

Book Reviews

I. E. Gordon

Theories of visual perception
Chichester : Wiley, 1989 pp. 273

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Summary. Gordon set out to write on visual perception mainly for advanced undergraduate students of psychology, for students in physiology and philosophy, and for lay people. He begins by explaining theories, and provides a classification scheme, from stimuli to responses, that allows the areas of concern of different theories to be identified. He devotes a chapter each to theories on Psychophysics, Gestalt, Brunswick's Probabilistic Functionalism, Neurophysiology, Empiricism (including Helmholtz and Gregory), Gibson's Ecological Optics, and Marr's computational theory (including parallel distributed processing models). Gordon describes each theory, then critically evaluates it. He concludes with a chapter in which he assesses the value of theories, and one on unsolved puzzles of perception.

Critique. There are at least two ways to structure a book about visual perception. The most common way is what I will call phenomenon-based: perception is divided up into categories, such as form, colour, motion, and depth. Within categories, the important phenomena are described (e.g., within depth we might get such phenomena as stereopsis, motion parallax, superimposition, subjective contours), along with the theories that bear on phenomena (e.g., a neurophysiological account of stereopsis, an ecological-optics account of motion parallax, and a Gestalt account of superimposition and subjective contours). The phenomenon-based approach disguises the fact that all knowledge is shaped by theory (e.g., even the division of perception into form, colour, motion and depth would be anathema to Gibson's Ecological Optics), and suggests to students that knowledge is split into apparently unrelated fragments.

The second approach to structuring a perception text is that taken by Gordon: to provide an explicitly theoretical account. I think this is an excellent idea, and Gordon has offered six

theories that cover most modern research, and one, Brunswick's Probabilistic Functionalism, that does not. Even the exhumation of Brunswick's writings was interesting in showing parallels with some of Gibson's thoughts. Gordon has attempted to be fair in evaluating all the theories, although it is easy to guess where his sympathies lie: Gregory's empiricism and Marr's computational theory.

Of course writing a theory-based book has risks, one of which is the risk to an impartial review by criticizing a reviewer's favourite theory! However, I do not need to debate with Gordon, as I regret that he falls short of his goals in at least four ways. First, Gordon apparently makes concessions to the phenomenon-based approach: digressions appear, not to illustrate a theory, but to cover some part of the usual perception syllabus. Most of the chapter on psychophysics is unconvincingly justified as a theory of perception, even though the separation of physics from psychology, fostered by Newton and formalized by Fechner, is probably one of the most profound splits to occur in science. Second, Gordon abandons his own classification scheme in dealing with Gibson and Marr, and criticizes neurophysiological accounts for confining themselves within parts of his classification scheme. Third, while the book always reads well, there are significant organizational departures from chapter to chapter. These give the impression that Gordon's own thinking is muddled. The usual structure consists of an introduction, biography, reportage, and evaluation. Yet after a comprehensive criticism of Gibson, we get two sections of second thoughts, including the relation of Gibson's ideas to the ecology (Green) movement. Marr receives minimal evaluation, followed by unrelated accounts of set effects in problem solving, and parallel distributed processing models. Finally, Gordon's reportage is occasionally inadequate: I got lost in the chapter on Brunswick, and much of the chapter on psychophysics is confused and weak.

The book also contains a disturbing number of error and irritants, perhaps suggesting a rush job. There are at least five figures which differ from the text's description. For example, the text implies that Figure 6.6 will depict the Penrose triangle, yet it shows the devil's tuning

fork. There are many typographical errors and broken type. I prefer anything I recommend to my students be a model of good writing and editorial (APA) style. Gordon shows most practices that I warn my students against, such as archaisms, sentences starting with *And* and *But*, sentences without verbs (e.g., "And so on"), and one-sentence paragraphs. There are many statements that need to be justified by citation. Citation and quotation depart from APA style. The index omits many key terms (e.g., depth, emergent properties, illusions).

