

BOOK REVIEW

Irwin N. Perr,¹ M.D., J.D.

A Review of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology: Perspectives and Standards for Interdisciplinary Practice

REFERENCE: Curran, W. J., McGarry, A. L., and Shah, S. A., Eds., *Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology: Perspectives and Standards for Interdisciplinary Practice*, F. A. Davis, 1915 Arch St., Philadelphia, PA 19103, 1986, \$49.00, 549 pp.

Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology is an unusually good book covering a panorama of issues of interest to expert witnesses, current and potential, and to legal people. It is well edited; for example, the various chapters are cross-referenced so that the reader can pick up related data in other sections of the book.

The contributors are generally an obviously very competent group. The material reflects several approaches—the role and foundation of the expert, how to do it, legal standards, professional standards, and/or advisable professional practices. Some chapters are overviews and assume a didactic, tutorial stance. Readers already familiar with forensic science issues will probably derive little from this broad general approach. Some of the overviews are excellent in that they review in succinct fashion the evolution of the law or current practices. For example, Shah's review on criminal responsibility is a superb, concise article which contains a great deal of information.

Because of the nature of the conflicts in professional practice and in legal standards and procedure, some authors tend to promulgate a standard which far exceeds usual practices. While there is nothing wrong with this approach, some presentations tend to be dogmatic and infer that those who do not meet these suggested levels of practice are somehow delinquent or inferior.

I have started with the negative comments which are indeed minor. Many of the chapters are superb mini-reviews of their subjects or deal with discussions not readily available in most texts or both. Usually, edited books are ritualistically criticized for their choppy quality, variable quality, and lack of consistency. That is to be expected. An advantage of an edited text is the opportunity for contributions from people extremely knowledgeable in specific areas. The content of this book is so broad that no one person could easily write a book dealing with such diverse matters, and clearly many of the contributors are very learned and familiar with the literature and the practical aspects of their topic. Even a sophisticated forensic science expert will find much in this book in terms of data and referenced research to augment a previously acquired information base.

¹Professor of psychiatry, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School-UMDNJ, Piscataway, NJ 08854-5635.

Many of the topics are of necessity intellectual samplings. Although the book is directed at both psychiatrists and psychologists, the focus is practical, directed at such items as to how you should behave and what you should do. More detail on the use of actual psychological test data might have been helpful.

Some of the topics included are, in addition to the usual competency-responsibility issues, predictions of dangerousness, family violence, child custody, juvenile delinquency, sexually aggressive behavior, the sexually abused child, the rape victim and the rape experience, male genital exhibitionism, antisocial personality, and impulse control disorders.

Roth's contribution on correctional psychiatry is a well-constructed, knowledgeable essay of great import. Forensic science experts are frequently called upon to contribute to formulations of public policy—a role that may well be more meaningful than courtroom work. Roth's article provides a broad, practical discussion of an area with which many of the "experts" are not greatly familiar.

The chapter on civil law and psychiatric testimony could well have been greater in scope and presentation when one considers its import in our society (duly noted by Modlin).

Throughout the book there are numerous references to relevant research studies and clinical reports. Thus, this book is a good reference source and can provide a starting point for those interested in specific subjects. Many authors express their concern with standards, reasonable application of what is known, effective presentation, and so forth. Even so, the failures of the adversary system and ethical deficiencies of the experts remain a major, almost insoluble problem.

The authors are to be commended for the immense amount of data in this book. In these days of expensive books, a reader deserves more than a diffuse, dogmatic, superficial, self-promoting, and self-aggrandizing production. This to me is clearly not in that category; it is one of the very best books on forensic psychiatric and psychologic issues that I have seen. Not only the neophyte but also the sophisticated forensic professional (and all those in between) will find this book of great practical use. Those taking Boards should find it quite helpful. I consider myself a knowledgeable person, and yet I learned a great deal from reviewing this book.

To sum up, *Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology* is a successful, collaborative venture and a meritorious addition to the professional literature on behavioral sciences and the law.