' or eager elaborators of these remarkable occurrences.

One is inevitably reminded of the scarcely less dramatic narratives of some celebrated cases of multiple personality, in which it seems in retrospect that the very interest of well-intentioned therapists has helped the syndrome to expand, and even to luxuriate. There have been isolated cases in Europe and America, where similar claims were made for vivid memories of past lives—not many years ago, for the recall of an existence in early medieval York, for one. When these cases are given publicity on TV or in the press, they excite eager acceptance, but also lively scepticism. In India or Sri Lanka, on the other hand, they are usually welcomed as confirmation of already strongly held religious beliefs. A reviewer of Dr Stevenson's earlier volume probably spoke for most Western readers when he wrote that the author 'may not convince sceptics but he has placed on record a large amount of data that cannot be ignored'. He has now done so again, in a neighbouring culture. The content of his case studies is fascinating, but once again it seems likely that his readers will fall into two camps, the eager believers, who find his evidence convincing, and the scientifically minded who will not. Meanwhile, for those who are prepared to suspend their disbelief, there remains a series of fascinating real-life (even if not necessarily past-life) stories. Not least interesting is the phenomenon of Dr Stevenson's own apparently total immersion into this exotic area of exploration of human experience and belief.

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