Prenatal Determinants of Behavior

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Psychiatry and the Community in 19th Century America

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Prenatal Determinants of Behavior

J. M. Joffe

Pergamon Press Ltd, New York, 1969, 366 pp, tbls, $13.00

In this volume, the author is neither theoretically nor pragmatically inclined. His interest, clearly stated, is in experimental design and biometrics. An experimental psychologist, Dr. Joffe has expanded his PhD thesis into this monograph. A description of his own work, carried out in an animal laboratory at the Bethlem Royal Hospital, is contained in the eighth chapter. Central to the organization of the book as a whole, this chapter brings together methodologic problems raised in earlier chapters. The author's experiment measured the effects of prenatal psychologic stress in separate genetic strains of rats on physical and behavioral traits of their offspring. Preconceptional and gestational stress were studied as separate variables, and the young were raised by foster parents to control for postnatal maternal influences on behavior. Much of the procedural description and analysis of the data will pass by all but the well trained and interested animal psychologist. One is left with the author's respect for the complicated interrelationships between maternal and fetal genotypes and for the specificity of behavioral effects to the treatment method used.

The body of this volume contains critical reviews of several hundred animal studies correlating environmental agents (irradiation, drugs, diet) administered during pregnancy with postnatal physical and behavioral measurements of the offspring. The author's comments are those of a sceptical statistician keeping a careful watch for unrecognized variables, premature generalizations, and fallacies of interpretation. Among charts, tables and graphs, the difference between subjects, procedures and controls from one study to another one is reminded of the linguistic problems in building a Tower of Babel.

The last third of the book is devoted to studies of human beings. Correlations between maternal complications of pregnancy—physiologic and mechanical—and childhood neuropsychiatric disorders abound. Disentangling variables that cannot be experimentally controlled is the researcher's headache. A strikingly consistent finding, however, is that low socioeconomic status is accompanied by a high perinatal mortality rate and incidence of prematurity. Although the relative contribution of poor maternal nutrition, poor prenatal care and other en-
Environmental stress factors remain unclear, the evidence is compelling for widespread preventive prenatal programs.

Only ten pages are devoted to maternal emotions and infant behavior. The author's selection of studies based on psychological tests, questionnaires and interviews does not take into account psychanalytically oriented research on early mother-child relationships. Omitted is mention of the profound effect a pregnant mother's unresolved conflicts about her own mother, her body, and her fetus have on the growing mother-infant unit.

The success of this book can best be measured by the laboratory researcher. It is not intended primarily for the clinician.

JOHN L. FRANK, MD

Psychiatry and the Community in 19th Century America

Ruth B. Caplan, in collaboration with Gerald Caplan

Basic Books, Inc, New York, 1969, 360 pp, $10.00

This book presents a chronicle of 19th century American psychiatry under various headings and with abundant use of primary sources. It is presented as a history of ideas, and the chapter headings represent the author's distillation of the cross currents and "ebb and flow" of such ideas. Psychiatric positions are not, however, presented against the background of social or philosophic attitudes in 19th century America; such is not within the scope of the volume.

As an historic reprise, this book will satisfy some inveterate readers of history. Rich in quotations from original sources on many of the 19th century issues in psychiatric management, it evokes, at times, a living sense of the past. This volume may help in fostering the use of the past to modify the present, though this is an exceedingly difficult task (as both patients and therapist know). The book illustrates a continuing community focus in American psychiatry. A general thrust in the direction of mental health for communities is not an emergent phenomenon of the past 15 years, but is shown in ideas present in the last century as well.

The author's father, a leading expert in the field, has written the final chapter reflecting on the present and future of community psychiatry, adding an adjuration to pay attention to its past.

THEODORE NADELSON, MD