



## BOOK REVIEWS

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

# What makes us unique?

**I**N this entertaining and insightful book, Gärdenfors takes on the role of detective to uncover how human beings' way of thinking has come into existence. The author takes an evolutionary approach and examines the different components of thinking and consciousness. Drawing particularly from comparative and developmental psychology investigations, this is achieved through philosophical discussions with a fictitious peanut-loving monkey called Egon! The author outlines the essential elements of our thinking and asks the question 'What makes humans unique?'

### *How Homo Became Sapiens: On the Evolution of Thinking*

PETER GÄRDENFORS

OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2003; Hb £25.00 (ISBN 0 19852 850 7)

REVIEWED BY Leigh Riby

The opening chapter outlines the proposed components of thinking – sensation, attention, emotion, memory, thoughts and imagination, planning, self-consciousness, free will and language. Whilst all organisms possess aspects of sensation and perception, most lack the ability to process information detached

from their immediate environment. Therefore, the main theme relates to the development from here-and-now (i.e. sensation and perception) to detached ways of thinking. For instance, the detached thought processes associated with imagination enable humans to simulate consequences of their actions. The author argues that such detachment from the immediate environment, and the development of richer 'inner worlds', has clear survival value. As more complex modes of thinking are discussed, it becomes clear what makes humans 'special' and why the evolution of the 'inner world' is central to our experience.

Further along the continuum of detachment the areas of theory of mind and self-consciousness are described. Here, autism is used as an illustration of how the absence of critical components of thinking can affect human behaviour. An awareness of how others are thinking and feeling (relatively impaired in autism) is critical for our everyday behaviour and social interactions.

Finally, any text that tries to demonstrate the uniqueness of human behaviour is incomplete without discussion of language. Do animals have language? How is language related to thinking? Again, Gärdenfors argues that animal communication is lacking since it comprises signals associated only with the immediate environment.

Overall, the book is an easy read with much supplementary material dropped to footnotes for the interested reader. Therefore, as well as being good reading for students in psychology and other biological-based disciplines, the book would be informative and entertaining to popular science readers.

■ *Dr Leigh Riby is with the Department of Psychology, Glasgow Caledonian University.*

## Murder, medicine and men

### *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle*

ANDREW SMITH

MANCHESTER AND NEW YORK: MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY PRESS; 2004; Pb £15.99 (ISBN 0 7190 6357 4)

REVIEWED BY Stephen Frosh

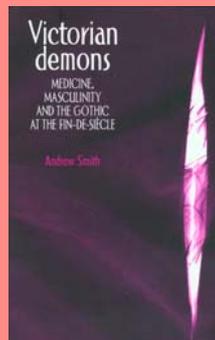
**W**HEN it comes to understanding masculinity, there is a lot to be learnt from cultural and historical studies, which generally means looking for sources outside the discipline of psychology. *Victorian Demons* is one such source, although in the end it has less to do with masculinity as currently perceived than with the images of medicine and the city out of which these perceptions grow.

Andrew Smith is based in an academic department of English, so his book focuses on some seminal 19th-century texts. These include *Dracula*, studies of the so-called Elephant Man, the Sherlock Holmes stories, and the writings and performance of Oscar Wilde. These texts demonstrate the emergence of an imagined 'crisis of masculinity' that is with us today, arising from a sense of 'degeneration' associated with the decline of empire; with radical changes to the gender structure of the city and of London in particular (Sherlock Holmes has to assert his masculine rationality mainly in the country); and

with the invention of a gay identity.

Most persuasively, however, the seminal text drawn on in this book is *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, a book that reveals the fragility of the distinction between 'civilised' bourgeois man and his subjugated violent underside, and which along the way dramatises the intimate relationship between London's West End and East End, and between medicine and murder. The link between Jekyll and Hyde and perceptions of the Jack the Ripper murders (the Ripper was suspected of being a doctor) are strong, revealing the roots of a perception of masculinity and medicine as dangerous and corrupt, a perception that fuels much contemporary research in psychology, as well as in other disciplines.