Recommendation. I offer the list of shortcomings in the hope that Gordon will fix them in a second edition, rather than to discourage those considering this version. I was variously interested, amused, challenged and irritated by the book, but on the whole I enjoyed reading it. The book's level is appropriate for advanced undergraduate students of psychology, but too difficult for anyone without their grounding. I would not require students to buy this book, but might recommend that they read it. Certainly, it is a worthwhile book to have in any institutional library.

George Sweet

Photographs by Georg Ludwig

The Advantage of Being Useless: The Tao of the Counsellor

Palmerston North, NZ: Dunmore Press, 1989
pp. 96

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In China, a few centuries before Christ, two particularly enduring but very different schools of philosophy, Confucianism and Taoism, rose to eminence. Confucianism was a very practical and worldly system of philosophy, concerned primarily with proper etiquette and deportment, and correct action, demanding of an aspirant the learning of many rules of conduct. In contrast, Taoism was a mystical philosophy recommending that true strength often came from yielding or choosing inaction. The central concept of Taoism is the Tao: the impalpable, indescribable and un-namable basis of existence frequently but inadequately translated

into English as "The Way of Life". The Tao has been likened to water: often yielding, stationary, even stagnating, but inevitably continuing its path to the sea and irresistibly reshaping landscapes on the way. Taoist and Confucian beliefs were often treated as complementary and have both contributed much to the lifestyle and thinking of the Chinese through to modern times.

George Sweet's book is subtitled "The Tao of the Counsellor", which appears to invite thinking about the practice of counselling in terms of the philosophical stance of Confucianism and Taoism. The "Confucianism of the counsellor" might be seen as the development, learning, and diligent practice of the skills of counselling and the technology of intervention. The "Tao of the counsellor" relates to aspects of the counselling process which allow for a different kind of involvement for the counsellor than purely as a practitioner of "counselling etiquette". The development of the skills and technology are seen as vital but the success of counselling is seen as also related to other factors beyond the acquisition of the technology. This book records George Sweet's personal exploration and thinking about these other factors in his counselling.

The book consists of brief sections of text and accompanying photographs. The text primarily consists of George Sweet's musings on the Tao and on counselling interspersed with quotations mostly from ancient Zen or Tao gurus or modern counselling gurus. I found the text lively and readable and the quotations well chosen to illustrate relevant aspects of (often rather inaccessible) Taoist thought and to illustrate the relation of this thinking to counselling. The black and white photographs, by Georg Ludwig, are interesting, often startling, in their own right.

If you find that the words of ancient mystics make you break out in the giggles or hives then this may not be the book for you. If you are interested in an attractive and readable personal exploration of that part of the experience of counselling often subsumed under the title of "non-specific" (un-namable?) factors, factors which have a large effect on therapy outcome and doubtless on counsellor satisfaction as well, then this book may well be worth a look.

John H. Kunkel
Encounters with Great Psychologists
Toronto: Wall & Thompson, 1989 pp. 290

Reviewed by Julie Bunnell,
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Looking for a good book for bedtime reading? Something interesting and entertaining, but not too demanding? *Encounters with Great Psychologists* may be a suitable choice. In this book John Kunkel has borrowed the technique of docudrama from television and applied it to the lives of a dozen eminent psychologists. Each of the main characters is placed in a social setting with a group of companions, the scene is sketched, and the ensuing conversation is reported. In 1894, for example, we find William James at home in his study, discussing the nature of psychology with a group of graduate students. Later we meet Kurt Lewin on a train bound for Boston, about to establish the Research Centre for Group Dynamics at MIT.

The episodes are well researched, well crafted and convincing; certainly the author's goal of "introducing the human element" is successfully achieved. If they are taken in the spirit intended — as possible rather than actual occurrences — then this book could serve as a useful supplement to traditional history of psychology textbooks. Some caution is necessary, however, because the boundary between fact and fiction is fuzzy, and it can be difficult to distinguish between the actual and the imagined.

