

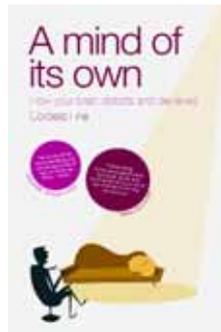
BOOK REVIEWS

If you would like to review a book for *The Psychologist*, contact Mike Thompson on mictho@bps.org.uk. Publishers should send advance title information and books for possible review to *The Psychologist* at the Leicester address.

The bigoted brain

YOU might think that, if there's one thing in the world you can trust, it's your own brain. You are, after all, as intimate as it is possible to be.

But you'd be wrong, so wrong. Cordelia Fine argues that our minds are vain, emotional, deluded, pigheaded, secretive and bigoted. There is a chapter devoted to each of these sins, and accessible descriptions of research in various fields demonstrating that our convictions and actions are often less than perfectly rational. The book picks out some of the strongest experimental demonstrations of our motivational and cognitive biases, and discusses them with an easy style and light wit. The book is more of a short-tour than a comprehensive introduction. It showpieces phenomena such as our irrational optimism (e.g. most people think they are better drivers than average) and our confirmation bias (our willingness to seek information



A Mind of Its Own: How Your Brain Distorts and Deceives

CORDELIA FINE

CAMBRIDGE: ICON BOOKS; 2006; Pb £9.99
(ISBN 1 84046 678 2)

REVIEWED BY Tom Stafford

that supports what we already know, rather than to risk finding out that we're wrong). The discussion of recent research on automatic behaviours, stereotypes and prejudice (the 'Secretive Brain' and the 'Bigoted Brain' in Fine's parlance) is particularly strong.

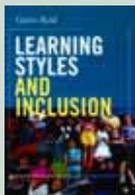
It is surprising that Fine, whose graduate training is in cognitive neuroscience but who is currently working

as a philosopher, doesn't dwell more on the function of the biases she discusses. Are there organising principles that offer to give an overview of what can sometimes seem like a disparate menagerie of phenomena? Which biases might be due to evolved preferences? Which result from the need to efficiently process information, or from the unfeasibility of gathering all relevant information? If self-esteem maintenance explains things like optimistic bias, how much do we know about which functions self-esteem itself serves? Some of these questions are addressed by Fine, but only very briefly. In-depth discussion of these issues might have risked slowing down the pace of the text, but could have made it more rewarding for readers already familiar with these topics – much of the material in the book is the standard fare of undergraduate courses. Similarly the way Fine conflates 'mind' and 'brain', and the repeated ascription of agency to the brain ('your brain wants you not to notice'-type phrasing), seem particularly disappointing from a philosopher. Admittedly this rhetorical convenience gives the prose some sparkle, but surely it is the duty of a philosopher to elevate rather than confuse the colloquy?

A Mind of Its Own is a fun introduction to some of the factors that can distort our reasoning. I'd recommend it to anyone who is just getting interested in the topic, or as a gift for anyone you know who still thinks that their personal point of view is unprejudiced and reliable.

■ Tom Stafford is the author of *Mind Hacks*. He is at the University of Sheffield.

What's style got to do with it?



Learning Styles and Inclusion

GAVIN REID

LONDON: PAUL CHAPMAN; 2005; Pb £17.99 (ISBN 1 4129 1064 1)

REVIEWED BY John M. Fisher

THIS book is aimed directly at the educator and, more specifically, the educator in primary and secondary schooling, and whilst it has some psychological theoretical underpinning, that is not its main focus.

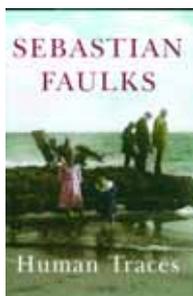
Gavin Reid uses a holistic overview approach to describe the learning process with a view to having more control over what and how students learn; in order to maximise the effectiveness of the learning experience. The focus moving from the 'task' (what to learn) to the 'how' making sure that the student's learning is optimised.

The author provides an awareness of the wide variety of learning styles, their strengths and limitations, and how their

selective application can help provide a diverse, individually structured, meaningful learning experience for everyone regardless of ability. In this sense he provides a useful summary of the wide variation in learning style models and gives an appreciation of how they can be used to assist 'inclusion'.

The information is presented in an easy-to-digest format and, following its own principles, uses various different methods to summarise the specific chapter (e.g. key points, mind maps, pictorial route maps, etc.) in order to help the reader get the most from the book.

■ John M. Fisher is with *Xchanging HR Services*.



The lost plot

Human Traces

SEBASTIAN FAULK'S

HUTCHINSON; 2005; Pb £12.99 (ISBN 0 09 179455 2)

REVIEWED BY **Diana Barker**

HERE is the plot: Prominent Oxford psychiatrist (POS) develops theory that human beings once all suffered from schizophrenia, but that, thanks to a chance mutation strangely catalogued in Biblical history, only traces of it remain in the human genome. Prominent writer (PW) takes the idea and turns it into a historical novel. POS threatens to sue PW. Entire psychological world holds its collective bated breath.

That is the story so far with the *Human Traces*, the new novel by Sebastian Faulks (PW). How delighted I was when my esteemed editor sent it to me to read!

