

Memory disorders in psychiatric practice

MEMORY DISORDERS IN PSYCHIATRIC PRACTICE. G.E. Berrios and J.R. Hodges (eds). Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000. No. of pages 520. Price £39.95 (Paperback).

This book is intended to be 'a practical reference for the clinician' according to the blurb, but it seems, to a cognitive psychologist, only to hit that mark intermittently. It is divided into three parts. In the first, there is supposed to be 'an overview of the historical and neurobiological accounts of memory and its disorders'. The second has relatively detailed accounts of the main memory syndromes seen in practice: the dementias, the amnesic syndrome, transient global amnesia and transient epileptic amnesia, lack of insight, memory and functional psychosis, and depressive pseudo-dementia. The section is topped and tailed by a description of procedures at the Cambridge Memory Clinic and a solid discussion of practical management of memory problems. The third part of the book reviews special topics: paramnesias, confabulations, flashback, traumatic and recovered memories and so on, ending with a couple of practical chapters of malingering and legal aspects of memory disorders.

As can be seen, the coverage is wide, the editors are knowledgeable and enthusiastic, so what could go wrong? In fact, the editors are involved in 10 of the 23 chapters, and herein lies some of the problem. They needed a third editor to do the editing! The two editors have as different style and approach as authors as you could imagine. The one practical, prescriptive and informative, the other historical, discursive with his six chapters spattered with entertaining and provocative footnotes. Well, in fact, they are end-notes which have been banished to the end of the book. And no other author has been allowed a single footnote! Is all of this a problem? Well, there is certainly stylistic variety and while it is entertaining to read about the nineteenth century debates on the nature of memory and while it is highly informative to read some of the early, detailed case reports, it isn't clear that Descartes has a role in a practical reference volume.

The editorial lapses are more serious. To start with the trivial, there is no author index and the topic index is spotty. How can a respectable academic house let such a thing through? As an example, Lamb and Prigatano have case reports on malingering in which they refer extensively to the DMT. This is not referred to in the index nor is it explicitly described in the text by those initials. It took ten minutes of detective work to figure out what this referred to. In general, the degree of editorially imposed cross-referencing was poor, and there was a lot of repetition and contradiction. For example, many of the authors accept a structural distinction between semantic memory and episodic memory (knowledge of single events) without question. On the other hand, De Renzi, in his chapter on the Amnesic Syndrome, says 'this claim is, however, open to question, since it confounds the nature of stimuli with the time of their acquisition'. The sparing of language may 'reflect the integrity of very remote memory and not the existence of a discreet memory domain' (p. 167). He cites as evidence the difficulty amnesics have with learning new words or remembering relatively recently acquired vocabulary. Within the organization of the book, there is no way in which this rather fundamental and contentious argument can be addressed.

There are issues of internal consistency as well. For example, De Renzi, in his conclusion, talks about 'the entity of focal retrograde amnesia which is now clearly established as a manifestation of brain disease' (p. 180). However, earlier in the chapter he refers to such patients 'in whom no apparent organic aetiology can be invoked' (p. 174).

Other problems have to do with the state of research and theory in memory and the way this was approached. Here, a firm hand in Part I would have been useful. What was needed was a framework, definitions, an update on cognitive models. In fact, in the whole book there is only one diagram, an information flow model of symptom-formation. As a result, some of the theoretical underpinning is breathtaking. 'A cognitive psychological viewpoint holds that memory formation involves encoding, storage and retrieval. In this field there is growing awareness that memory is not a unitary or monolithic entity but composed of separate interactive systems and subsystems' (p. 406). 'Growing awareness'!!—after 30 years! To give another more detailed example, an extensive historical survey of paramnesias says nothing about the extensive literature on source error. There was hope in a chapter by Andrew Mayes on 'The Neuropsychology of Memory' but he didn't have enough space and it wasn't really intended to be a reference for the other authors.

At a more sophisticated level the historical and philosophical expertise of Berrios could have benefited from more complex cognitive models. After some ingenious analysis he concludes: 'An

absolute distinction cannot yet be made between confabulating and lying' (p. 357). Work in this area needs to be framed in a functional model in which the concept of unconscious volition is intelligible. Then such distinctions might be more easily attainable.

Sensitivity to cognitive matters was most evident in the chapter by Coull and Sahakian on the 'Psycho Pharmacology of Memo'. They draw attention to the dangers of assuming that the effects of drugs on memory tasks necessarily have to do with memory rather than the range of other cognitive factors which enter into most tests.

The editors, in a chapter with Breen, aim to describe 'the origins, principles and organisation of the Cambridge Memory Clinic'. In fact, most of this chapter is a moderately detailed description of the procedures the patient will be put through. While the completeness of this multidisciplinary examination is impressive, including as it does cognitive assessment, it was disappointing that no outcome information was given. What are the weaknesses of the procedures? Have other clinics tried to use the same procedures and with what kind of success?

For the rest, I was impressed by Greene and Hodges who take the reader clearly through the clinical process of making a diagnosis of dementia. And insight in dementia is covered in some considerable and interesting detail. In addition, some of the more marginal areas, such as recovered memories, were covered evenly and informatively.

I was also moved by the way the authors, in general, treated the available neuroanatomical data with due caution. For example, there was a careful analysis eliminating all current hypotheses of the pathophysiology underlying transient global amnesia. And in several chapters the authors' views seemed to be that a neuroanatomical theory of something or other means that the particular problem has been observed in the presence of supposed malfunction of a particular part of the anatomy.

Finally, I was delighted to read about the Ganser syndrome and with the very practical warning 'The clinician must be aware that an misdiagnosed case of Ganser-type hysteria may result in law-suits, unnecessary surgical interventions, inappropriate use of minor and major tranquillizers, and social consequences for patient and family' (p. 452).

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A tradition attends to the applied: A review of Attention and Performance XVII

ATTENTION AND PERFORMANCE XVII: COGNITIVE REGULATION OF PERFORMANCE: INTERACTION OF THEORY AND APPLICATION. D. Gopher and A. Koriat (eds). MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1999. ISBN 0-262-07188-6. Price \$95.

Attention and Performance XVII, like its predecessors, is based on lectures and discussions presented at the meeting of the International Association for the Study of Attention and Performance. However, unlike its predecessors, the focus is on application. Gopher and Koriat begin the book with an introduction titled 'Bridging the gap between basic and applied research on the cognitive regulation of performance' and the chapter authors, for the most part, follow their lead. In this book, contemporary theories of cognitive processes are applied to human interactions with complex systems. The introductory chapter along with the final chapter provide a unifying structure for the book.

This book is divided into four sections: the presentation and representation of information, cognitive regulation of acquisition and performance, consciousness and behaviour, and special populations, and ageing and neurological disorders, some of which fit together better than others.

The first section of the book is 'Presentation and representation of information' and contains chapters on object classification (Biederman, Subramaniam, and Bar), navigation (Wickens), automatic and controlled attention (Shimojo, Hikosaka, and Miyauchi), haptic glance (Klatski and Lederman), display design (Flach), mental models (Moray), and models of planning and control (Long). This section provides a fairly cohesive view of information displays and some of the cognitive functions that are important in their interpretation.

From this section I found the chapter by Flach on display design interesting. Effective interfaces represent meaningful properties as directly as possible. The design rationale behind a configurational