The blurring is compounded by the use of real events and people as the basis for fictional counterparts. In the encounter with John B. Watson, for instance, we are introduced to Louise Phillips, one of Watson's graduate students. Louise describes how she has eliminated a small boy's fear of rabbits, by gradually introducing a rabbit while the child snacked on milk and cookies. The work discussed is not merely plausible: it was conducted by Mary Cover Jones, and reported in 1924. This substitution of fiction for fact — and there may be other instances of which I am not aware — fails to give credit where it is due, and hence is misleading to the reader.

Selecting twelve individuals from the many who have contributed to the development of psychology is a difficult task. Some choices are obvious, others less so. Kunkel has imposed a degree of order by dividing the twelve into four groups: the founders, the experimentalists, the psychoanalysts, and the others. Two places go to Wilhelm Wundt and William James as the European and American founders, respectively, of psychology. Experimental psychology is represented by Watson, Skinner, and Bandura; this group could more properly be labelled the behaviorists. Psychoanalysis is very well covered, as Freud, Adler, Jung, and Binswanger are all included. Three "free spirits" complete the volume: Lewin, Piaget, and Maslow.

Any selection is open to criticism from readers who find their personal favourite omitted, but the important question is whether the sample fairly represents the population. I felt that psychoanalysis had been over-emphasized, relative to its importance in the history of psychology, and that the early functionalist period of psychology deserved to be included. But this is a relatively minor criticism, as episodes can be chosen by the reader to mesh with their own interests.

In the final chapter Kunkel has bravely attempted to arrive at some synthesis of the contributions of the twelve psychologists, by explicating common themes underlying their work. This chapter is less compelling than the encounters, but it does provide a sense of closure, and links the past to the present.

Encounters is an interesting book, although not an essential one. Its main strength is its unconventional approach to the subject matter, which may stimulate interest where other approaches do not. Browse through it at your leisure, and you may find new perspectives on some of psychology's great names.

Colleen Ward (Ed.)
Altered States of Consciousness and Mental Health: A Cross-Cultural Perspective.
 Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1989. pp. 316.

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This new volume in the *Cross-Cultural Research and Methodology* series deals with a fascinating phenomenon. There is a growing interest in the phenomenon of altered states of consciousness within general and clinical psychology, and clinical psychiatry. The nature and diversity of the phenomenon are known but not at all well understood. Even the descriptions usually given in standard text books are inadequate, as there is a variety of phenomena that can be brought under the term 'altered states of consciousness', and — more importantly — different perspectives are possible.

One major reason for the variety of the phenomenon is, of course, the variability of its manifestations in different cultures. Thus the area is a natural topic of interest for cross-cultural psychologists, just as much as it is for mental health professionals who are often called upon to deal with these cases in a clinical setting. Dr Ward's book has clear relevance to both these groups, and in addition to other groups of readers such as anthropologists.

The book is in four parts. The first discusses theoretical and methodological issues in the study of altered states of consciousness and mental health, and consists of two chapters. The second, focusing on altered states of consciousness and psychopathology, comprises four chapters. The third, which discusses therapeutic aspects, also has four chapters. The fourth part is entitled 'Alternative Perspectives on Altered States of Consciousness', and again consists of four chapters.

It is not possible, in a brief review like this, to comment on the individual chapters of the book. They offer a wide variety of ideas, theories, and — in some cases — a wealth of empirical data. The empirical chapters are worth reading in their own right. The main

value of the book, however, is a global one. What the book does is to open discussion and pave the way for more, and better, investigations of the phenomena of altered states of consciousness and their relation to mental health. The editor's own chapter on theoretical and methodological issues provides a broad and comprehensive framework for such study. If the points made in this well-argued chapter, and emphasised in the subsequent chapters, succeed in creating the impact that one hopes they will, then this volume will have made a lasting contribution to this challenging and complex field. In this sense, this book is essentially a beginning. And there are not too many books in contemporary psychology which can be described in this way.