

## Book Reviews

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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

phenomena (e.g. inflation and unemployment). The third considers details of individual decision-making. The fourth group examine consumer behaviour, and the fifth group raises more general questions about economic analysis. It includes an account of animal experiments which seek to discover demand equations from the behaviour of rats and rhesus monkeys.

The editors provide a useful introduction. Psychologists interested in economics and economists interested in psychology will learn something from all the papers.

ALAN BUDD, *Visiting Professor of Economics, London Business School*

**Festina Lente: A Psychiatric Odyssey.** By HENRY R. ROLLIN. London: British Medical Journal/The Memoir Club. 1990. 194 pp. £14.95.

For half a century, Dr Rollin has participated in some of the most significant developments in British psychiatry. It would be difficult to find a more entertaining guide to the discipline's recent past than Rollin, whose recollections are written in a conversational and engaging style, which combines both humour and perceptive observation. While the events of 20th-century psychiatry are reasonably well known, the intriguing aspect of this book, especially to younger generations, is Rollin's evocation of the general day-to-day atmosphere of the previous era. He captures well the rigid hierarchy of the 'total institution' of pre-war days, where the superintendent reigned supreme, and where the junior medical officers were required to live-in and to ask for permission to leave the asylum overnight.

The advent of insulin coma therapy, pre-frontal leucotomy and electroconvulsive therapy – 'the high noon of physical methods' – is recounted and Rollin vividly conveys the excitement of the times and the near messianic faith in the new therapies. He is honest enough to describe his own temporary 'conversion' but also his subsequent disappointment at the failure of physical treatments. With the exception of ECT, Rollin's judgement of this period is severe, with particular condemnation being reserved for psychosurgery.

Of great contemporary relevance is Rollin's account of the first moves, in the late 1950s, to close mental hospitals. The now familiar issue of hospital versus 'community' care was being fiercely debated, and Rollin sounded a largely unheeded warning about the dangers of emptying asylums in the absence of an adequate alternative:

"[many patients] will join the army of vagrants and elbow each other off the park benches, or lengthen the queues outside the doss-houses. Others still will embarrass the courts and prisons where their crimes, usually petty and purposeless, unless interpreted as a plea for care and protection, have landed them."

Many other aspects of the cultural history of psychiatry in the last 50 years are reflected in the book: the changing presentation of mental illness; the rise and fall of psychoanalysis; the fate of the mentally abnormal offender; and the development of out-patient clinics.

Of course, Rollin does not confine himself merely to the medical world and his lifelong interest in the Arts is given generous space, with affectionate memories of the theatre in Leeds and London; jazz music in New York; and classical music at Oxford. Attention is also given to his appraisal of Shakespeare, Byron, Shaw and Joyce. As he concludes:

"Psychiatry . . . spills over into so many other disciplines that it affords a golden opportunity for the dilettante – which is essentially what I am – to flourish."

Rollin's wide cultural interests have surely increased rather than diminished his ability as a psychiatrist and it would be sad if such 'dilettantes' did not continue to find a place in contemporary psychiatry.

ALLAN BEVERIDGE, *Consultant Psychiatrist, West Fife District General Hospital, Dunfermline, Fife, Scotland*

**Dysthymic Disorder.** Edited by S. W. BURTON and H. S. AKISKAL. London: Gaskell. 1990. 130 pp. £7.50.

This well produced paperback contains the proceedings of the first symposium devoted entirely to discussion of the new DSM-III-R concept of dysthymic disorder. In his foreword, the late Professor Max Hamilton points out that 'dysthymia' covers a wide variety of conditions and under one name or another has always been with us. Perhaps the best known traditional term has been 'chronic neurotic depression'. DSM-III-R dysthymia requires low grade chronicity of depressive symptoms of more than two years, early and insidious onset, a persistent or intermittent course, concurrent character pathology and, finally, is an "ambulant disorder compatible with stable social functioning". The North American influence behind the inclusion of dysthymia in DSM-III and DSM-III-R owes much to the work of Professor Akiskal of Tennessee, who is co-editor of the book and one of the major contributors. From his work on mild chronic depressives, Akiskal has derived a complex classification and subclassification of dysthymics. This is drawn largely it seems from US private practice experience. Subcategories include subaffective dysthymia with shortened latency of rapid eye movement on electroencephalography and good response to tricyclics, and also 'character spectrum disorder' reflecting a *melange* of dependent, histrionic and antisocial traits.

From the text of Akiskal's opening chapter it is clear that a major US concern has been to salvage a mild, chronic subgroup of depressives who heretofore were dismissed as hopelessly character disordered and suitable only for psychotherapy or to be dismissed as