

## Book reviews

**Constructions of Health and Illness: European Perspectives.** Edited by Ian Shaw & Kaisa Kauppinen. Pp. 154. (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004.) £45.00, ISBN 0-7546-3276-8, hardback. doi:10.1017/S0021932007002726

*Constructions of Health and Illness: European Perspectives* comprises nine contributions, and states that it aims to cover the ‘main areas of social construction as it relates to health and illness’ (p. 1). However, its approach is rooted in sociology and consequently several key aspects of the constructionist debate are omitted, notably the approach from social anthropology and specifically from medical anthropology. This edited volume presents an array of sociological forays into issues related to constructions of health and illness; it does not form a cohesive thesis as it comprises stand-alone chapters related to the general theme of constructionism in relation to health and illness.

Within this broad remit, the book covers a range of topics including, amongst others, visual constructions of disease from the perspective of the pathologist, the role of rumour in the construction of risk by physicians, patterns of medical pluralism amongst Chinese people in Britain and resistance to mass childhood vaccination.

Of note is Kangas’ chapter, which examines shifting views of depression from the perspective of the depressed individual. In this refreshing essay, Kangas grapples with the complexities of depressive disorders, demonstrating the differences in the way the disorder is conceptualized in two social groups with different age ranges and gender compositions. The author concludes that depression is a response to ‘serious problems within society’, but she does so without disregarding the influence of intra-individual and inter-individual difficulties and thereby avoids the determinism common to such explanations.

Unfortunately, Shaw and Woodward’s chapter on depression as the medicalization of ‘unhappiness’ is very superficial. It fails to make explicit that ‘depression’ is not a single, uniform category of disorder and makes only a cursory reference to its complexity in the concluding section. Furthermore, the authors begin by referring to the American DSM IV, which seems somewhat inappropriate in a book about *European* perspectives on constructions of health and illness. They go on to refer to ‘ISD 10’, which the reader can only assume is meant to read ‘ICD 10’ (the acronym for the International Classification of Diseases 10). In addition, the authors take the critical position that general practitioners, to some extent, will inevitably medicalize unhappiness by prescribing antidepressants as a mechanism for managing high caseloads, but they do so without providing convincing supporting evidence, and thus the reader is left with a sense that it is merely conjecture.

*Constructions of Health and Illness: European Perspectives* may be of use to people who wish to find out more about the approach taken by this group of sociologists and public health and health policy researchers. However, the chapters lack sufficient contextualization, both of the issues they address and within wider debates surrounding the title subject. For this reason the volume is not recommended for people

seeking an introduction to the field of constructions of health and illness. Nor is it recommended for those already conversant in the field, who seek a stimulating and rigorous examination of European perspectives on the subject. Finally, it is unfortunate that the volume is littered with typographic errors; had more care been taken in its editing, the book may have proved a more useful academic source.

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**The Economics of Climate Change. The Stern Review.** By Nicholas Stern. Pp. 692. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007.) £29.99, ISBN 0-521-70080-9, paperback. doi: 10.1017/S0021932008002824

There seems little controversy now concerning climate change, although the extent to which it is anthropogenic remains debated in some quarters. If governments are to take it seriously and to act to mitigate its effects, they must be convinced of its impacts on the economy. To that end, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer called for the Review in July 2005, to be presented to the Prime Minister and Chancellor by autumn 2006. The remit was to examine the economics of moving to a low-carbon global economy, with a focus on the medium- to long-term perspective, with time-scales for action according to a small number of potential policies. It was also called to determine the potential of different approaches for adaptation, and examine what of what is known about global climate change is of specific importance for the United Kingdom, in relation to existing climate change goals. Nicholas Stern, the Head of the United Kingdom Government Economic Service and a former chief economist of the World Bank, rose to the challenge admirably. The Stern Report is a landmark publication. It is a wide-reaching report from a man of gravity, and should be taken seriously. The Report considers all aspects of the issue, from an introductory overview, to the impacts of climate change on economic growth and development, the economics of stabilization, possible policy responses for the mitigation of climate change and its impacts, and the economics of adaptation to climate change. The final part presents a persuasive case for the urgent need for international collective action. The author leaves little room for political manoeuvre: pay now to fix global warming or risk a worldwide economic depression later. These are words that the United Kingdom Government is heeding; the world must follow. This book is extremely readable, and something that all interested in climate change and its consequences should have.

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