

# Inventing an enemy

Keith Stanovich has written a brilliant book. But it's not this one. His brilliant book is *How to Think Straight About Psychology*, now in its ninth edition. It is probably the best book about rational thinking in psychology (and elsewhere) I have ever read. It had me nodding with agreement constantly, and occasionally

punching the air in response to such well-made points. I turn down the top corners of pages when there's something especially I want to note down later. *How to Think Straight About Psychology* almost has more pages with folded corners than not.

This new book by Stanovich is also good. It has a lot of interesting material about rational thinking and how it is important in human life. Along the way there are very nice and novel examples and illustrations of rational thinking, and how badly supposedly intelligent people do in this field. Eventually, the book builds to a taxonomy of thinking errors that are mapped to a box-and-arrow model of mind. Readers will also find some fairly usual suspects – how our evolutionary history still has an influence over us; the fact that we don't do formal reasoning very well; the usual Kahneman and Tversky stuff; 'myside' bias; Wittgenstein's

cute puzzle about the string round the equator; and President Bush, who continues to do service in providing examples of lapses from rationality. Overall, then, the reader will be entertained and well informed about human rationality – and its failures in the intelligent – in a book that doesn't exactly do what it says on the cover.

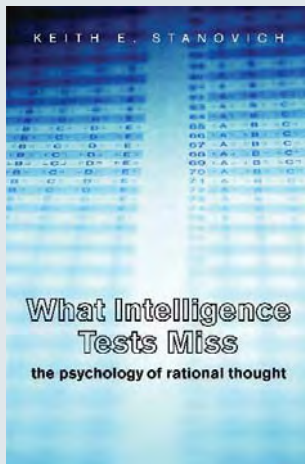
The writing is very good; somewhere between a cognitive psychology textbook and *Freakonomics*. The book does a good job of showing that rationality is important; it also, to something of a lesser extent, shows that rationality is not always strongly associated with conventionally measured intelligence. However, the titling of the book as a sort of anti-IQ tract that does it a disservice. For fairly long periods we don't hear anything about intelligence tests; nor do we need to. And it would be tiresome for the writer to recount the correlation between intelligence and the assessment of rational thinking that is being discussed. Some things about intelligence don't quite emerge; for example, the fact that fluid and crystallised intelligence are so highly correlated, and the many important things in life with which measured intelligence is associated: education, occupation, health, and so forth.

On the cover the subtitle 'the psychology of rational thought' is small and lower case, whereas 'What Intelligence Tests Miss' is far larger and with capitalised first letters. It's unfortunate: this is not an IQ-bashing book. It's a good read on human thinking that needn't have invented an enemy in order to get noticed.

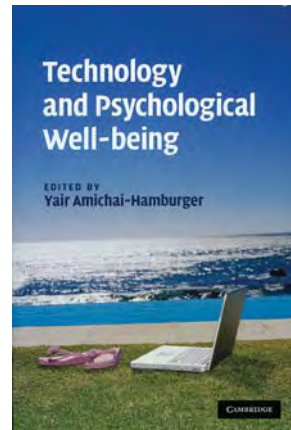
Yale University Press; 2009; Hb £20.00

Reviewed by Ian J. Deary

who is Professor of Differential Psychology, University of Edinburgh



What Intelligence Tests Miss: The Psychology of Rational Thought  
Keith E. Stanovich



## A click too far?

Technology and Psychological Well-Being  
Yair Amichai-Hamburger (Ed.)

A mix of international contributors have united for what is claimed as the first wide-ranging appraisal of technology's impact on our psychological well-being. Taking cues from the field of hedonomics, the book suggests ways to ensure that technology enhances our lives and psychological well-being.

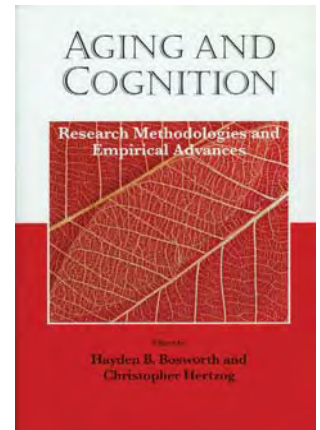
There is a limit to the psychological benefits technology can bring, and then negative effects can appear. This is most pertinent at work, where technology affects a worker's locus of control and relationships. The effects of teleworking on well-being aren't always positive. At home, the modern telecommuter can 'meet' others online, with the advantages of anonymity and irrelevance of physicality. If ill, medical technology can help, and even hinder, her recovery. The incongruous penultimate chapter argues against the view that women play a secondary role in technology and that women's contribution is greater.

The internet, mobiles, social networking, laptops: Are they life-enhancing tools or is information overload turning us all into stressed, but well-connected, workaholics? It's a serious topic and the book carries a serious price tag. Ironically, the book is also available in e-book format.

Cambridge University Press; 2009; Hb £50.00

Reviewed by Fidelma Butler

who is an occupational psychologist in training



## Clear and accessible

Aging and Cognition  
Hayden B. Bosworth & Christopher Hertzog (Eds.)

*Aging and Cognition* offers a series of chapters collated in homage to K. Warner Schaie, whose famous Seattle Longitudinal Study (originally founded from his PhD work in 1956) continues to yield important findings into cognitive changes over time. This book forms one volume in a series entitled the 'APA Decade of Behaviour', which aims to showcase some of the most important topics in psychological science. Given the background to this publication, it is not surprising that the book offers readers with a comprehensive overview of the effects of ageing on cognition in a variety of social and psychological contexts.

In line with Schaie's longitudinal research findings, this book offers contemporary insights into the malleability of cognitive ability in old age, turning away from the stereotypical view of cognitive decline in old age. In an ageing society, the importance of gerontology research is paramount. The way in which this book draws together key research findings and the applications of these findings offers a clear and accessible read for both researchers and students concerned with ageing and cognition.

APA Books; 2009; Hb £56.50

Reviewed by Helen Henshaw  
who is a Research Fellow, at the National Biomedical Research Unit in Hearing, University of Nottingham

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