I can now report that, in my humble opinion, the novel is truly appalling. Completely unbelievable, two-dimensional characters are caught up in a poorly devised plot against a sketchily described geographical backdrop. Horrendous descriptions of brain surgery lie back-to-back with reports on academic papers and

accounts of people snivelling loudly in dark passageways. It's a bit like *The Psychologist* really... Anyway, no one in their right mind, mutated genome or not, would ever want to read this book. POS can rest assured that his academic ideas will remain obscure for posterity; an enormous pity because they are great ideas. But he must be more careful in future about letting novelists into his graduate seminars... Don't forget we are all sniffing about for the next *Da Vinci Code*. A film of *Human Traces* could be absorbing, as long as PW isn't entrusted with the screenplay.

Here is another plot: Prominent Editor (PE) discovers mad, poverty-stricken, yet somehow seductively beautiful, ex-psychology lecturer tending an allotment in South West France...

■ *Ex-psychology lecturer, Diana Barker currently works for the Business School in Pau, South West France.*

Helping online

Guidelines for Online Counselling and Psychotherapy (2nd edition)

KATE ANTHONY & ALAN JAMIESON

RUGBY: BACP; 2005; Pb £8.00 (ISBN: 1 9051 1411 7)

REVIEWED BY **Alan Bainbridge**

THE dramatic increase in the use of information technology is a defining feature of modern times. The internet has expanded the ways in which we shop, bank, learn and make contact with each other, and this impact is now being noticed within the 'talking therapies'. The number of individuals using online services to contact organisations such as the Samaritans and NSPCC is greater than ever. These guidelines attempt to deal with the problematic nature of this expansion and in particular how quality and integrity of provision can be maintained while meeting the needs of many in an online environment.

What is paramount in these

developmental years is to identify and discuss guidelines for practice and supervision; this booklet does exactly this. Issues relating to accreditation, identifying client suitability and legal implications are raised, and this new edition contributes significantly to the important role and responsibilities of online supervisors. Useful case studies are provided, although in a publication of this length they are brief and simplistic. I would suggest that anyone involved in online discussion and not just counsellors and psychotherapists would benefit from reading these guidelines.

■ *Alan Bainbridge is a senior lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University.*

Hidden Self-Harm:

Narratives from Psychotherapy

MAGGIE TURP

LONDON: JESSICA KINGSLEY; 2005;

Pb £16.95 (ISBN 1 85302 901 7)

IS working too hard a form of self-harm? Turp, a psychoanalyst, argues that conventional definitions of self-harm focus on actively destructive behaviours, but we should also recognise that many people harm themselves either passively, such as by an unhealthy lifestyle, or by omission, such as through failure to seek medical treatment. This she calls 'hidden self-harm', since it may not be recognised as such by therapists, peers, family, or the patient.

Through the discussion of five case studies as well as the early life of a typical infant, Turp places overt and hidden self-harm in the context of culture, maternal love, and the development of self-esteem and self-care skills. Although her ideas are interesting, if not entirely novel, she does not always show how they are useful in interpreting the cases she presents, and she offers little evidence for many of her assertions. Her postmodernist approach and antipathy to mainstream psychiatry may alienate some readers. But her writing is clear and pleasingly informal, and this book should be stimulating for psychotherapists and others with an interest in the field.

Jamie Horder

(Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge)

Colour in the Darkness: Helpful Hints for People Who Are Feeling Down

PAM NORMAN

BATH: COMFORT BOOKS; 2006; Pb £5.00

(ISBN 0 9551874 0 7)

DEPRESSED? Swamped by worries? Finding life is all too much for you? Then this pocket-sized paperback, written for people who are feeling either a bit low or depressed, might be the answer. It attempts to normalise and give a balance to people's thoughts; for example, 'If the world is beginning to crowd in on you – concentrate on one thing at a time'. It acknowledges that friends might not be able to understand how someone is feeling, and provides valuable and realistic advice just when it is needed.

A useful and affordable gem.

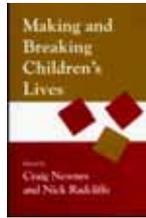
Chris Boyle

(South Lanarkshire Council Psychological Service)

Confronting the orthodoxy

THIS book offers challenging and stimulating perspectives on contemporary issues relevant to children's well-being and to child psychology. Calder's historical analysis of public awareness of child abuse, for example, identifies a form of collective amnesia on this subject and warns against complacency and inertia in child protection policy.

Many contributing authors question the validity and utility of ADHD diagnosis, and its associated drug treatments, offering a welcome challenge to the increasing 'psychiatrisation' of children's emotions and behaviours. In presenting alternative views, however, the book sometimes lapses into subjective, polemical arguments. Jackson, for instance, argues that new technologies create symptoms that become labeled as ADHD, and informs us that video games and the internet are 'creating children who are addicted to novel stimuli, multitasking and speed'. No meaningful evidence was presented to support this view.



