

Book Reviews

Editor: Sidney Crown

Psychiatry Around the Globe: A Transcultural View (2nd edn). By JULIAN LEFF. London: Gaskell. 1989. 226 pp. £10.00.

This is a remarkable book. The first edition was published in 1981 when transcultural psychiatry was being strongly influenced by sociopolitical concerns. The second edition has reached our desks when the subject has become yet more popular and is now a training requirement for many health professionals. To use Murphy's phrase – transcultural psychiatry in the UK has 'come of age'. The second edition of this book, therefore, is both a result and cause of this important development. Tutors, consultants, Mental Health Act commissioners, MRCPsych candidates and librarians are recommended to possess it. Similar and appropriate praise is given in the foreword by Kleinman.

"Leff clarifies which questions have been answered, which problems remain to be solved and which have been refined and restated. . . . This fine volume is popularisation in the best sense. I believe it deserves and will receive a very wide readership . . ."

This reviewer underlines what Kleinman has said. Leff has indeed also shown his stature by listening to his critics and then modifying the chapters which described the schema for development of emotional differentiation, so that they are less culture-bound.

There could yet be a need for a further edition (or a new book) to enlarge further on transcultural aspects of psychotherapy, to provide examples of teaching curricula, give an account of qualitative research methods and to describe cultural aspects of psychopharmacology. Let us hope that Leff with his enviable writing talent and academic resource will address other transcultural topics, and that Gaskell Press will retain their interest in these vital aspects of psychiatric practice.

JOHN COX, *Professor of Psychiatry, University of Keele*

Understanding Economic Behaviour. Edited by KLAUS G. GRUNERT and FOLKE OLANDER. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff. 1989. 440 pp. £57.00.

The more that non-economists discover about economics the more surprised they become. This is not (usually) because the subject produces surprising but true results but because economists, particularly in the

West, seem to adopt such strange assumptions about human behaviour. Psychologists, sociologists and social anthropologists are especially likely to be critical, if they do not dismiss the subject completely.

Economists (who are not usually noted for their modesty) can generally live with this scepticism but it is desirable that at least some members of the profession should be open-minded enough to hear what other students of human behaviour have to say and should also attempt to explain why the subject has developed in the way it has. This book provides an excellent example of such a dialogue. It is based on a conference held by the International Association for Research in Economic Psychology in Denmark in 1987 and includes papers by mainstream economists as well as by specialists in economic psychology.

It may be worth sketching the traditional approach of Western economics, which is the subject of critical (although not necessarily hostile) review in this volume. There are two strands. The first, which was set out most notably in Lord Robbins' book *The Nature and Significance of Economic Science*, argued that economics is an axiomatic system based on self-evident truths about human behaviour. Since the initial assumptions were true, all statements derived logically from them must also be true. The second strand was described in Professor Milton Friedman's book *Essays in Positive Economics*. Friedman stated that the success of economic theories should be judged by their predictive power. The truth of the underlying hypotheses was unimportant in itself. Linking the two strands is the notion of the individual acting rationally to maximise his utility – an idea which at its best is a powerful organising concept but which at its worst is simply tautological (since all actions must be rational in respect of some objective).

Economic psychology is concerned with individual behaviour and particularly emphasises the relation between actions and *perceptions*. The main research method consists of empirical research, which includes laboratory experimentation (a technique which most economists would regard as impossible). The papers in this volume are divided into five groups. The first is concerned with economic factors and well being. They ask, for example, whether any relationship can be discovered between the economic prosperity of a nation and the happiness of its inhabitants. The second group is concerned with perceptions of macro-economic