

BOOK REVIEW

Autism: an introduction to psychological theory

*By Francesca Happé
UCL Press 1994*

This book is intended as an introduction to current thinking about autism. It aims to acquaint the reader with current research and thinking about autism in a concise and comprehensive way

In chapter 1, the author raises very important questions; how to explain autism at different levels, what is autism and what autism is not. The answers for such important questions are given in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 gives us a view of the history of autism. The views of 'Leo Kanner and Hans Asperger are presented and compared in a simplified manner. The author concluded that although the term autism was introduced by Kanner in 1945, the disorder itself has been there before that time.

In chapter 3, the author starts to answer the questions raised in the introduction. Autism is explained at the behavioral level. She concluded that it is the behavior of people with autism which can be observed and must be coped with directly. Therefore, it is clearly important to know about the behavioral nature of autism. Behavioral techniques for managing autism can be very effective. However, to gain insight into these behaviors and better understand their cause and nature, one has to know about aut-

ism at the biological and cognitive levels.

Chapter 4 attempts to explain autism at the biological level. The author discussed the evidences for organic and, the hereditary factors. The author reached the following conclusions ; where as much research has been conducted into the biological nature of autism, and much has been learnt about the genetics and predisposing medical conditions, relatively little has been conclusively determined regarding the actual brain area or pathway involved.

In chapter 5, the author presents an explanation of autism at the cognitive level. Some of the characteristics of a cognitive theory have been discussed. The idea that autistic persons suffer from a specific impairment in "mind reading" has been presented at some length, as an example of a cognitive theory which has exceptional explanatory power and specificity.

Chapter 6 reviews alternative cognitive theories of autism. All the theories discussed in this chapter as well as in the previous chapter are somewhat similar. Each postulates a core psychological deficit which results in the trial of handicaps in communication, socialization and imagination.

Chapter 7 explores the underlying cognitive capacities of the "talented minority" of autism subjects.

In chapter 8, the author discussed "Asperger's Syndrome". She concludes

that the label Asperger's Syndrome can be used to mark a subgroup of autism which is at the more able end of the spectrum in terms of social and communication handicaps.

In chapter 9, the nature of autism is explored through what it is not. This chapter has explored the borderlands of autism and reviewed certain concepts like, are we all a bit autistic, does autism merge into the continuum of normality. The next and final chapter looks to the future and describes a new theory of autism which may have new implications for our understanding of the relations between which is "normal" and which is "autistic".

This book serves a function not served by many text books, it gives a concise and readable introduction to current research and theory in the field of autism. Further readings are suggested in two ways inside this book; referenced in the text and suggested readings appearing at the end of each chapter. Throughout the book the discussion of points has been kept as brief as possible.

This book is recommended for those who are interested in child psychiatry, whether psychiatrists, psychologists or sociologists. Hopefully, one day this subject will be covered in our Egyptian literature written by our professors.

Reviewed H. Ramy