
I approached this book with hope and a degree of optimism. Here was a book on applied behaviour analysis (ABA) and autism, written, not by Americans selling a method, but by academics in a British University and containing contributions from the parents themselves. Sadly, I was largely disappointed. There are good parts; the actual programme descriptions are clear and helpful, with enough detail to allow replication and illustrations of programmes not working, and how they may be adapted. The authors are also right to stress the importance of U.K. parents having access to local support, rather than relying on infrequent visits from “experts”. But there is also the familiar tirade against all other approaches and the insistence that ABA is not only the best but the only programme worth following. The research presented is almost exclusively positive to ABA, so that the result is a polemic rather than a reasoned debate.

It is hard to judge the audience, but I assume it is mainly parents, given that jargon is laboriously “translated” into English. That being the case, it is hard to see why the jargon is used in the first place, except perhaps to give an aura of “science”. The authors make much play of the “scientific” nature of ABA, and in terms of pre- and post-individual recording, and making decisions based on evidence, the point is well made. However, this is over-laboured with respect to parents, whom I have known to be discouraged from adopting what might otherwise have been a useful approach because of this need to record continually. Most parents are only too aware whether or not some programmes, such as toileting, are working and (apart from research needs) recording is not always essential. However, I would agree that all professionals should be encouraged (if not required) to record and monitor what they do, as is, of course, increasingly the case.

The real problem with the book is its polemical and defensive tone. No-one, as far as I am aware, denies that a behavioural approach can be useful in building up certain skills and in modifying behaviour. However, performance is not the same as learning and true learning involves cognitive gain and understanding. For example, training a child to look (as is often suggested in this book), without understanding how looking is used as a social signal, may just make the individual vulnerable — staring being interpreted as a sexual come-on or aggression. At some stages for some children, also, looking may preclude — staring being interpreted as a sexual come-on or aggression. At some stages for some children, also, looking may preclude.

If parents or others come to this book wanting to know what running an ABA home-based programme is like, I think they would get a reasonably good idea. It is also very optimistic, which is appropriate for encouraging effort in all concerned, but I have some worries about those for whom the promise of ever-onward progress does not materialise. Even the Young Autism project (Lovaas, 1987) produced very uneven results and we have no scientific evidence for the overall efficacy of current procedures that do not rely (as Lovaas did) on aversives. Case studies and common sense suggest that working intensively and systematically with young children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs) on ABA or other programmes does produce worthwhile benefits for all, but this book does nothing to allay the impression that all can achieve what the “best outcomes” achieve, and that is certainly not proven. The ethical concerns (which the authors dismiss) concern the lack of information about the individual predisposers for success and how parents can be supported not to blame themselves (or their children) if the promised outcomes do not happen for them.

An interest for academic readers of this journal is the presentation of the academic debate in this book. For all its claims to science, there is no sign of the scientific balance and caution which should be its hallmark. Many of the questions raised over ABA are empirical ones, not yet scientifically settled, yet they are presented as “attacks”. Straw men are set up in the form of specious comments rather than any attempt to address the real issues that have been raised. Some of this is intellectual nonsense, such as when an observation that ABA is criticised for not dealing with cognition or emotion is dealt with by simply redefining thinking as behaviour. In truth, one can “operationalise” thinking as any behaviour you choose, but that is playing Humpty Dumpy; you can say there is no need to consider intervening variables (which is at least an honourable intellectual position) but you cannot equate two quite separate levels of analysis. The argument in this book, then, fails as a scientific treatise. In fact it is reminiscent of a credo of belief, and the whole ABA movement appears increasingly more like a cult than a science: there is a charismatic leader, a doctrine, a failure to engage with criticisms, inquisition and denunciation of any who criticise (however mildly), misrepresentation of critics, and proseletysing exercises to gain converts and spread the word. However, perhaps that is more a suitable subject for social anthropology, rather than psychology.

