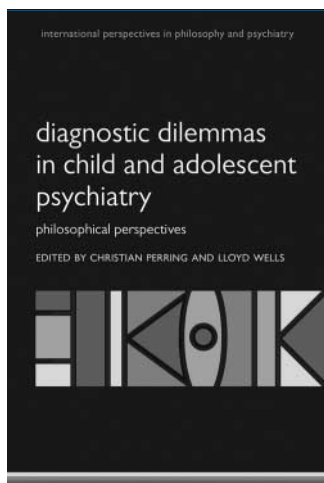


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



**Diagnostic Dilemmas
in Child and Adolescent
Psychiatry: Philosophical
Perspectives**

Ed. Christian Perring & Lloyd Wells.
Oxford University Press, 2014.
£34.99 (pb). 288 pp.
ISBN: 9780199645756

The conceptual, philosophical and evidential basis of psychiatric diagnosis has come under renewed scrutiny, particularly since publication of DSM-5. Heated exchanges are taking place in conferences, journals and in social and public media. The lack of diagnostic markers has led some groups to develop new diagnostic systems (such as the Research Domain Criteria from the National Institute of Mental Health in the USA) in the belief that this will enable the discovery of elusive biomarkers and bring the process of psychiatric diagnosis in closer alignment with the rest of medicine. Others (such as the British Psychological Society) have been emboldened to publish position statements that conclude that the time has come to dispense with the practice of giving psychiatric diagnoses altogether. Meanwhile, service users are split, with passionate verbalisations both for and against the utility of psychiatric diagnosis to their lives. It is therefore important to have works that help us to reflect thoughtfully and critically on all aspects of the clearly problematic area of diagnosis in psychiatry.

Having read, enjoyed and found helpful many other books in the Oxford series on philosophy and psychiatry, I jumped at the chance to review this book as we are particularly bereft of texts that critically examine psychiatric diagnosis in childhood. However, I never felt this book was able to deliver anything more than a superficial analysis of dilemmas *when* diagnosing as opposed to dilemmas *with* diagnosis.

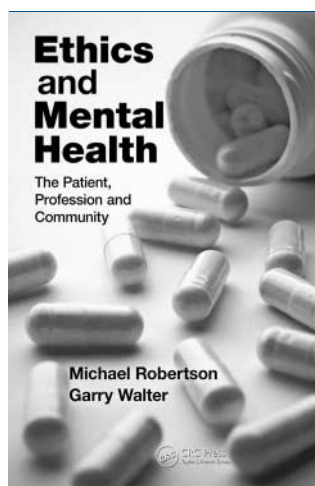
The book is an edited volume containing 14 chapters that are grouped into two sections: 'theoretical and conceptual issues' and 'particular disorders'. The chapters look at subjects ranging from the impact of neuroscience to how we categorise relationship problems. Diagnoses such as paediatric bipolar disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and conduct disorder get particular scrutiny.

The main problem, however, is that the authors come from a position of assuming that diagnosis in child psychiatry is a good thing and is here to stay, and so have limited themselves to discussions about the process of making diagnosis and the limits of diagnosis. There was little engagement with more fundamental conceptual issues and an almost complete absence of reference to multidisciplinary works that examine our concepts of childhood, child development and family, or the critical literature on cultural

concepts or the evidence base on outcomes following treatment. For me, this meant it never reached the heart of the current live debates and disputes mentioned above.

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**Ethics and Mental Health:
The Patient, Profession
and Community**

By Michael Robertson & Garry
Walter.
CRC Press, 2014.
£35.00 (pb). 290 pp.
ISBN: 9781444168648

The preface to this book offers a powerful reminder of the capacity of doctors – and psychiatrists in particular – to participate in cruelty. The authors' subject is Irmfried Eberl, but they argue that in focusing on one man, we have insight into the moral agency of many. And the relationships between individuals and others – be it professional groups, issue-oriented organisations or society – are the dominant theme in this title. Whether it is in the reframing of 'the virtuous psychiatrist' as the 'virtuous citizen' or in arguments for what the authors describe as 'the moderate communitarian position', this is a work that attends to context and connectedness.

The first section of the book offers a sound review of ethical theories which might be somewhat pedestrian were it not for careful attention to the particular context of psychiatry and the inclusion of approaches that have not traditionally informed discussion of medical ethics, for example 'common morality theory'. The authors maintain the thread of their argument throughout this section, exploring the notion of the social contract, concepts of justice, the relevance of communitarian ethics and delineating the social construction of moral agency, to propose that psychiatry is uniquely situated in medicine and therefore in its ethical discourse.

Section two is somewhat curious and less satisfying. It comprises five chapters focusing on a specific dimension of psychiatry. The choice of involuntary treatment is expected, but the focus of the other chapters is less predictable. Although innovative approaches are refreshing, the motivation for dedicating chapters to neoliberalism and popular culture is unclear. There is much to admire in this part of the book, but the overall effect is uneven, with some parts feeling too specific whereas others seem too broad and unfocused. More significantly, the coherence of argument diminishes in this part of the book compared with the careful lucidity of the preceding section.

The final part references more explicitly the authors' central premise, namely that the psychiatrist is a moral agent whose work

creates particular ethical questions. Competing moral claims are analysed with reference to power, sociopolitical context and epistemological preferences with deftness and unusual accessibility. Yet, the structure is problematic and there are some unusual inclusions that dilute the impact of the analysis at the expense of apparently disparate glimpses into particular countries, regulatory systems or types of patient. I found myself craving a concluding chapter to pull together the ideas and arguments.

This is an interesting book and it contains some important ideas, but too often those ideas are overshadowed by the disjointed structure. It seems like a text that is seeking to serve too many audiences. I would have welcomed a more selective approach to the material allowing for a deeper engagement with the questions set out in the preface. Much of the discussion of

ethical theory is well-trodden territory. The analytic contributions that are original and most interesting risk getting lost in the range of material crammed into the book. Clarity of purpose is not helped by the structure, which I found difficult to navigate. When I finished, I was left with the sense that these are authors who, in keeping with their interest in multiple roles and conflicting obligations, have been caught between the preferences and expectations of different readers. As a result, this is a book that itself reflects what it is to be in a quandary.

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