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To mark the retirement of professor Sir Michael Rutter from the MRC Child Psychiatry Unit in 1998, both the Association for Child Psychology and Psychiatry and the Royal College of Psychiatrists held academic meetings in his honour. Arising from these meetings two volumes have been published: The Festschrift reviewed here and a companion volume in which some of Professor Rutter’s classic papers are reproduced.

In the past 35 years Professor Sir Michael Rutter has been the single most influential figure in child and adolescent psychiatry and developmental psychopathology. He has published dozens of books and hundreds of academic articles on a wide range of topics. His writings have been marked by a rigorous scientific approach to investigating childhood difficulties and a commitment to testing the validity of theories about developmental problems through empirical research.

The Festschrift contains 10 papers, 2 of which are written by Professor Rutter himself and eight are written by colleagues. Each of these papers address a field which has been of central concern to Rutter’s work over the past four decades. The volume opens with an informative paper by Barbara Maugham in which she summarizes lessons from longitudinal research on childhood psychological problems. There are chapters by Jim Stevenson on the significance of genetic variation on abnormal development; by Dante Cicchetti on developmental
psychopathology; by Eric Taylor on developmental neuropsychiatry; by Fred Volkmar on autism; by David Shaffer on classification of psychological problems; and by Lee Robbins on conduct disorder. One of the papers by Rutter focuses on the interplay between research and clinical work in dealing with childhood autism. The other is an exploration of evidence for the role of psychosocial adversity in the development of child psychopathology. The volume closes with a personal essay by Ann Le Couteur in which she highlights some of the major achievements of Professor Sir Michael Rutter across his career.

All of the papers in this Festschrift are clearly written authoritative reviews of the topics they address. Each may be read independently by readers wanting a quick overview of a particular problem. Collectively these essays underline the extraordinary contribution which Professor Sir Michael Rutter has made to the field of child and adolescent psychiatry over the last half a century.

This volume should be an essential purchase for all libraries servicing child and adolescent mental health professionals and I would also recommend that personal copies be bought by those involved in training in child and adolescent mental health professionals. This volume would be of interest to academic developmental psychologists and all involved in specialist education.

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