

Reviews

Analysis of Perception. By J. R. SMYTHIES, M.A., M.D., M.Sc., D.P.M. Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1956. Pp. 140. Price 21s.

The study of perception, and its relation to the very diverse fields of philosophy, epistemology and neurophysiology, is a most difficult one. Few who have studied the subject have brought to it an adequately wide experience. Dr. Smythies, however, is a psychiatrist who is at present conducting research in physiological psychology, has worked in neurophysiology and anatomy, and has studied philosophy at some length. He has also worked with hallucinogens, and was one of the team responsible for the discovery that trimethoxyamphetamine was in this group. He is therefore unusually well qualified to write on the subject.

Such a subject, treated with the seriousness that it deserves, cannot make easy reading, and this book is no exception. It bears throughout, however, the mark of hard and prolonged thinking. It is clearly written, and should be studied by those who are interested in the subject.

W. ROSS ASHBY.

Probability and Scientific Inference. By G. SPENCER BROWN. Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1957. Pp. 154. Price 15s.

The author, a professional mathematician, believes that something is rotten in the state of Statistics, and in this book he attempts to display various inconsistencies, paradoxes, and other confusions that he believes to infest the subject. Plenty of confusion is certainly displayed in the book, though whether it is due to the subject or to the author's failure to think slowly and carefully must be left to the reader to judge.

The subjects of statistics and probability are not easy, and quite elementary questions are apt to provide tangles that need much thought for their straightening out. Those who like puzzling themselves will like this book, but the reviewer will pay closer attention when Mr. Brown stops stirring up difficulties and proposes some solutions.

W. ROSS ASHBY.

L'Homme Criminel. By DR. ÉTIENNE DE GREEF. Nauwelaerts, Louvain, and Beatrice—Nauwelaerts, Paris, 1956.

This is a symposium in honour of Étienne de Greef, a Belgian Criminologist (and clinical psychiatrist) of great repute—much greater abroad than at home we are told by Professor Leclerc, who opens the papers with a glowing critique of the man to whom the volume is dedicated, and who, much later on, contributes a major paper on the immediate future of criminology.

The book is divided into three sections: (i) the personality of the delinquent, (ii) psychiatry in the penitentiary, (iii) psychiatry and Social Defence (the contriving of a healthy social system, including the retrieval of all criminals).

The contributors are mainly pupils of Professor de Greef, at any rate in the first section, and they both readily acknowledge their indebtedness, and enthusiastically delineate the impact of their master on Belgian and on all French-speaking criminological thought. If to a non-Gallic reviewer the tributes are, at times, effusive, and seem to impede the otherwise very free thought, their sincerity is patent, as is the pleasure with which they are made.

The section devoted to the personality of the criminal contains five papers; the last being a tripartite discussion on responsibility, by a jurist, an anthropologist and a psychiatrist. On the whole, the very general, theoretical, philosophically flavoured and somewhat doctrinaire quality of this section is much relieved by Professor

O. Kinberg's contribution on the "Biological infrastructure of the criminal act as a basis of an objective criminogeny". He fails, however, to carry conviction that an expansion of Lhermitte's observations on punctate cerebral damage in encephalitides, married to an hypothesis of afferent and/or efferent pathway interruption can yet, or in the visible future, lead us to the understanding implicit in the title—the more so, as Professor Kinberg steadfastly asserts that in the neuro-cerebral pathways there is no point at which the psychic circuits can be intercalated. But let it be said that Dr. Kinberg puts forward his ideas as foreshadowings and no more.

The second section, the psychiatrist in the penitentiary, opens with a racy attack by the First Secretary to the Ministry of Justice—M. Cornil, upon the practical contribution actually made by psychiatry and psychiatrists to the day-to-day problems confronting the prison administrators in dealing with prisoners. It is much more stimulating reading than the reply which comes later. Much of this section has to do with Belgian domestic matters, but Miss Tuerlinckx, a social worker, the first female to work in the Central Prison at Louvain, the site of Dr. de Greef's life-long labours, is given the opportunity, and takes it, of recalling her first reactions to her work which she succeeded in being allowed to undertake. There is also included a chapter on case history taking and Extended Observation on children.

It is in this section too, that Dr. E. de Greef writes his paper, essentially a consideration of three men, each of whom murdered his wife. The material is of great interest, and its interpretation by Dr. de Greef, open to much argument. He notes, for instance, that in two cases the homicidal act was quite out of character with the general life pattern of the culprit, and that the prisoner was admitted in a state of mind and outlook which was foreign to him, slowly resolved in two or three years or more and could then be seen to have existed for a significant time before the crime, insidiously worsening. Dr. de Greef sees all this as evidence of a moral deterioration in the individual, which is capable of recovery if he be put in satisfactory conditions; prison (and, according to the criticism of M. Cornil, solitary confinement), being satisfactory. Dr. de Greef indicates that his contacts with these three chosen cases are few and far between.

The last section of the book is devoted to medico-legal considerations by psychiatrists, including contributions by Zilboorg, who touches on some of the main points made in his Isaac Ray memorial lectures (reviewed in these columns about 15 months ago) concerning the evolution of anglo-saxon medico-legal thought on the topic of legal tests of responsibility. He brings matters up to date by quoting the 1954 reformulation of an American Court—that of Columbia—in which the establishment of mental illness and the origin therein of the criminal act, becomes the test to be applied.

Much hard thinking and writing has gone into this tribute to Professor de Greef, and there is much that is admirable, but some of it is obscured by the generality of approach and argument, and by the lack of clarity of the topic of argument, when murder, delinquency and criminality are used without indication with separate and synonymous meanings.

JONATHAN GOULD.

Alcoholism. By LINCOLN WILLIAMS. Livingstone, Edinburgh and London, 1956.

Dr. Lincoln Williams, in an essay of some 25,000 words, has attempted gallantly, and with considerable success, to convey an impression of that field of concern that is called alcoholism. At a time when psychiatric literature is not specially notable for its freshness and spontaneity, it is pleasing that Dr. Williams' monograph retains much of the flavour of cursive discussion, such as might go on between more and less experienced physicians engaged in the same field. It is this quality of directness, of lack of dogmatic authoritativeness, carrying yet that air of confidence of one who knows from a wealth of experience, which leads the reader to forgive with ease the occasional digression of the short chapters, from the title, to other no less interesting topics. And the chapters are short—at times, less than 500 words! Indeed, the book,