

BOOK REVIEWS

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A plea for peace education

Learning to Live Together: Preventing Hatred and Violence in Child and Adolescent Development

DAVID A. HAMBURG & BEATRIX A. HAMBURG

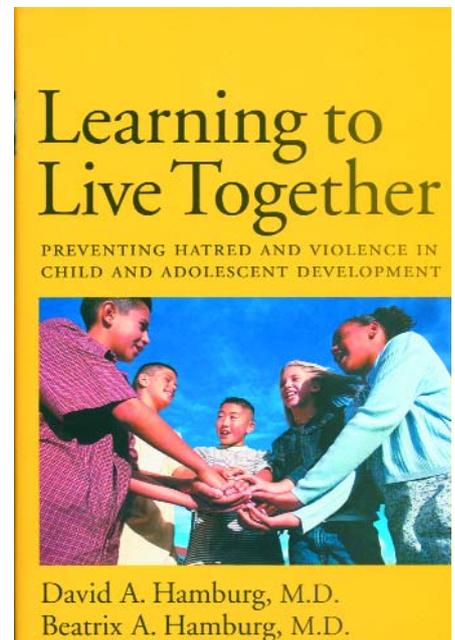
NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2004; Hb £24.95 (ISBN 0 19 515779 6)

REVIEWED BY **Miriam Landor**

DEADLY conflict is an urgent global problem, which cries out for improved education in conflict resolution and the construction of a peaceful world. This is the message of *Learning to Live Together*. From an educational psychology perspective, I particularly valued the marriage of a wide range of psychological theories to detailed descriptions of educational applications covering several developmental stages. The book is research-based and thorough, tracing the development of both intergroup conflict and prosocial behaviour through the childhood years to adulthood. It describes successful school and media programmes for conflict resolution and explains the difference between these and higher-level 'peace education'.

The main psychological approach is the ethological – the evolutionary adaptiveness of attachment, group behaviour, regulation of fear, and so on. However the Hamburgs also range widely through the psychological landscape, choosing exemplars from naturalistic and controlled experimental studies, from social and developmental psychology, and from classic research such as Bandura's and Sherif's. Educational methodologies include numerous strategies from cooperative learning.

The authors are highly distinguished pioneering academics in development and psychiatry. For the most part, the style comes across as well written and clear. Abundant academic references and quotations are annotated so that they can



be followed up without disrupting the reading flow. The Hamburgs exhort 'governments and societies everywhere' to heed the message of education for peace. However, I suspect the audience for this book may rather be previous converts to the cause and organisers of university peace programmes. At over 400 pages, it is a long and academic read; a succinct précis might win over more hearts and minds, both in the media and in corridors of power throughout the world.

My only quibble is that despite the book's global theme, there is a lingering impression of US bias, which might jar with some readers – the selection of conflict resolution programmes is mainly from the US, and the concerns and issues chosen seem to reflect current US thinking. 'Active opposition...by outside nations' in the event of genocide or civil war, elaboration of Palestinian but not Israeli 'hate education campaigns' and the conviction that the US leads the world in terms of civic nationalism and ethnic integration may comfort a home audience, but might also feed anxiety that terrorists' causes can be fuelled by such unconscious complacency.

On the whole, though, a worthwhile read.

■ *Miriam Landor is an educational psychologist in training at the University of Dundee.*

Really useful undergraduate resource



Positive Psychology: The Science of Happiness and Human Strengths

ALAN CARR

HOVE: BRUNNER-ROUTLEDGE; 2004; Pb £17.99 (ISBN 1 58391 991 0)

REVIEWED BY **David Pike**

FEEL that the field of positive psychology lacks a true synthesis of personality, emotional states and behavioural prediction at this time, but then I am an optimist and believe this is actually possible. I started out reading this book in a linear fashion, looking for what unifying conclusions Dr Carr might have come to; but this was hard going, with the book being written in the familiar uninspiring style we are all trained to use as psychologists. I soon found I was much happier dipping into it, when I discovered it to be a really useful, comprehensive overview that I shall definitely be returning to frequently.

