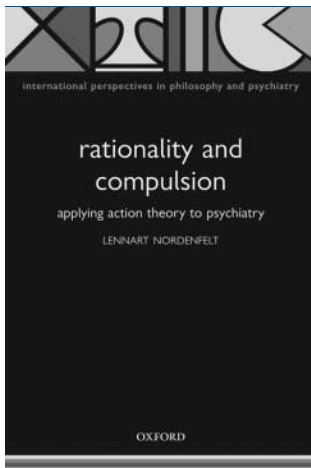


This book represents a departure from that beaten track. A textbook on culture and mental health that has chapters on epidemiological method and mental health law is truly unique. This book is not about the reification of 'culture-bound' syndromes nor is it constrained by a narrow definition of culture. Rather, it presents evidence, much of it from legitimate cultural representatives, for why the experience of psychiatric syndromes and the treatment for such have to be considered within the context of the culture of the patients experiencing such syndromes.

The result is an impressive opus that lives up to its promise of being comprehensive. The first part of the book has chapters dealing with basic sciences and provides a much-needed grounding for readers who want to be able to critically review what they read in the literature regarding, for example, cross-cultural studies. The second part has chapters, of varying lengths and details, dealing with cultural aspects of mental health in various regions of the world. However, the section flips between nations (Russia, South Africa, etc.) and regions (West Africa, South Asia, etc.), thus, perhaps, losing some consistency of organisation. That notwithstanding, this part of the book is a treasure trove, drawing on local experiences and sensitive analysis of the ways in which culture, in the broadest sense, shapes the experience of mental disorders and the delivery of services to those affected. An informed discussion of culture in the context of mental health must avoid inflation of differences as much as their deflation. This book strikes the right balance and deserves wide readership among practitioners and trainees.

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### Rationality and Compulsion

By Lennart Nordenfelt.  
Oxford University Press. 2007.  
224pp. £29.95 (pb).  
ISBN 9780199214853

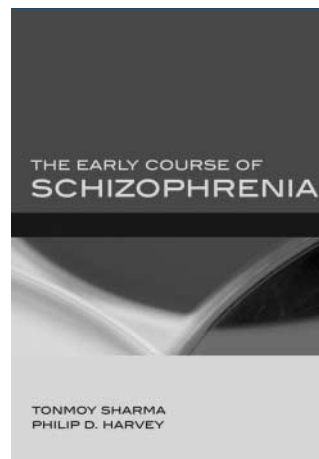
*Rationality and Compulsion* is a very useful resource for those philosophers of mind who might wonder what the practical dimension of their work is, and to those psychiatrists who are interested in the philosophical issues raised by the study of mental disorders. Nordenfelt has the great merit of writing clearly and developing the book around a very transparent structure. First, he combines his insights in philosophy of action and philosophy of health to create a solid theoretical apparatus, and then draws from that some conclusions about rationality that he applies to the case of compulsion. The theses put forward are well-argued and overall convincing, although the reader sometimes gets the impression that they are being rushed through a very intricate terrain and not made totally aware of the implications of what they are tempted to agree with. But this is inescapable in an ambitious work such as Nordenfelt's.

My concerns are of a different sort. The book does exactly what it says on the tin: it applies action theory to psychiatry. Methodologically, this is a fairly safe option. Take a theory which explains when certain actions are rational, and use it to answer the question of whether a certain type of behaviour occurring in a certain type of mental disorder can be legitimately characterised as an instance of intentional behaviour which satisfies the relevant norms of rationality. If you think the theory works, and has advantages over its competitors, then you will get a good illustration of it by throwing in some interesting examples from psychiatry, where an initially puzzling phenomenon is made clearer by the application of the theory of your choice.

However, this is a classic case of imposing independently motivated theoretical distinctions onto real-life problems without properly acknowledging that the analysis of those problems can feed back into the theory. The study of mental disorders does not simply illustrate how elegantly our theoretical commitments can provide answers to questions about intentionality and rationality. Rather, it helps us redefine what intentionality and rationality are. Regrettably, there is little of this feedback loop in Nordenfelt's work.

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### The Early Course of Schizophrenia

Edited by Tonmoy Sharma  
& Philip D. Harvey.  
Oxford University Press. 2006.  
264pp. £29.95 (pb).  
ISBN 0198568959

There was a shift surrounding schizophrenia in the latter decades of the 20th century which continues today, away from a research and therapeutic nihilism, towards optimism in gaining understanding of aetiology as well as effective treatments. Quite right too, you might say. The lack of a single genetic culprit being identified has not dented this enthusiasm, and the scope and quality of research in the area is vast and increasing.

The market for new texts in schizophrenia, therefore, is growing at an equal pace, and it can be difficult to decide which should be a priority to read (and to buy).

Many a text on the market is little more than a collection of loosely connected review papers and conference transcripts which make the heart sink on opening – what can be inspiring to listen to is not necessarily easy to read.

