

ing edifices of trade, technology and science of modern civilisation. How our ability to use them is organised in our brain is the subject of this erudite but eminently readable monograph which concludes that "numbers, like other mathematical objects, are mental constructions whose roots are to be found in the adaptation of the human brain to the regularities of the universe" (252).

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## Minds behind the brain. A history of the pioneers and their discoveries

Finger S. Oxford University Press: New York, 2000. Hb. 364 pp incl. index. IR£31.25.

This eminently readable and enjoyable volume, from the pen of a professor of psychology at Washington University, Missouri, brings us on a fascinating tour spanning thousands of years. We start our journey in ancient Egypt when we are introduced to the god-physician Imhotep. Ancient documents are scoured to improve our understanding of the very close relationship throughout history between medicine and religion. This is surely as it should be, since all our patients will die eventually. Our ancestors rarely questioned the continuity of existence across the threshold of *Thanatos*.

We move on to Hippocrates and the ancient Greeks. Hippocrates was one of the first physicians to decry demonology and to suggest that we think and feel with our brains, although this idea has not necessarily survived in common folklore, and indeed it died a death in medicine for centuries. Galen of Pergamon (130-200 approx.) dissected animals, extrapolated freely to humans, gave free reign to a hypertrophied ego and dominated medical thinking until unseated by Andreas Vesalius (1514- 1564), a professor of anatomy at Padua. Sadly, René Descartes (1596-1650) then went and placed the soul in the pineal

gland simply because it was a single, midline structure. He is also responsible for Cartesian dualism: mind and body are separate entities. Other characters encountered include Thomas Willis (of 'circle' fame), Luigi Galvani (galvanism), FJ Gall ('bumps on the head' fame – an early attempt at cerebral function localisation), Paul Broca (expressive dysphasia) Jean-Martin Charcot (one of Freud's teachers), and SR Cajal (who revealed the fine structure of the nervous system).

The journey continues on to modern times, ending with an interesting dissection of what makes for a successful pioneer in the neurosciences. This beautifully illustrated text is reasonably priced and can be recommended to all those who wish to know how our current knowledge appears set against the harsh mirror of Time.

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## Review of suicidology, 2000

Maris W et al, editors. Guilford Press: New York, 2000. Hb. 282 pp incl. index

American texts often use up too much space with the *curriculum vitae* of contributors and this book is no exception. There follows a rather unnecessary synopsis of each chapter. Much of this could have been captured in the preface. We are well into the book when the first chapter arrives. These minor caveats aside, the bulk of this up-to-date text is reasonably digestible. The most interesting chapters for me were those dealing with prepubertal children; culture; African Americans; and physician-assisted suicide. Americans are really going to have to do something about gun ownership. A point not made by any of the authors is the fact that the commonest reason given when applying for a gun is to protect the family. Unfortunately, the commonest victims are the wife and the self! An important read for everyone dealing with suicide.

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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### The development of psychotherapy in Northern Ireland

*Sir* – I was recently saddened to hear of the death of Professor George Fenton who was Professor of Psychiatry at Queen's University Belfast. What may not be widely known is that he had a significant role in the development of psychotherapy in the North of Ireland. In 1981 I was invited to a meeting with Professor George Fenton by Professor Joe Meehan of St Patrick's Hospital, which took place in the Library of St Patrick's Hospital, to discuss the development of psychotherapy training in the North of Ireland. I was invited to join in the training of registrars in psychotherapy and hence began almost 20 years of supervision of health professionals from the North of Ireland on a weekly basis, which is still continuing. The work that Professor George Fenton initiated has continued on to this day by Professor Roy McClland, his successor.

I have always admired the developments that led from Professor Fenton's efforts: the development of psychotherapy training at master's level in Queen's University Belfast and the Northern Ireland Institute of Human Relations, which recently celebrated its 10th anniversary at Stormont Castle on the 24th of November 2000. The early psychiatrists who developed training with Professor George Fenton were Lord John Alderdice and Dr Clare Adams, and the current state of psychotherapy training and services in the North of Ireland is due to all these people's efforts. It is somewhat ironic that Professor George Fenton's speciality was neuropsychiatry and one of his great contributions to the North of Ireland was to initiate psychoanalytic psychotherapy training there.

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