

Book Reviews

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Mental Health in Ireland: Policy, Practice and Law. Edited by Agnes Higgins and Shari McDaid (298pp.; ISBN 978 07171 5980 2). Gill & MacMillan: Dublin, 2014.

In his foreword to *Mental Health in Ireland: Policy, Practice and Law*, Ivor Browne surmises that the psychiatric profession, 'seeking to distinguish contemporary practice from the barbarism of the past ... found refuge in a reductionist, mechanistic conception of the human being'. The shortcomings of psychiatrists and the mental health system they control are critically scrutinised throughout this searching new collection of essays edited by Agnes Higgins and Shari McDaid. Indeed, many of the essays question the fundamental beliefs that underpin the delivery of mental health care in Ireland today.

The book is divided into three sections, the first of which deals primarily with historical aspects of mental health care delivery in Ireland. Damien Brennan in his treatise on institutionalisation and deinstitutionalisation argues that psychiatric hospitals became a dumping ground for social misfits and that their economic importance to communities sustained them long after it was obvious that they were not fit for purpose. Similarly, Brennan sees deinstitutionalisation as having been driven by social, political and economic factors. He discounts the severe mental illnesses that many of those who were institutionalised suffered and gives little credit to advances in treatment, tightening of diagnostic standards and more enlightened mental health legislation in their subsequent release. In the subsequent chapter, Liam Mac Gabhann rails against psychiatric hegemony and looks forward to empowered service user movements pushing back the professions. Shari McDaid follows this with an essay highlighting the degree to which those with 'mental health conditions' continue to be excluded from full participation in society and criticises mental health services for engineering the reinstitutionalisation, segregation and marginalisation of these people.

The second section that examines developments in the field, starts off with Agnes Higgins and Paddy McGowan describing the many challenges in reorienting mental health service delivery towards recovery. They recognise the risk that the language of recovery will be assimilated without accompanying meaningful changes in the delivery of care. They rightly draw attention to the tightrope that psychiatrists walk between a government policy that espouses recovery

and a legal framework and public discourse that holds them responsible for preventing adverse outcomes. Liz Brosnan then traces the interesting history of Irish mental health service use/survivor movement and looks forward to a day when professionals are on tap rather than on top. Mike Watts in his piece on mutual help seeks a similar change, to a system in which non-professionals have a much larger role.

The editors combine forces for an interesting essay entitled 'The paradoxical role of families in mental health'. In their view the burden on families and carers arises from 'their relative's engagement with mental health services' rather than directly resulting from their mental health condition. An extremely informative chapter on the mental health needs of minority ethnic communities in Ireland follows. Shane Butler then recounts the historical flip-flopping and continued disparities in Irish approaches to the treatment of alcohol disorders. The second section is rounded off by a useful chapter on the Irish criminal justice system's many interfaces with people experiencing mental health problems.

The final section looks at future of mental health care delivery in Ireland. Brendan Kennelly valiantly explores the question of how to redress the current inequities in mental health service provision. Mary Keys examines current Irish mental health policy and law in relation to human rights provisions and finds a need to move away from medically determined best interests towards individual choice and autonomy. This is followed by a thoughtful chapter on risk that points out the inherent contradiction between society's pre-occupation with risk reduction and the concept of recovery. David Healy then details the profit-driven practices of the pharmaceutical industry as new drugs are promoted despite minimal added value and without due regard to their adverse effects. He argues that the RCT and the prescription pad, although originally conceived of as safety measures, have been subverted to facilitate pharmaceutical sales. The editors conclude that 'real collaboration, partnership and recovery orientation will only happen when the institution of psychiatry is ready to recognise the damaging effect of current models of care on service users, family supporters and indeed practitioners'.

There is much to be recommended in this handsomely produced collection of essays. Each chapter is followed by provocative questions for discussion and debate and I certainly found the book's critical stance to be intellectually stimulating. To my mind, the book's title should have been chosen to give some suggestion as to the uniformly censorious nature of the material therein. Many of the pieces included are excellent and contain important new material. However, some important topics such as drug addiction, psychological

treatments, or child and adolescent mental health are not covered. The book would have been stronger in my view if the editors had included a broader church of opinion. Sociologically oriented academics dominate the discourse and there is very little room for psychiatrists, psychologists or others working at the coalface. Notwithstanding these criticisms, this book is an extremely valuable addition to the mental health literature.