Finally, may I pre-empt the assumption (made in the book) that all criticisms of ABA stem from ignorance. I was trained extensively in ABA at Masters’ level and worked alongside Lovaas workers in the 1970s, being a co-member of the Radical Behaviourists group at that time. I trained parents (as well as professionals) in ABA methods in home-based and school-based programmes (Jordan & Saunders, 1975; Kiernan, Jordan & Saunders, 1978; Saunders, Jordan & Kiernan, 1975) and then taught in sld and autism-specific schools, largely using these methods (although I began to supplement them with interactive and cognitive approaches, as I perceived their limitations). In my initial training of SEN teachers in the 1980s I included a module on ABA, but current time constraints in continuing professional development work only allow teaching about ABA (as well as other approaches), rather than instruction in it. I have been working with individuals with ASDs and their families for 32 years, so I also believe I have a reasonable understanding of autism and the difficulties faced by parents.

Rita Jordan
The topic considered in this book reflects the increasing interest in the possible role of developmental processes in the causal pathways leading to adult psychopathology. A volume that brought together the concepts and findings on this topic would be really valuable. This book, however, meets the need only partially. Because it comprises the papers given at the 1998 meeting of the American Psychopathological Association, inevitably it is constrained by what was presented there. It is strongest on the neurodevelopmental origins of schizophrenia, with particularly good chapters by Jane Tarrant and Peter Jones and by Colm McDonald, Paul Fearon, and Robin Murray. Both chapters are impressive in bringing out the concepts, the research issues to which they give rise, and the dilemmas that have still to be resolved. There is, unfortunately, substantial redundancy in that not only are similar issues dealt with in these two chapters but also they occupy a prominent part of three other chapters. Each brings something different to the topic but there is a distinct déjà-vu feeling reading the book.

Antisocial disorders are poorly dealt with despite the huge interest raised by the postulated differences between the so-called life-course persistent and adolescence-limited varieties. Similarly, substance abuse is largely ignored, apart from an interesting chapter on the prevention of alcoholism by George Vaillant. There are several worthwhile chapters on depression but suicide is not dealt with and the possible role of childhood adversities in increasing liability to depression in adult life is not discussed systematically.

Altogether, the book contains much of interest (including chapters on topics other than those mentioned here) but it does not provide a comprehensive treatment of the topic. Judith Rapoport does a good job in outlining the themes in her brief introduction but there is no bringing together of the concepts and findings at the end of the book. Perhaps that should not be expected of what is in essence the proceedings of a particular meeting, but this lack makes the book less useful than it could have been. There is sufficient of high value for the book to be recommended for any psychiatric library but its attraction for individual purchasers is less.

Michael Rutter


This book addresses the interesting and topical subject of adoption/permanent foster placement for ethnic minority children. It is largely based on a study of 297 children from either two ethnic minority parents or of mixed parenting, who had been placed for permanent placement 10 years ago. Chapter 1 briefly summarises general aspects of adoption and fostering, as well as race and identity, before reviewing the literature on the relatively limited evidence from the interface of these two areas.

Chapters 2, 5, and 6 refer to the general findings of the study, with frequent reference to ethnic minority issues. The chapters are well structured and easy to read. They all include qualitative interview material from children and their carers. Children’s perspectives, in particular, are very interesting and provide some insight into their experiences. These findings include children’s early histories, the characteristics of their new families, children and carers’ recollection of the initial placement period, and parenting-family relationships issues (the later would be particularly relevant to practitioners and the development of interventions).

Chapter 7 specifically describes children and carers’ perspectives of ethnicity and racism as well as their attitudes towards the placement policy. This is followed by chapters on the role of social work and other support services, long-term outcome data (8 to 15 years after the placement, at which point about 75% of the placements had been maintained) and identification of predictors, and a final summary and comment on the findings.

As the book predominantly discusses one major study, this could be viewed as a limitation. On the other hand, this has enabled the authors to maintain their focus and steer clear of discussion of beliefs in the lack of other evidence. In that respect, the material is very interesting, and of relevance to social workers and other practitioners, policy makers, and researchers in the field of fostering and adoption.

