

Membership MCQ questions. Only at the end of the book is the reader offered a standard test paper consisting of 50 questions – too few for the trainee's needs.

Both books suffer from a basic fault similar to that of many of their predecessors, in that they contain several errors involving either ambivalent questions or incorrect 'true' or 'false' answers. I attempted all the examples in both books, as did some of my colleagues, and our exasperation at the mistakes we discovered was validated by checking the established facts in a number of well-respected standard texts.

I still await the perfect MCQ book – one in which the questions are interesting and varied, and are neither too easy nor too difficult. They should be accompanied by clear explanatory notes, relevant to Membership revision and (above all) accurate! The two mentioned here do fulfil some of these criteria, but they are far from ideal.

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**Social Learning and Systems Approaches to Marriage and the Family.** Edited by RAY DEV. PETERS and ROBERT J. McMAHON. New York: Brunner/Mazel. 1988. 325 pp. \$51.00.

It is hard to pin this volume down, which should be a promising start. The promise is not fulfilled, however. This is a collection of papers, mainly in the social learning research tradition, about the study and treatment of a variety of problems in family life, such as maternal depression, marital conflict, sexual abuse, male sexual dysfunction, and handicap. The influence of systems theory is slight, although there is a bold attempt in the final chapter to marry the two traditions, or at least to see where the overlap is. The notion of 'reinforcement', for example, can easily be understood by a systems family therapist as part of the process of 'homeostasis'. The political goal of the authors of this chapter is clearly stated at the end – because behavioural and family therapies are getting less and less funding than "the more directly medically related phenomena . . . as a field we must become more coherent, more efficient, and more inclusive in our focus".

The volume as a whole does not achieve this aim. I think there is more mileage in the idea that systems therapy is the offspring of psychoanalytical and behavioural learning therapies, and the book I would like to see would include all three traditions with this evolutionary perspective in mind. The penultimate chapter, 'Comprehensive assessment of family functioning', is a useful review of the subject, and any hopeful researcher on families would be wise to read it.

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**The Human Brain.** By PAUL GLEES. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1988. 204 pp. £32.50.

The Book Reviews Editor has asked me to consider whether this book is more useful for MRCPsych candidates than other texts already available. There are many books with similar titles – for example, Peter Nathan's excellent *The Nervous System* (Penguin). Glees states in his preface that, "Being primarily a morphologist, rooted in the concept of the evolution of structure, I have placed the emphasis on structural organisation, but functional aspects, experimental research and clinical findings have been incorporated, broadening the interests for clinical students and for students of neurobiology". He has, I believe, only partly fulfilled his task, and whether psychiatrists are an appropriate audience for this book is also, to my mind, not at all certain. There are elegant drawings of cells with dendrites with different types of arborisation, but the artwork of many of the larger-scale illustrations looks very dated. For example, the figure showing the circulation of the human brain is considerably less informative than that found in many introductory texts of human biology designed for GCSE candidates.

Intermingled with some quite complex descriptions of micro-neuroanatomy are statements which fit less comfortably into a modern text – for example, "Old age is often brought to a sudden end by a vascular catastrophe, when the hardened fragile brain vessels rupture and cause infarction (loss of blood to a given vascular bed)." Not only is this account too simplistic for those who are likely to labour through a very complex chapter on the organisation of the cerebral cortex, but the statement is also incorrect, as the pathology of infarction is quite distinct from that of cerebral haemorrhage.

The strengths of the book lie in some unusual drawings and photographs but, presumably in an attempt to keep the cost down, the paper is not of a high quality, and much electron micrographic detail is lost. The diagrams of the anatomy of the peripheral nervous system are much less clear than those in the excellent and cheap MRC publication *Aids to the investigation of peripheral nerve injuries*. I regret that I cannot recommend this book to readers of this journal.

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**Parenting Breakdown – The Making and Breaking of Inter-generational Links.** By DAVID QUINTON and MICHAEL RUTTER. Aldershot: Avebury. 1988. 270 pp. £25.00.

"People who were themselves deprived in one or more ways in childhood become in turn the parents of another generation of deprived children." This observation