



BOOK REVIEWS

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Religion – Is it all Double Dutch?

WHEN I did my MSc in social psychology 10 years ago, I noted there was more than a certain frisson between the psychological and religious worlds in the UK. I was told in no uncertain terms that there was no such thing as the ‘spiritual self’ and that such irrational concepts could not be countenanced within the scientific paradigm that evidently encapsulates modern-day psychology.

Since those dark days, more and more psychologists in the clinical and health-related fields have come to realise that, if we are to help people improve their lives and surmount their difficulties, we must take account of their most deeply



Religion and Coping in Mental Health Care

JOSEPH PIEPER & MARINUS VAN UDEN

AMSTERDAM: EDITIONS RODOP; 2005; Pb £26.00
(ISBN 9 0 4201997 2)

REVIEWED BY **Diana Barker**

held religious beliefs, even if we do not agree with them ourselves. We often lament, however, the lack of UK research in this area, and most of us have had to rely almost exclusively on American sources for our inspiration.

Therefore, I am pleased to announce the arrival of this new book which collates a set of previously published Dutch papers on the subject of the relationship between religion and mental health. Dr van Uden

is a professor of clinical psychology and Dr Pieper is an assistant professor of religion and pastoral psychology. Between them they have gathered a set of information which would interest all those involved in clinical, health, or counselling psychology and anyone wishing to do innovative research in this highly interesting and still largely uncharted territory (yes, student readers, the field is wide open for you).

Although some of the

translation of Dutch into English is a little suspect, this book provides a valuable assortment of data, explanatory material, and methodologies and conveys an exceptionally balanced approach to the relationship between religion and mental health. There is even a highly entertaining section at the end which provides a method for teaching the clinical psychology of religion. I, for one, would have loved to have had this to hand when I was struggling with the closed minds of my social psychology lecturers all those years ago...

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

COMIC TALE OF LIFE ON THE WARD

Poppy Shakespeare

CLARE ALLAN

LONDON: BLOOMSBURY; 2006; Hb £12.99 (ISBN 0 7475 8046 4)

REVIEWED BY **Rachael Allen**

CLARE Allan's debut novel is at once poignant, absurd and gut-bustingly funny. Set in a mental institution, the story is told from the perspective of N, a day patient of 13 years. Like all the day patients in the Dorothy Fish, her days are filled with chain-smoking, swapping medications and ensuring that she is never discharged.

That is until the arrival of Poppy Shakespeare, who claims she isn't mentally ill and is set on proving this to anyone who will listen. Although confused by this endeavour, N agrees to assist by ironically helping Poppy to fake mental illness.

Sharing the stage with N and Poppy are 24 other day

patients, one for every letter of the alphabet. Each is described in a comically larger-than-life fashion, without relying on the sentimentality often reserved for the mentally ill, to brilliant effect.

Clare Allan was a psychiatric patient for more than 10 years, although she claims that *Poppy Shakespeare* is in no way a memoir. Rather, she uses her experiences of the mental health system to gently introduce the uncomfortable question of how society distinguishes between the sane and insane.

■ *Rachael Allen is a public relations officer at the British Psychological Society.*

Compulsive reading

Man, Interrupted. Welcome to the Bizarre World of OCD, Where Once More is Never Enough

JAMES BAILEY

EDINBURGH: MAINSTREAM; 2006; Hb £12.99 (ISBN: 1 84596 006 8)

REVIEWED BY **Sophie Langford**

JAMES Bailey presents an intriguing personal account into his experience of obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). He describes his fear of drugs and their effects: that he might become high through people placing drugs in his food, coming into contact with people who have used drugs or even through simply touching a picture of drugs. He tells his story of time spent at an American clinic engaged in their treatment programme using exposure and response prevention. He gives an honest account into the battles and triumphs he encounters whilst trying to overcome his OCD.

This book reminded me of

Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in the sense that Bailey invites the reader into the world of the staff and other patients in the hospital. As with other personal accounts I found this book more informative than many textbook approaches to discussing OCD. It gives allows the reader to gain a greater understanding into the individual experiences someone who has OCD may encounter. I enjoyed this book, it was easy to read, and at times difficult to put down.

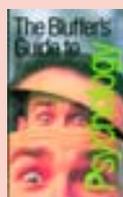
■ *Sophie Langford is a trainee clinical psychologist at the University of Surrey.*

PSYCHO-BABBLING FOR BEGINNERS

FOR anyone with an interest in psychology at whatever level, this book is a must read. It steers the reader on a thoroughly enjoyable and irreverently humorous whistle-stop tour of psychology. The author covers topics ranging from psychology's early classical beginnings with references to Plato and Aristotle, to more recent quirky and attention-grabbing questions such as 'why can't people tickle themselves'.

Being a former psychology lecturer, I was familiar with much of the material presented by the author. However, I was unprepared for the numerous one-liners that elicited spontaneous and immense expulsions of mirth from yours truly as I sat on the train attempting to look studious on my way to the recent BPS conference in Cardiff.

