

Preface

Cognitive neurology, or behavioural neurology as it is known in the United States, is a curious sub-discipline of neurology. There have been major schools of cognitive neurology, most notably those of Germany, and Northern Italy since the war. Stefano Cappa, the author of this book, issues from that highly productive school that combined good neurological clinical practice with the theoretical and practical approaches of neuropsychology. In the United Kingdom the discipline lay largely in the province of neuropsychologists. It is difficult to be sure why there was this difference in tradition. Some claim that British neurologists, with their inbred empiricism, preferred to concentrate on diseases of the peripheral nervous system where electrophysiological techniques allowed quantitation and objective measurements. Interestingly it was neuropsychologists like Elizabeth Warrington who applied the same principles of empiricism to the collection of neuropsychological data and established many of the scientific underpinnings of the current practice of cognitive neurology. These principles were taken up and developed rapidly in neurology by the Italian school. The school also distinguished itself by maintaining a close cooperation with neuropsychologists and basic neuroscientists, thus enriching theoretical advances in the field and rapid application to patients.

The last twenty years have seen a methodological revolution in the study of disorders of cognition and behaviour. The introduction of the non-invasive brain imaging techniques, most notably PET and fMRI, have led to dramatic advances. The reanalysis of theoretical models of brain function in their biological context has been extraordinarily productive in a wide variety of cognitive fields including language, attention, perception and others. In turn this reappraisal has had a major impact on the understanding of neurological syndromes such as the apraxias. There has also been an increase in the awareness of the fact that the adult brain is capable of considerable plastic reorganisation. The therapeutic implications of these observations have been seminal to the design of new therapeutic strategies.

This book is unique. It is a single author text that introduces this brave new discipline at a very burgeoning phase in its development. Its structure is ideal for the student as it moves from theoretical consideration

of the neuroscience underpinning the medical art, to a clear description of the techniques of assessment. That is followed by a description of the syndromes of cognitive dysfunction. The description of these syndromes is often placed within the context of the diseases in which they occur. Example clinical scenarios serve to illustrate and enliven the text enormously. Finally, therapeutics is not forgotten in negation of the idea that therapeutic nihilism is the prevailing tradition in neurology in general. Though the therapeutic section is relatively short it conveys a sense of the excitement of translating new knowledge into patient care. Stefano Cappa is singularly appropriate as an author of such a text. He has been a practicing clinician in a busy university hospital. He has maintained a high scientific profile in neuropsychology with influential work in disorders of language and finally he has embraced the modern techniques of functional imaging to become an expert in their use. His recent appointment to a new prestigious chair at the Hospital San Raffaele in Milan University is an explicit signal of the very high regard in which he is held by his community. He writes lucidly, simply and with exemplary logic. The text will undoubtedly serve its purpose as an introduction to cognitive neurology to all neurology residents and practitioners interested in this challenging field.

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