

Book reviews


“When I first read Eugen Bleuler’s account of schizophrenia I was enthralled”. This splendid opening sentence sets the tone for what is essentially an account of John Cutting’s personal odyssey through the literature on the psychology and the pathogenesis of schizophrenia. He covers a great deal of ground and cites some 1300 references, many of them verbatim and a high proportion from before 1950. He also writes very clearly, with frequent summary restatements of his argument and numerous cross references. Essentially his thesis is this: that Jaspers and the phenomenologists described the subjective phenomena of schizophrenia comprehensively and brilliantly, and were convinced that they were “understandable”, only to be explained as a secondary consequence of brain disease. Unfortunately, the phenomena in question (delusional perception, delusions of control, incongruity and flattening of affect and so on) were wholly different from those associated with all the forms of brain disease known at that time (general paralysis, Korsakoff’s psychosis, senile dementia and delirium). There was therefore an impasse; and this led to a long series of attempts, some crude and ingenuous, others elaborate and ingenious, but all ultimately futile, to account for schizophrenia in existential, psychodynamic or social terms. Only now that the subtle psychological deficits associated with section of the corpus callosum or of selective damage to one or other cerebral hemisphere are being revealed do we begin to possess a convincing brain disease model for schizophrenia. Whatever the cause or causes of this disorder, Cutting argues, they must be capable of producing localised brain damage, and he commits himself to the idea that selective damage to the right hemisphere is probably of central importance.

It is an interesting and intelligent book. It contains the best and the most comprehensive English language account of the attempts of pre-war European psychiatry to comprehend schizophrenia, and the central thesis is well argued. But is has two important shortcomings. Like most of the rest of us Dr Cutting does not speak German and so can only read texts that have been translated. There is therefore no mention of Janzarik’s concept of “dynamic insufficiency”, only a brief passing comment on Huber’s “uncharacteristic” or “basic”, symptoms, and the prognosis of schizophrenia is discussed without reference to Ciompi and Muller’s 37 year follow up of nearly 300 patients. Nor can his right hemisphere hypothesis be regarded as much more than a hunch. As yet, he can produce no convincing neuropathological or neuroradiological evidence in support, and as good a case could probably be made for the left hemisphere, the temporal lobes or even the diencephalon.

RE KENDALL.


Duplicate publication is widely regarded as sinful, and here we have a flagrant example. This volume reproduces 27 articles on neuropsychological topics that have recently appeared in Science. Nevertheless it is warmly welcome. Of course most keen students have access to library copies of Science and most serious neuroscientists are members of AAAS and receive their own copy. The advantages of this publication are two-fold. Firstly is the format. It is pleasant to carry and to read, and is substantially cheaper than xerox copies. Secondly, it provides editorial supervision that guides the reader into topics that may be unfamiliar.

What are these editorial choices? Principally the emphasis is on molecular biology. Not only is one of the four sections headed “Molecular Biology” but in the others (“Neuroplastcity”, “Somatic Transmission”, and “Behavior”) there is a very strong emphasis on molecular aspects.

Thus two chapters propose molecular mechanisms for learning, one involving cyclic AMP and protein kinases (Kandel and Schwartz) and one involving calcium activated proteinases and glutamate receptors (Lynch and Baudry). Clinicians who feel dispirited when higher cerebral functions are described in terms of synaptic changes observed in aplysia will be comforted by Roger Sperry’s 1982 Nobel oration on cerebral hemisphere disconnection, and will also appreciate the chapters on Alzheimer’s disease (by Coyle, Price and Delong) and on DNA markers for nervous system disorders (by Gusella and colleagues).

In terms of its key objective which is presumably to provide the young neuroscientist...