Fitting in the enormous wealth and diverse of knowledge-base that constitutes psychology in 63 pages is no mean feat, yet Warren Mansell manages this extremely well. The author even finds space to comment on the psychology bluffer's essential



The Bluffer's Guide to Psychology

WARREN MANSELL

LONDON: OVAL BOOKS; 2005; Pb £3.99
(ISBN 1 903096 63 4)

REVIEWED BY Nigel Sherriff

repertoire of skills such as a finely tuned air of aloofness, impressive curios, and the ability to fend off tricky questions such as reading minds and explaining why you decided to become a psychologist in the first place. This book is a recommended read for (non)-psychologists, students, and academics alike.

■ *Dr Nigel Sherriff is a research officer at the Trust for the Study of Adolescence.*

True and interesting in parts

MUCH of psychology suffers from what I think of as the 'true and obvious verses interesting but uncertain' dilemma. Many of the things we are most certain about in psychology are relatively uninteresting, or at least unsurprising, while some of the most interesting, tantalising or seductive ideas are either uncertain or downright false. Strongman's book aims to balance this dilemma and to also meet a third target – to be both true and interesting, and useful. At points the book succeeds, but the dominant impression is unsatisfying.

Partly this is because of a mistaken approach. Strongman believes that 'However scientifically respectable and methodologically sound research in psychology becomes, it must stay grounded in everyday life and, therefore, return to it at every opportunity'. What this appears to mean here is that psychology must address topics of common concern, in common language. What justification is there for believing that psychological

Applying Psychology to Everyday Life:

A Beginner's Guide

KENNETH T. STRONGMAN

CHICHESTER: WILEY; 2006; Pb
£19.99 (ISBN 0 470 86989 5)

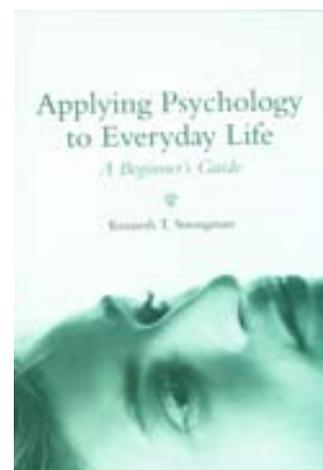
REVIEWED BY Tom Stafford

science should produce explanations which are based at the same descriptive level as the thing they explain? What justification that it could do this any better than the five thousand years of cultural output by poets, artists and philosophers? *Applying Psychology to Everyday Life* demonstrates that such explanations in the 'folk psychological' mode often appear either weary or limited (and dangerous if anyone took them seriously in the wrong context).

Strongman notes that psychology students are often disappointed to find out how removed from everyday life psychology is. But the

correction would be to write a book showing why it is useful to look for explanations which are couched at lower levels of descriptions; about why the pedantry of scientific rigour is necessary (if you think this would be boring, consider the glittering array of illustrations that could be selected from the previous errors of famous psychologists); and about the dangerous hubris of assuming that psychology will provide anything more than small clues in answer to the riddle of the human condition.

Aside from the problem of approach – which I am sure not all readers would feel the same about – the book has other weaknesses. A serious one is the lack of research weight. 281 pages are supported by a mere 34 references. Some of these are classic (Freud, Bowlby, Piaget, Skinner, etc) but are now known to be subject to major qualification. The only excuse for this might be that the book covers so many topics that there is little room for nuance – but this in itself is a separate flaw, not a



strength. In a number of places sloppy editing has left sections of text which repeat each other.

The strengths of the book are a light and engaging tone, and a wide range of topics, illustrated with compelling vignettes from 'real-life' situations, but these cannot compensate for the basic lack of convincing material. There are many interesting findings in psychology, and some of them might even be useful in everyday life, but this is not the first book to turn to in order to discover them.

■ *Tom Stafford is at the University of Sheffield.*

A comprehensive critique



Attachment and Sexual Offending

PHIL RICH

CHICHESTER: WILEY; 2005; Pp £31.99
(ISBN 0 470 09106 1)

REVIEWED BY **Olive Travers**

WHILE the title suggests a specialist readership, the greater part of this substantial text consists of the most detailed comprehensive overview and critique of attachment theory I have come across. A major strength is the coherence and consolidation of the theory that comes from single authorship rather than contributed chapters, helped by the clear organisational and flow charts throughout.

The generic practitioner in clinical and forensic psychology, who wishes to integrate such a cornerstone concept as attachment into a more sophisticated and theoretically informed way into their practice, will find everything they need in this book. Indeed the author gives a timely warning of the dangers of the often inadequate and ill-informed use of this complex and abstract psychological construct.

The exploration of how attachment continues to shape cognition, affect, and social relationship in adolescents is

particularly valuable in closing the gap in our understanding of the transformation of attachment from its childhood origins to its adult equivalent. The succinct summary of the neuro biology of attachment is also a bonus for the busy clinician.

In relation to sexual offending Rich concludes that while attachment deficits are a contributing factor, rather than a primary cause of sexual offending, the role of attachment is significant enough to place its assessment and treatment at the heart of sex offender treatment, particularly with adolescence. This makes a significant contribution to the more general movement at present away from a confrontational approach in all fields involving change of harmful behaviour – not just sexual offending.

■ *Olive Travers is a senior clinical psychologist and head of COSC Service with Health Service Executive N.W. Ireland.*