Making and Breaking Children's Lives

CRAIG NEWNES & NICK RADCLIFFE (EDS)

ROSS-ON-WYE: PCCS BOOKS; 2005; P/B £14.00 (ISBN 1 898059 70 5)

REVIEWED BY Paul Jefferis

Rowe's proposal that ADHD 'symptoms' represent expressions of children's anxiety is to be welcomed, but the tone of the argument appears to exclude other possible explanations, potentially limiting debate about other factors that might also cause such behaviours in children. More constructively, Brady's qualitative study of children's experiences of ADHD diagnosis stands in vivid contrast to the highly technical and often clinically irrelevant studies of attention and impulse control that predominate in mainstream journals.

The book closes optimistically with a section describing innovative community-

based approaches, such as Harris's Family Well-Being project, where fine-grained neighbourhood analysis led to a broad-ranging service firmly tied to local needs.

In summary, this book is informative and thought-provoking, and its aims should be applauded, but it is also a reminder that in order to challenge the increasingly powerful psychiatric orthodoxy permeating child mental health services and popular culture, we must strive for well-formulated, objective arguments if alternative views are to be taken seriously.

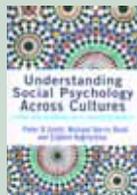
■ *Dr Paul Jefferis is with the Tavistock & Portman NHS Trust.*

Diversity in a changing world

RELEVANT in a world that is struggling with cultural diversity, this book helps to understand cultural difference. It is lengthy, packed with research, and the early chapters are so dense they verge on the indigestible; however, the summaries and questions at the end of each chapter aid the reader's understanding, and as the book progresses the central ideas become clearer and it becomes easier and increasingly interesting.

Understanding Social Psychology gently challenges an intrapsychic view of self describing self as culturally determined. Here 'nations' (viewed as systems bound by institutions and social ecology) set the context for culture (defined by endorsed values and beliefs), which sets the context for self-construal driving language and relational interaction. With this in the background, interaction and mis-interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds are understood as emerging from different cultural expectations and assumptions.

The initial chapters are slightly dry providing a cross-cultural model and



Understanding Social Psychology Across Cultures: Living and Working in a Changing World

PETER B. SMITH, MICHAEL HARRIS BOND & ÇIĞDEM KAĞITÇIBASI

LONDON: SAGE; 2006; P/B £22.99 (ISBN 1 4129 0366 1)

REVIEWED BY Joanne Warren

discussing valid methodologies for cross-cultural research with discussion of emic and etic studies central to this. Next is a more lively presentation of a developmental perspective of self concept within a cultural context, and differences between independent self-construal associated with individualist cultures and interdependent self-construal associated with collectivist cultures are stressed. A discussion of the impact of self-construal on self-expression follows, and the misunderstandings that may occur when the assumptions, expectations and motivations from people from different cultural backgrounds are not considered are highlighted with subtle humour.

The closing chapters provide a thoughtful discussion of the impact of

migration and acculturation (reminding the reader that acculturation is two-way between host nation and migrant), wealth and the media on cultural change, and the final chapter raises thought-provoking issues around the survival of cultural diversity and cross-cultural psychology in the present political climate.

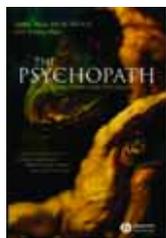
The relevance of *Understanding Social Psychology* is obvious, and although it takes time to digest it is useful in informing interactions with those of similar or different cultures and in understanding how cultural misunderstanding can occur. For these reasons I believe it is worth reading and would recommend it.

■ *Joanne Warren is a clinical psychologist with Oxleas NHS Trust.*

Understanding psychopathy

WORKING in the forensic field, I have found it difficult to decipher fact from fiction when the issues surrounding psychopathy arise. I was therefore keen to review this book, which looks at the cognitive neuropsychology of observable behaviour that forms so much of the treatment when working with individuals who have this diagnosis.

The book follows a clear structure and is easy to follow and concise, following a logical pattern of discussion from an understanding of what psychopathy is, to neurocognitive accounts. The layout of the book makes it easy to follow from start to



The Psychopath: Emotion and the Brain

JAMES BLAIR, DEREK MITCHELL & KARINA BLAIR

OXFORD: BLACKWELL; 2005;

Pb £15.99 (ISBN 0 631 23336 9)

REVIEWED BY **Catherine Harrison**

finish but also allows one to dip into selected topic areas for reference use. The models and diagrams help to explain some of the theory, and there are useful summaries at the end of every chapter. The book also includes research on associated conditions, such as ADHD and autism, which I found particularly useful.

Among the ideas this book presents is the possibility of

environmental insult being coupled with genetic factors to cause possible responses within the brain architecture, and the suggestion that if the neurocognitive systems involved with reactive aggression or emotional learning are impaired at an early age then the individual will present with the emotional difficulties associated with psychopathy. The idea that

psychopathy may be caused by abnormal brain architecture could ultimately change the way that psychopaths are clinically treated.

This book will clearly advance our understanding of neurocognitive factors in psychopathology and is far ahead of the field of treatment. The authors themselves acknowledge that there is work yet to be carried out to improve upon the treatment for antisocial behaviour disorders and I am excited by the prospect of advances in treatment areas that are due to follow.

■ *Catherine Harrison works at St Andrew's Group of Hospitals.*