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Book Review

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Book Reviews

*Reviewed by Stanley B. Kent**

UNDERSTANDING LAW AND PSYCHIATRY, by Melvin L. Selzer, M.D., Edited by Stephen A. Glasser, Practising Law Institute, New York City, New York, 380 pp. 1969.

The library of legal-psychiatric books and articles, already enormous, is now further enlarged by the publication of an anthology under the title "Understanding Law and Psychiatry." A few of the essays were written especially for this book by Dr. Melvin L. Selzer, the compiler, but the greater number are reprints from legal and psychiatric journals and from law reviews (including this one).

The direct relevancy of psychiatry to the law no longer requires argument. Judges, lawyers, and a growing segment of the public now concede that psychiatric findings are often appropriately dispositive of cases and it is doubtful if judges will now exclude psychiatric testimony in any type of case. The special value of this book is that although it plows through some well worn ruts (alcoholism, criminal responsibility, and mental commitment), it touches on some substantive legal fields with which psychiatry is not normally associated. Thus, included are a detailed article entitled "Intent and Psychiatric Disturbances in Tax Fraud Cases" and another on "Psychic Disabilities Following Trauma."

As might be expected from any study which seeks to blend the two disciplines of law and psychiatry, emphasis is upon those fields in which psychiatry has won widest acceptance and is most frequently utilized, and these, of course, are the criminal law and the law of incompetency as it relates to wills and commitments. But while psychiatry's dominion in these areas is no longer questioned, serious and urgent problems persist and these are candidly examined in several articles. If there is one theme that constantly recurs, it is the psychiatrist's reluctance to cast his opinion into the form that will render it admissible into evidence. Yet opinions that do not meet evidentiary tests of admissibility are useless to the lawyer. The conflict between the psychiatrist's scientific integrity and the rigidity of the rules of evidence is as old as the use or attempted use of psychiatric testimony and we seem no closer to a resolution of the conflict. It is encouraging, as these articles make clear, that both lawyers and psychiatrists are aware of the conflict and are addressing themselves to it.

Included in this book is a classification of various types of mental illness with a list of symptoms which constitute each particular syndrome. This is an interesting exercise, but for precisely the same rea-

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son that a lawyer would counsel a client not to depend on law for the layman books, this "checklist" should not be relied on too heavily. This section seems to be nothing more than padding and not characteristic of the careful scholarship that is otherwise found in this volume.

In general, "Understanding Law and Psychiatry" is a useful handbook and readable to an extent not generally true of psychiatric works.

*Reviewed by Arnold H. Sutin**

NEIGHBORHOOD GOVERNMENT: THE LOCAL FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL LIFE, by Milton Kotler. Bobbs-Merrill Co., Indianapolis and New York (1969) 105 pp.

While our politicians, in their frantic counter-responses to urban and social deterioration continue to bow down in besotted worship to the fetish of more and better social programs and services, largely centrally administered, one finds little in these many and varied *ad hoc* legislative contrivances, either singularly or collectively, that has proven to be anything more than a palliative in the urban crisis.

The accelerated increase in recent years of violence and social alienation within the inner-city are believed by many to be but the spasms and death throes of this dying social organism. Continued tinkering with externals, as many of these programs do, with this or that symptom of organic social disease, may defer but not reverse what appears to be the ultimate or inevitable dissolution.

Yet there are the voices of men and women, urbanologists, theoretical and practical, whose radical rhetoric persist in bringing some hope to the general malaise. Milton Kotler is one such voice. In his short volume, *Neighborhood Government: The Local Foundations of Political Life*, he has sought to traverse the chasm between futile political promises of urban salvation on the one hand and substantial realization on the other in one great leap vis-a-vis his theme and controlling principle, namely, *political autonomy for urban neighborhoods*.

Kotler begins his political credo—for that is what it is—by tracing the nature and historical foundations of the "neighborhood" and its later absorption as an inconsequential political subdivision of the greater city. In its pristine state, the "neighborhood" is a definite geographical and political sovereignty, perhaps a small town or village replete with tradition and history; then comes the sweep of the 19th century industrialization bringing in its wake the enormous mushrooming of urban centers through their insatiable political appetite for expansion. The original city now emerges as the political nucleus of the so-called "Downtown"

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