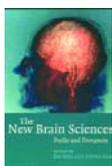
The book is directed specifically at the undergraduate market and does this job very well. It gives structured introductions to topics that undergraduates may not know a great deal about (flow, giftedness, emotional intelligence, neurobiology of optimism...). After introducing the concepts, research and controversies, the text leads to exercises, references and resources that can take the reader deeper.

Unfortunately, I felt that Alan Carr wandered rather naively into murky water in his political conclusions at the end, where he calls on governments to legislate for happiness itself, for example by promoting good marriages and absorbing leisure interests. This surely requires a subtlety and maturity from politicians way beyond anything currently conceivable.

'What makes governments happy is not necessarily happy people. Discuss.' That is definitely another book.

■ *David Pike works independently in a positive way.*

A brain, a heart... the nerve



The New Brain Sciences: Perils and Prospects

DAI REES & STEVEN ROSE (EDS)

CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2004; Pb £24.99 (ISBN 0 521 53714 2)

REVIEWED BY Christian Jarrett

THIS book's Rumsfeldian quest to set out what we know, don't know, and don't know we don't know about the brain answers those critics who say scientists only consider the consequences of their research once it's too late. The volume boasts a diverse and sparkling line-up of 21 eminent contributors from the philosopher Mary Midgley to the professor of law Alexander McCall Smith, now also famed for his

No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series. This is not the usual gung-ho account of how advances in our understanding of the biology of the brain look set to solve the mystery of consciousness and eradicate brain-related illness. Instead, the book's cautious first half considers how current and potential advances in neuroscience might impact on our sense of free will, and the implications that will have for our understanding of criminal responsibility.

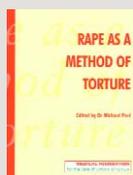
For instance, would a complete knowledge of the neural correlates of paedophilia absolve child sex-offenders of responsibility for their actions? McCall Smith ponders whether such people may then 'deserve some pity at least, on the grounds that the starting point for their choices is so much more difficult than it is for others not afflicted by such conditions'.

Much of this moral and philosophical discussion is reassuring reading for those psychologists nervously anticipating extinction as they watch the reductionist march of neuroscience into their midst. No one method of inquiry is more fundamental than another, Mary Midgley argues, mocking those biologists and sociologists consumed by 'physics envy'. Feminist sociologist Hilary Rose, meanwhile, notes the characters involved in consciousness research and finds biologists apparently undergoing 'philosopause' – 'that change of life when experimental fertility runs out', the lure of the ultimate mystery proving too much. Indeed, for the psychologist reader, this book is a call to arms, the clear message being that rapid advances in neuroscience are making our need to understand human psychology – the self, society, volition – more pressing than ever, not less.

I particularly appreciated ethologist Patrick Bateson's critique of 'heritability', an increasingly quoted and misinterpreted measure that represents how much a given behaviour or condition is influenced by a person's genes rather than their environment. The problem is people often interpret this measure as fixed and absolute, not appreciating that the measure obtained will vary depending on the relative genetic and environmental variation in the particular population sampled.

The book's second half is less philosophical, based more on the issues provoked by new drugs and technologies. Particularly timely, given the issue's divisiveness in US politics, is a highly readable chapter by Helen Hodges and

Easy read on a difficult topic



Rape As a Method of Torture

MICHAEL PEEL (ED)

LONDON: MEDICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE CARE OF VICTIMS OF TORTURE; 2004; Pb £15.00

REVIEWED BY Rachel Egan

HAVING conducted research with victims of rape and torture, I found this book very useful and enlightening. It contains a number of papers that discuss the psychological and physical consequences of rape and an analysis of how victims are treated by the law.

The structure and style of the book makes is an easy read. Psychological concepts and theories are clearly outlined and discussed. The majority of papers present guidelines for professionals working with victims of rape and torture. However, they are not clearly signposted in the various chapters and as a reader you stumble upon them. It would have been useful to substitute tables or summary boxes for some of the text. An interesting distinction between rape in peaceful societies and rape in war-torn societies is made in chapter six. The author uses the terms 'random' versus 'persecutory' rape. Initially, the distinction is blurred and the consequences of 'random' rape seem somewhat trivialised. However, it becomes clear that this is not the

intention and the aim is to outline important differences between the two.