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The Trauma of Everyday Life. Edited by Mark Epstein (256pp.; ISBN 9781594205132). The Penguin Press: London, 2013.

Recent years have seen increased interest in the relationship between Buddhist thought and Western psychotherapeutic endeavours. A remarkable amount of this interest has focussed on the practice of mindfulness that has now become an ubiquitous feature of self-help manuals and public discourse in Ireland and elsewhere. This has been accompanied by a genuine renewal of academic interest in the place of Buddhism in Ireland, as evidenced by Laurence Cox's remarkable and revelatory book, *Buddhism and Ireland: From the Celts to the Counter-Culture and Beyond* (Equinox, 2013).

From a therapeutic perspective, this renewal of interest in mindfulness has also been accompanied by some extremely perceptive writings about Buddhism, psychotherapy and psychiatry. One of the key authors in this area is Dr Mark Epstein, an American psychiatrist, whose most recent book, *The Trauma of Everyday Life*, was published in 2013 by the Penguin Press (New York).

As its title suggests, *The Trauma of Everyday Life* is concerned primarily with human responses to trauma, and proposes that the inevitable traumas of life can be used in a way that promotes human growth and ever deeper understandings of change. Epstein proposes that viewing trauma in this fashion connects us with the world in a very profound way. He supports this idea by, among other arguments, presenting a psychobiography or re-interpretation of the life of Buddha, emphasising the early death of Buddha's mother as a formative traumatic experience for Buddha.

Epstein argues that Buddha's loss of his mother was influential in shaping the memories and insights that

led ultimately to 'the foundation of his Middle Path, the route he found between sensory indulgence on the one hand and self-loathing on the other' (p. 116). In developing his argument, Epstein draws skilfully on the insights of Donald Winnicott (1896–1971) the English paediatrician and psychoanalyst best known for his contributions to object relations theory. In traditional psychoanalytic fashion, Epstein even goes on to analyse Buddha's dreams, in which, according to Epstein, Buddha let 'the imagery of the mother move from implicit to narrative memory' thus freeing up his own 'implicit relational capacities' (p. 173). This, in essence, is the kernel of Epstein's argument: that the inevitable traumas of life can be exposed and, if we stop trying to 'resist, deny, overcome or even indulge' them (p. 211), our lives can be changed in a profound and positive way.

The Trauma of Everyday Life

Mark Epstein is very well placed to write a book such as this. He received his undergraduate and medical degrees from Harvard University and is currently in private psychiatric practice in New York City. Epstein is already the author of several well-received books on the interface between Buddhism and psychotherapy including *Thoughts Without a Thinker: Psychotherapy From a Buddhist Perspective*, *Going on Being: Buddhism and the Way of Change*, *Open to Desire: The Truth About What the Buddha Taught* and *Going to Pieces Without Falling Apart: A Buddhist Perspective On Wholeness*.

Against this backdrop, it is no surprise that *The Trauma of Everyday Life* arrives festooned with praise from various writers, academics and Buddhist luminaries. Daniel Goleman, author of *Emotional Intelligence*, writes that 'this daring psychobiography of the Buddha divines in tales of his life the sources of his early emotional pain, and finds in the Buddha's methods a balm for the human psyche. In a breath-taking display of the therapeutic art, Epstein does ingenious psychodynamic detective work, deducing what ailed the Buddha, and why his remedies work so well'.

Siddhartha Mukherjee, author of *The Emperor of All Maladies*, describes the book as 'a rare and remarkable achievement' that 'fuses deep scholarship with deep tenderness – in the spirit of the greatest Buddhist teachers'. Robert A.F. Thurman, Jey Tsong Khapa Professor of Buddhist Studies at Columbia University and author of *Essential Tibetan Buddhism*, goes even further: 'Buddha would have loved it – I love it! I recommend it – a transforming pleasure'!

Psychotherapy without the self

Consistent with these accolades, *The Trauma of Everyday Life* is indeed very well informed, smoothly written and