*The Early Course of Schizophrenia*, however, is much more than this and is one of the best on the market at present. It is clear in its aims and scope, focusing on recent advances in basic and clinical neurosciences relevant to schizophrenia. It is easily accessible in size, yet manages to cover most individual topic areas in considerable detail.

It is divided in to three sections, 'Schizophrenia in the pre-morbid period', 'Schizophrenia at the time of the first episode' and 'Treatment of early schizophrenia'.

I liked the first section best, not least because with its help I was able clearly to return smart questions from a particularly testing student – a mark of value for money if ever there was one. Chapters of particular note include those on neurocognitive deficits, first-episode schizophrenia and the prodromal period, which managed to tackle pharmacological and behavioural interventions. These areas are covered better than that of treatment in the first episode, which lacked similar scope by focusing exclusively on pharmacology. On the whole the treatment section was weak compared with the pre-morbid and first-episode sections, and in reality one can question whether a comprehensive review of current treatment in schizophrenia was beyond the range of this small text.

Novel topics that were included and made good reading included gender differences in schizophrenia and late-onset schizophrenia, both neglected areas of the field.

This is a great travel-size book to update adult psychiatrists and those in child and adolescent mental health services, and will also be of use to those coming up for membership. Definitely worth its price tag.

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**Freedom and Neurobiology: Reflections on Free Will, Language and Political Power**

By John R. Searle.  
Columbia University Press. 2007.  
128pp. US\$ 24.50 (hb).  
ISBN 0231137524

How do we, 'meaning creating' agents fit in 'with a universe that consists entirely of mindless, meaningless, unfree, nonrational, brute physical particles' (p. 5)?

According to Searle, in order to answer this question we need to understand the 'basic facts of philosophy' and the relationships between them. He identifies the basic facts as consciousness, intentionality, language, free will, society and institutions, politics and ethics. The task of the philosopher is to ask questions about them in such a way that answers can be tested in the light of physics and biology. This has been achieved to a considerable degree with consciousness, intentionality and language. What about free will?

Spinoza thought free will is an illusion. He argued that our actions are no less determined than the path of a stone that has been set in a course of flight. Supposing the stone could 'think' halfway through the flight that it 'wanted' to reach the pre-determined destination. If this were so, it would be subject to the illusion of free will.

Searle wishes to salvage our subjective experience of free will as a legitimate expression of freedom. He gives the example of a

restaurant diner who is asked by the waiter what he wants to eat. It would be absurd for the response to be 'Look, I am a determinist. I will just wait and see what I order because I know that my order is determined' (p. 11)!

Searle draws a distinction between causes and reasons. Human reasons differ from physical causes. Human reasons depend on consciousness, intentionality, language, free will, etc. These are properties of the brain in the same way that solidity is a property of the molecules that constitute a wheel. Solidity matters because it makes the wheel roll down a hill. Does free will matter in a similar way or is it an illusion?

If free will makes a difference and is also biologically founded, Searle argues, we must find a way of relating it to quantum indeterminism in physics. However, he has already warned us in the introduction that the 'problem of free will is unusual among contemporary philosophical problems in that we are nowhere remotely near to having a solution' (p. 11). In chapter one he sets out why this is so and concludes that in order to understand free will we need to understand 'the self' biologically and this we have also failed to do to date.

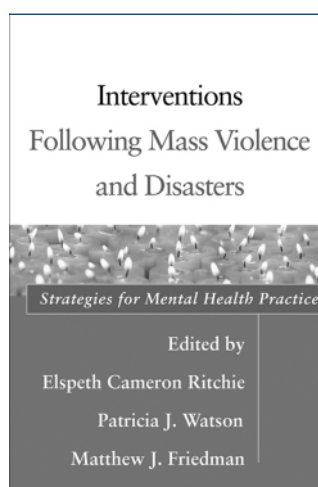
In the light of the above ignorance and uncertainty some might conclude that the basic facts of philosophy might not matter at present. In chapter two, which deals with 'Society and institutions and their relations to politics,' Searle shows us why this would be wrong.

Politics depends on political institutions such as the presidency, parliament etc. These depend on citizens subjectively agreeing to their status. Institutions have what Searle calls a 'status function'. It is its status function, agreed socially, that turns a green piece of paper into a dollar note. This is an example of human reasons differing from physical causes and, clearly, being of consequence.

This slim, elegantly written and intellectually rigorous volume which consists of an introduction and two lectures given to general audiences, sets out some core issues on the interface between the philosophy of mind and the sciences. It can be read with profit by all psychiatrists, both those inclined towards Spinoza's and those inclined towards Searle's views.

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**Interventions Following Mass Violence and Disasters: Strategies for Mental Health Practice**

Edited by Elspeth Cameron Ritchie, Patricia J. Watson & Matthew J. Friedman.  
Guilford Press. 2006. 450pp.  
£34.50 (hb). ISBN 1593852568

The events of 11 September 2001 have determined many developments in world affairs and it is not surprising that their influence has reached mental health services. In the USA the trauma of 9/11