

works for psychosurgery appears to have been somewhat different, suggesting an interesting medical history research topic. For example, Victorian mental health authorities insisted that psychosurgery should not be regarded as a 'last resort' and time spent in a mental hospital was not regarded as particularly relevant.

Nonetheless, modern medicine has its own treatments of last resort, as recent debate over antiretroviral therapy for HIV-AIDS vividly demonstrates. Despite the contemporary focus on controlled clinical trials and exhaustive research protocols, medicine does not have a well-defined strategy for dealing with an impotent armamentarium. As Pressman demonstrates, when all else fails and the limits of medicine are exposed, new approaches inevitably involve a thoughtful gamble. Improving the odds of success remains a major challenge.

Ann Westmore
University of Melbourne

The Last of the Lunatics. By John Cawte. Melbourne University Press 1998. Pp. x + 175. \$24.95 paper.

The Last of the Lunatics is a pleasingly complex book that rewards careful reading and consideration. John Cawte has produced both a personal memoir and a brief history of post-war Australian psychiatry. At one level he constructs a simple 'then and now' divided by the availability of neuroleptic drugs (anti-psychotics or tranquillisers). In this strand of his narrative Cawte situates himself as one of the few surviving doctors who practised in the pre-neuroleptic era and knows the 'natural histories' of mental illnesses. He considers, and shares with us, some of the case notes he made during the early 1950s, before the 'vast advance in empiricism and technique', or in other terms, before 'psychiatrists could distribute drug lobotomies at will'.

Cawte does not want a return to the era of 'insanity at full pelt' or the 'then' before neuroleptics. But he does want to explore some of the more consistent features of psychiatry. He asks — should psychiatry be about diagnosis and drugs or humanism, empathy and psychotherapy? Should we overlook the virtues of temporary asylum or refuge just because we can suppress symptoms with medication cheaply in 'the community'? Cawte promotes, and seems to have practised, a

balanced, culturally sensitive psychiatry that includes physical medicine, chemotherapy, psychotherapy and sociotherapy. He suggests, explicitly and implicitly, that an infatuation with the latest drugs should be tempered by some 'older practices'.

The book contains some fascinating case studies, or stories, selected from the collected case records of the Enfield Receiving House in Adelaide, South Australia. The chosen case studies were the ones that leapt from the files and stimulated Cawte's memory of the patients involved. The case histories are interwoven with vignettes of hospital staff, literary references, historical material and the work of other psychiatrists and medical theorists. There is also an interesting chapter on Cawte's personal analysis with Dr Harry Southwood. Readers who know Cawte's work on Aboriginal health may be disappointed to find only passing reference to reasons or explanations for his interest in this area.

The principal images created and explored in this book are of the coincidence of physical and mental illness, the problems general practitioners have in dealing with serious or troublesome mental illness, the use of electro-convulsive therapy, deep sleep and sub-coma insulin therapy. Cawte does not flinch from describing the use of force of various sorts and freely refers to the role of psychiatrists as jailers. However, there is perhaps some reluctance to discuss times when necessary restraint crossed over into violence and abuse. Perhaps Cawte's most important and heartening image is that of the psychiatrist as a respectful, empathetic listener who can retain a belief in the possibility of recovery. For this type of psychiatrist each patient is both an individual and a member of a particular culture or society. For Cawte, the culture or society can be as much in need of healing as the patient.

In addition to the central themes there are many small uncut gems to be discovered in this book. My favourite was the test phrases used to assess clarity of speech at Enfield in the 1950s. Patients were asked to say 'British Constitution' and 'Royal Irish Constabulary'. These very imperial phrases were further evidence, along with the Constable print on Cawte's office wall and the analyst's couch, of the influence of England and Austria on Australian psychiatry. Cawte briefly notes these influences. In a chapter entitled 'A Pilgrimage' he describes in more detail the centrality of North American ideas and practices on Australian praxis.

As befits the writings of an emeritus professor, *The Last of the Lunatics* is didactic as well as interesting and challenging. Yet, ironically, Cawte seems to doubt that medical students, presumably a major part

of his intended audience for this book, have any time or inclination for imaginative and analytical print-based material. Cawte tells how in his hospital classes he dropped his allusions to literature and engaged his students with visual images of mental distress. Despite his comments on the 'glum illiteracy of the majority of students', Cawte is determined to push home his argument that understanding mental distress and illness does not stop with reading or, indeed, writing 'academic reviews of neuroleptic drugs'. In the epilogue to this book Cawte commends Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, published in 1651, as an exemplar that did not confine its focus 'to the drug infatuations of its day'.

This book entertains the casual reader while it prompts those with more commitment to the subject to explore a range of both contemporary and historical material. It is to be hoped that Cawte is wrong and that many medical students and practitioners read and explore this personal and public history of psychiatry.

Janice Chesters
Monash University

Eugenics and the Welfare State: Sterilization Policy in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland. Edited by Gunnar Broberg & Nils Roll-Hansen. Michigan State University 1996. Pp. ix + 272. c. \$100 cloth.

In the introduction to this collection of essays, Gunnar Broberg writes of Swedish society in the first half of this century that it was, 'a country with rational, organized education, light veneer or steel furniture, kindergartens, cleanliness and order. That is how Sweden looked, at least from a distance.' (p. 5). Whilst differences existed between the nations that made up Scandinavia — Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark — Broberg emphasizes their shared tradition of race, culture and, in the period under study, modern, progressive liberal democratic social structures. He writes that

in the eyes of the rest of the world, Scandinavia probably still represents peace and prosperity. Its welfare program continued and accelerated after the war. People live longer and are wealthier than elsewhere. Nordic countries have come to stand for quality. (p. 7)