Panos Vostanis


This reprint of James Sully’s 1896 book is preceded by an excellent Introduction by Susan Sugarman and an equally useful Biographical Introduction by Elizabeth Valentine. Together these place Sully as an important founder of developmental psychology.

James Sully (1842–1923) was at the centre of intellectual life at the turn of the 19th century, acquainted with Galton, Darwin, William James, Binet, and Herbert Spencer, among others. As Grote Professor of Mind and Logic at University College London, he was instrumental in setting up the first major psychological laboratory in England, and called the first meeting of the British Psychological Society in 1901.

As an early developmental psychologist Sully was concerned with the natural history of early child development, examined by skilled observation and also culled from published writings with confirmatory evidence from individual anecdotes. He aimed to understand something of the child’s inner life, touching upon areas as diverse as child imagination, fear, mortality, the production of art, and language development, supplemented by extracts from his diary on the first 6 years of his son’s development. In these, his work anticipated much later interests in, for example, attachment and separation. Like the rest of us, Sully was of course a creature of his time, reflecting common attitudes in the immediate post-Darwinian era on the “lower” races and on the inferiority of women, which will jar the modern reader.

Recently a view was quoted to us that anything published more than 5 years ago was not worth looking at. Those who have this attitude will reject this book. But among the rest of us there will be many who have an interest in the struggles of early psychologists, whose contributions underlay subsequent work. This is an excellent slice of history.

Alan and Ann Clarke


Bateson and Martin have written a gem of a book; it provides much the best available nontechnical account of what the biology of psychological development is all about and it is a delight to read. There is a splendid lightness of touch in their writing style, with the individual meaning of ideas skilfully conveyed through references to novels and plays as well as through scientific findings. The book is particularly successful in conveying the research challenges and how they have been met. Far too many accounts of development present science as a set of established “facts”; Bateson and Martin give a wonderful account of what is known but they also provide a picture of science as a way of testing ideas and of seeking meaning in the data that emerge. The result is a gripping, and intensely interesting, read. The book is aimed at nonscientists...
but most scientists will find much to interest them, and clinicians will certainly gain a much better understanding of developmental processes. Their account is informed by evolutionary concepts, but without the dogma that sometimes goes with them; by animal studies, but with a proper appreciation of what is distinctive about humans; by biological research without the determinism that this sometimes implies; and by psychological studies of continuities and discontinuities in development.

Without going into the technical details, the book provides a clear and well-informed account of how genetic influences operate and how they interact with environmental factors. But the emphasis throughout is on how the mechanisms apply to development, how both continuities and change come about, and how there are both biological design features and individuality in the pathways followed. Attention is paid to secular changes as well as to individual differences. Particularly good accounts are given of both the concepts and findings on developmental programming and sensitive periods. As they note, the developmental processes that make certain kinds of learning easier at the beginning of a sensitive period are often linked to a phase of rapid and radical physical growth (of the brain but also of other bodily systems). However, they are also timed to correspond with changes in the ecology of the developing individual and they serve an adaptive function.

As they put it, genes and experience come together in the developmental kitchen to contribute to psychological growth; each person has the capacity to develop in several different ways: individual characteristics start early in life and exhibit substantial continuity but yet remain capable of transformation with the operation of both chance and choice. All of this is based on neural structure and function, but shaped by hormonal and chemical, as well as psychosocial, influences, with the whole deriving from a dynamic interplay between the organism and the environment, the organism changing in its features as it develops. At first sight, this might seem to imply mind-boggling complexity but Bateson and Martin argue persuasively that the basic developmental processes exhibit simplicity and regularity in the ways in which they give rise to unique individuals.

This is an outstandingly good book, deceptively easy reading but full of wisdom, the source of many insights into the process of development, giving also a riveting account of what developmental science is all about.

