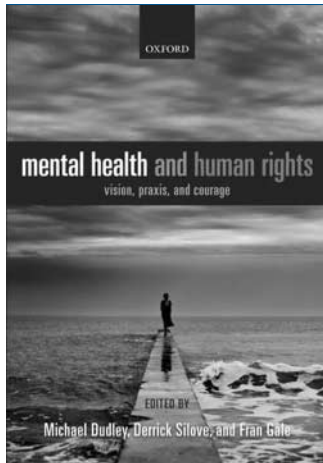


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



Mental Health and Human Rights: Vision, Praxis, and Courage

Edited by Michael Dudley,
Derrick Silove & Fran Gale.
Oxford University Press. 2012.
£75.00 (hb). 736 pp.
ISBN: 9780199213962

International, regional and domestic human rights comprise laws which safeguard entitlements owned by everyone by dint of their existence. Inevitably, it is the rights of the disempowered rather than the strong that most need protection – among whose ranks exists none more important globally than people with a mental disorder. The book's editors claim that the disciplines of human rights and mental health have emerged as converging fields of research and practice that intersect in multiple and complex ways. With what success does this volume chronicle this nexus?

This textbook is a *tour de force* in its ambition and achievement. Into its four primary sections – conceptual issues, psychiatry and abuses, vulnerable groups, and protection of mental health – are crammed 38 chapters written by almost 100 leaders in the field of psychiatry, behavioural sciences, ethics, philosophy and human rights. Each chapter comprises a referenced exposition focused on a different aspect of either human rights or of psychiatry, and of their mutual relationship.

The multiplicity of chapters reflects the heterogeneity of injustices perpetrated. Inevitably, because of the interlinking nature of related issues within human rights, and within psychiatry, some of the subject matter of one chapter can overlap with content from another. Yet this never creates a sense of repetition; rather, the fresh angle provided by an alternative perspective or author group illuminates understanding of often conceptually complex issues.

The book is impressively comprehensive, demonstrates appropriately rigorous scholarship, and yet remains lucid and interesting. I have learnt a great deal from it, not least that the scale of the historically cumulative crime committed against people with a mental disorder amounts notionally, if not yet jurisprudentially, to a crime against humanity. Although the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities came into force only 5 years ago, the binding legal principles applicable to the whole human race were set in stone by 1976.

It feels churlish to criticise this outstanding book, yet, despite an excellent chapter on justice promotion and preventing human rights violations, I found no comment on the nature and magnitude of the cultural change needed to end the

discrimination inherent in every violation of human rights. That doctors tend to perceive patients in relation to their illnesses is axiomatic and tolerated. But for discrimination in medical practice to end, doctors must perceive each patient primarily as a rights holder who has a health problem.

This textbook should appear in every medical library and on every psychiatrist's bookshelf, and representative content should be incorporated into the curricula and examinations of medical students and trainee psychiatrists.

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R.D. Laing: 50 Years Since The Divided Self

Edited by Theodor Itten
& Courtenay Young.
PCCS Books. 2012.
£16.00 (pb). 290 pp.
ISBN: 9781906254544

Yet another book on R. D. Laing may appear self-indulgent. In fact, several of the contributions to this edited collection do seem to be of this nature. However, the title registers the half-century anniversary of Laing's *The Divided Self*, first published in 1960, which the authors and editors 'commemorate and celebrate in [their] various ways' (p. vii). The book appraises 'Laing's life, work, frailties, brilliance, and his wide and varied influences' (back cover).

The editors are both on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Psychotherapy (IJP)*, which published a special R. D. Laing issue in 2011. These essays and articles have been reused in this book. I found the collection something of a hotch-potch, including some transcripts of somewhat vacuous interviews that had previously, perhaps understandably, not been published, and some reprinted material from the *British Journal of Psychiatry* and *The Guardian*. Of the new material, I thought the best chapter was that by Chris Oakley, entitled 'Where did it all go wrong?' His simple and simplistic answer is 'alcohol'. But the more complex version is that Laing was engulfed by his desire for adulation, becoming the tolerated and celebrated psychiatric superstar, operating on the edge of madness. To be clear, Laing was not mad but became the product of others, who twisted and obfuscated his message, for example undermining him by repeatedly calling him an 'anti-psychiatrist'. Laing's capacity to sabotage may explain his demise but he did provide a vision of the uncertainties and enigmas of personal interaction.

The other chapter that I appreciated was by Emmy van Deurzen, who established an existential therapy school at Regent's College and set up the Society for Existential Analysis. As she says, her form of existential psychotherapy is indebted to Laing's ideas and she came to work with what she thought would be existential therapy at the Arbours and Philadelphia Associations. However much Laing may be associated with existential psychotherapy, she argues that in practice he provided no practical

direction for its development, instead turning to psychoanalysis and rebirthing.

The opportunities for new inspiration about R. D. Laing may be limited but there are a few, if far between, in this book.

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advances in psychiatric treatment

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Patricia Casey

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