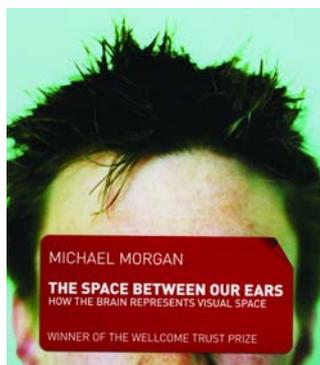
■ *Professor Stephen Frosh is in the Centre for Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck College, London.*



## From ear to out there

**T**HE Wellcome Trust Prize winning book by the distinguished psychophysicist Michael Morgan provides a fascinating overview of how our brains perceive what our eyes see. A vast amount of material is covered efficiently and effectively, using sources ranging from DIY vision experiments to insights gained from neuroscience. Morgan grounds his choice of scientific sources with a sense of their anecdotal, mythological, historical and philosophical contexts. This takes the reader on an often diversionary but nevertheless intriguing journey to the present-day understanding of visual perception. Such diversions will either reveal unforgivable gaps in your general knowledge (did you know that the walls of Tyrins on the edge of the Argolic Gulf are 7 metres thick?) or leave you wondering just how much space is left between Morgan's ears.

Nevertheless, it is precisely these fascinating and detailed contexts that give this book its edge. There is a real sense that Morgan is interested in the 'big picture', and while the ideas he presents are not new, they do feel fresh and, importantly, they feel sensible. Sensible that the brain-as-digital-computer metaphor is replaced with a brain-as-analogue-computer metaphor whereby different aspects of the world are not analysed and represented in numbers but rather in multiple and discrete maps; sensible in viewing the business of most maps as automated and unconscious; sensible in not pursuing the Holy Grail of consciousness in any particular map; sensible in not being overly seduced by the poor spatial and temporal resolution of current fMRI brain scans; and sensible in recognising the



### *The Space Between Our Ears: How the Brain Represents Visual Space*

MICHAEL MORGAN  
LONDON: WEIDENFELD & NICOLSON; 2003; Hb £20.00  
(ISBN 0 297 82970 X)

REVIEWED BY **Ed Symes**

significance of actions and our bodies when representing and experiencing physical space.

For readers already interested in visual perception (readers who may or may not know that Charles Darwin's cousin Francis Galton invented fingerprinting, whilst his grandfather Erasmus potentially invented the discotheque by suggesting the use of coloured glass to project light from oil lamps in time with music), much of the scientific content of this book may be familiar – visual illusions, neural maps, receptive fields, motion detection, binocularity, depth perception, shape-from-shading, frames of reference, face perception, prosopagnosia, colour perception, change blindness, and so on. Don't worry if such a list leaves you cold: Morgan introduces topics with such clarity and style that any newcomers to visual perception are in for a real treat.

■ *Dr Ed Symes is at the University of Plymouth.*

## Advance to go?

### *Advanced Psychology: Health Psychology*

MARK FORSHAW

### *Advanced Psychology: Contemporary Topics*

PETE HOUGHTON & DAVE ROBINSON

### *Advanced Psychology: Atypical Behaviour*

LYNDA TURNER

LONDON: HODDER & STOUGHTON; 2003; Pb £9.99 EACH  
(ISBN 0 34085 931 8; —932 6; —933 4)

Reviewed by **Christian Jarrett**

**B**Y catering specifically for students studying the AQA specification B syllabus, this series follows the current publishing trend of targeting exam board syllabuses, and in so doing helps redress the balance – most other available textbooks serve the more widely adopted AQA specification A.

Each slim volume covers one of the second year (A2) options available to students. The books pepper their text with 'evaluative comments', 'reflective and practical activities' and example studies, the latter giving students an important reminder of the science behind the ideas. These insertions will appeal to those averse to swathes of unbroken text, but they clutter the pages and break the authors' flow.

Unfortunately, the writing isn't always student-friendly. Take Forshaw's description of a study demonstrating 'that those parents who had a chronic health problem were more likely than those who had not to have children who see a doctor because they are experiencing abdominal pain'.

And some of the phrasing seems careless. Forshaw writes that 'health psychologists may treat the mild anxiety that a person experiences on first being told they have cancer', but then later on writes that telling a person they have cancer is usually extremely distressing for them. Indeed, one can imagine a health psychologist being called on to help someone suffering extreme distress, but not mild anxiety.

A strength of single-authored general textbooks is their coherence between topics, something lacking here. It seems misleading for Forshaw to describe the medical model as dualist without reference to contemporary medicine's efforts, not to ignore psychological phenomena, but to uncover their biological causes. In her book, Turner says that this belief in the physical causes of mental illness is called 'somatogenesis', yet she ignores Forshaw's coverage of the medical model, and vice versa.

I'm sure teachers will find the sample exam questions and activities useful, but when a general text like Gross (2001) covers all of these topics with clarity and coherence, I find it difficult to commend these books to students.

Gross, R. (2001). *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour* (4th edn). London: Hodder & Stoughton.

■ *Dr Christian Jarrett is Editor/Writer of the BPS Research Digest.*