Michael Rutter


This well-written book addresses one of the most complex fields of language, i.e. the study of language in context in which socialisation skill, cognitive processes, and context cues play such a critical role in determining communicative effect. The authors begin by pointing out that the study of pragmatics has focused on three main areas: use of language in social interaction (including turn-taking and contextual constraints), aspects of meaning not recoverable from the linguistic expression (for instance, implied meaning and nonliteral language like idiom and irony), and connected discourse (narrative and story-telling). Each chapter deals with a particular aspect of pragmatics ranging from specific communicative acts, through discourse and narrative and pragmatic comprehension, to issues of cooperative communication. Each chapter discusses the nature of each component of pragmatics, problems of evaluation, phases of development in young normal children, abnormal development, and clinical issues, including those related to therapeutic intervention. Given that many of the concepts introduced are by necessity complex, the authors wisely illustrate with copious examples and clinical case studies.

Findings from recent research studies that have helped inform our understanding of this highly complex field of linguistic study are discussed. One content weakness of the book is that pragmatic disorders in children with autism and Asperger’s syndrome could have been more comprehensively discussed (they are addressed fairly briefly in the last chapter).

The book sets out to have been written mainly for students of linguistics and researchers in the field, together with practitioner speech and language therapists. In respect of its clinical applicability, the authors highlight the difficulties in assessing and evaluating pragmatic skills in young children. This stems partly from the fact that many theoretical notions in pragmatics (e.g. linguistic theories of cooperative communication and relevance theory) have been applied only minimally to studies of child language. Another major problem is that while many aspects of language are measurable to an acceptable degree by standardised tests, the social and context dependent nature of pragmatics means that it is very hard to develop standardised instruments that might meaningfully tap levels of language usage. Checklists such as Dorothy Bishop’s Children’s Communication Checklist provide one means of evaluating pragmatic skills. The authors also propose the use of linguistic methods to help determine whether a child might have a pragmatic impairment, e.g. using coding systems to analyse records of individual children’s conversational discourse. Not only is the assessment of pragmatic functioning a challenge for practitioners, but similarly methods of therapeutic intervention are still in the early stages of development. Speech and language therapists reading this book may be disappointed at the lack of specific detail given to suggested methods of intervention, which may limit its applicability to other than the most experienced therapists. Having said that, this book is a useful reference source for students of language and for practitioners who would welcome an update of research and knowledge in this challenging area of linguistics.

Valerie Muter


This book is one of the latest to provide a useful bridge between neurodevelopmental paediatrics and child mental health. It unashamedly takes the view that for the developmental difficulties in question, at least, the contribution of biological (usually genetic) factors is overwhelming and beyond doubt. This is not, therefore, a book for those wanting in-depth reviews of psychosocial influences on development. It does, however, remind us just how important and pervasive neurodevelopmental influences on emotion and behaviour are.

The book is organised into three sections covering basic principles and applications, disorders primarily affecting learning and behaviour (specific developmental delays, ADHD, Tourette’s, anxiety disorders, autism), and “disorders with broader-spectrum effects”. This last section contains 14 chapters reviewing a range of genetic conditions with recognised behavioural phenotypes. In line with the authors’ country of origin, the book has a primarily North American orientation. It also takes a neuropsychological perspective—one that usefully complements the growing number of psychiatric texts in this field.

There are useful chapters on neuropsychological assessment, overview of genetics in neurobehavioural disorders, and neuroimaging. However, the large number of contributors (40 in all) makes consistency in style and presentation problematic. Nonetheless the contributions are scholarly and well referenced, with comprehensive coverage of medical as well as developmental and psychological aspects.

This book may well prove too detailed for most child mental health professionals to purchase for themselves. It would, however, be a most useful addition to clinic and departmental libraries as an up-to-date reference volume on these important conditions. I shall also be recommending it to trainees as a good introduction to this range of developmental disorders and current knowledge and thinking about them.

Jeremy Turk