Sexist language can occasionally be seen (e.g. where the victim is referred to as 'she'). However, the chapter written by Peel includes an insightful discussion on men as both victims and perpetrators of rape. I was very impressed with the continued emphasis on the importance of briefing interpreters who work with victims of rape and torture.

There is a detailed analysis of how rape as a method of torture is considered in both international and national law. While this is important, the chapters are very long and sometimes confusing. It is clear that the authors are not satisfied with the UK immigration system and how it deals with victims. Strong criticisms are given. However, the argument is one-sided and lacks a discussion on how the immigration system actually helps victims.

The book closes with a lively, well-written summing-up.

■ *Rachel Egan is a researcher for the Home Office.*

colleagues on the current state of stem cell research and the alternatives available.

Other chapters cover issues related to ADHD and Ritalin, and the rise of Prozac. David Healy, for example, points out the absurdity of SSRIs being relaunched as

anxiolytics. On this issue, I felt the book's second half would have benefited from a contribution by a front-line psychiatrist, much as the first half benefited from the practical view contributed by a senior judge, Lord Justice Stephen Sedley.

This is not a popular-science book, and some of the chapters, especially those in the first half, can get heavy. However, it's an extremely polished text that leaves the reader feeling up to date and well informed for the inevitable debates ahead.

Perceptions and probabilities

GEOFF CRAWFORD (REPORTDIGITAL.CO.UK)

Risk and Reason: Safety, Law, and the Environment

CASS R. SUNSTEIN

CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2004; Pb £15.99 (ISBN 0 521 01625 8)

REVIEWED BY **Judith Covey**

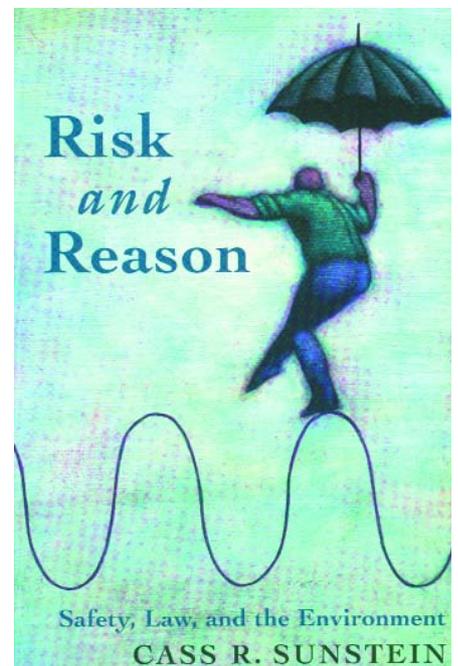
In *Risk and Reason* Cass Sunstein, a scholar in administrative law from the University of Chicago, connects the law of risk regulation to the psychology of risk. The book's central theme is that public demand for regulation is based on a misunderstanding of facts. Policy should not be driven, in Sunstein's view, by ordinary people's perceptions about which risks are especially bad.

Many of the reasons offered in the first few chapters of the book for the unreliability of people's intuitions about risk will be well known to psychologists familiar with the risk perception literature. Some of the problems like the use of the availability heuristic are cognitive. Others are more emotive, whereby vivid images and concrete pictures of disaster can crowd out other kinds of thoughts including the probability of harm. Consequently we fear low-probability highly publicised/dramatic risks (like terrorism and water pollution) whilst we neglect high-probability/

mundane risks (like eating badly, smoking too much and driving too fast).

Sunstein suggests that government focus less on people's fears and more on the likelihood that harm will occur by applying cost-benefit analysis. This more sensible system of risk regulation could, he argues, save thousands of lives and billions of dollars. The final chapters of the book are devoted to what cost-benefit analysis would mean in practice and draws lessons from past policy decisions, like the US government's decision to suspend the Environmental Protection Agency's regulation of arsenic in drinking water.

This book undoubtedly provides a thought-provoking introduction to the psychology of risk for non-specialists and professionals involved in risk assessment. For psychologists familiar with the risk perception literature it is unlikely to alert them to new research in the area. However, whilst covering familiar ground the review that Sunstein offers is potentially



provocative and is likely to inspire commentary and debate amongst the academic community.

■ *Dr Judith Covey is with the Department of Psychology, University of Durham.*