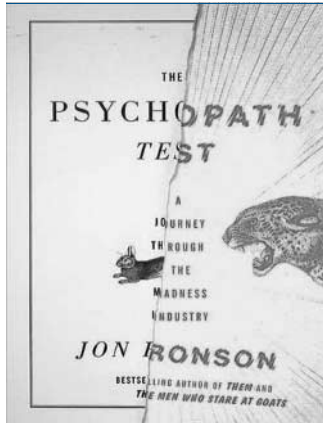


## Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode  
and Rosalind Ramsay



### The Psychopath Test

By Jon Ronson.  
Picador. 2011. £16.99 (hb). 304pp.  
ISBN: 9780330492263

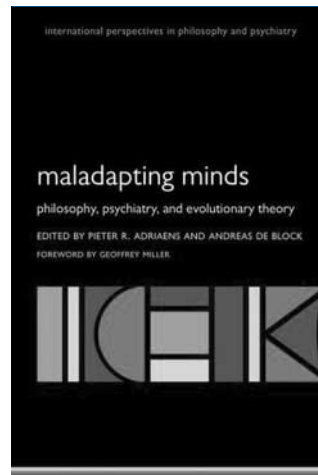
Jon Ronson is a journalist, quite a good journalist, with a nose for a story and a ready wit. The story he describes in this book, ‘a journey through the madness industry’, as it is described on the cover, is quite a convoluted one. It begins with the investigation of a strange package sent to neurologists at University College Hospital, which reads like the beginnings of a John le Carré novel. During this investigation he becomes drawn into the strange world of DSM, scientology and psychopathy. A scientologist friend introduces him to a man who faked madness at Broadmoor Hospital. But of course the man is not mad; he is a psychopath. So our intrepid writer, a latter-day Candide, decides to unravel psychopathy by seeing all the experts in the condition and asking them innocent questions like ‘why does wearing a sharp suit indicate that someone’s a psychopath?’ and ‘why do psychopaths dream in black and white?’. Eventually he gets the answer – Bob Hare’s psychopath test, and we get all 20 items of the test listed and explained. Armed with this new insight he goes to the guru himself and ends up drinking with Bob ‘in a hotel bar in rural Pembrokeshire’, where he learns how to administer this test as part of a training course. He then spices up his account with a series of interviews with a mass murderer, a corporate chief executive whose main joy was firing people, and an MI5 spy, before returning to Broadmoor to release the man who faked madness, and then returning to the John le Carré mystery, unsolved.

The book is an easy read and seems quite harmless. But it is sloppy and disconnected, and even the author recognises this in a criticism from a colleague, ‘you take a little bit of craziness from up there and a little bit of craziness from over there and then you stitch it all together’. The trouble is that the ‘craziness’ includes not just psychopathy, but schizophrenia, depression, bipolar disorder, drug misuse, LSD treatment-induced conditions, obsessive-compulsive disorder, autism, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, so the uninitiated reader is quickly lost. More botheringly, the book pretends to be factual but uses all the devices of the non-fiction or ‘faction’ novel, with detailed quotations from the people he interviews that are frequently inaccurate (I know, as I have checked) and have been refashioned to make a more rumbustious read. Ronson makes fun of almost everybody he writes about but most of the time he gets away with it as he is equally deprecating about himself. All this would not matter if the book were just a pleasant romp through an

uncontentious landscape. But it is not uncontentious; by his writing Ronson trivialises, and in the end stigmatises, not just personality disorder and psychopathy, but the whole of mental illness, in the search for cheap laughs and better sales. I urge him to change tack and use his talents to write a proper non-fiction novel on a subject where his humour can be put to better purpose.

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### Maladapting Minds: Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Evolutionary Theory

International Perspectives  
in Philosophy and Psychiatry.  
Edited by Pieter R. Adriaens  
& Andreas De Block.  
Oxford University Press. 2011.  
£34.95 (pb). 344pp.  
ISBN: 9780199558667

The title of this multi-author text places it as a successor to two now classic texts, one on evolutionary psychology (*The Adapted Mind*, 1992) and the other on evolutionary psychiatry (*The Maladapted Mind*, 1997). Although each of these three volumes is by different editors, they have some authors in common, for example Randolph Nesse and John Price.

Compared with evolutionary psychology, which has numerous periodicals and a large following, evolutionary psychiatry is very much the poor relation. There still is not a single peer-reviewed journal worldwide dedicated to evolutionary psychiatry, nor is there, to my knowledge, a single university course that teaches the subject. Hence this publication is to be welcomed.

The book comprises a foreword by Geoffrey Miller, an introductory chapter by the editors and 11 further chapters. Both the foreword and the introduction provide an excellent overview of evolutionary psychiatry as a subject and a useful and informed resume of the rest of the book. The editors raise the pertinent and thorny question of whether evolutionary psychiatry is ‘good science’. Given that one of the book’s aims is to explore the philosophical aspects of psychiatry and evolutionary theory, and given the scepticism that psychiatrists have shown towards this new discipline, it is helpful to frame the question in this manner.

The book’s contributors’ views differ, at times diametrically so. Unusually for a book on evolutionary psychiatry, there are two chapters that present arguments critical of the Darwinian approach. The authors of one of these chapters are critical of the whole adaptational paradigm that attempts to identify function and dysfunction from an evolutionary standpoint, preferring instead the mechanistic breakdown model prevalent in the rest of medicine where function is considered to be designed to keep a given system in homeostasis. Although I applaud the authors for giving space to critics of some of the prevailing theories in evolutionary psychiatry (specifically Marks and Nesse’s theory on anxiety and phobia), in the light of disconfirming

evidence I would question the appropriateness of publishing the anti-Darwinian analysis in this kind of book when it could have found a place elsewhere, in any number of publications critical of the evolutionary approach to psychiatry.

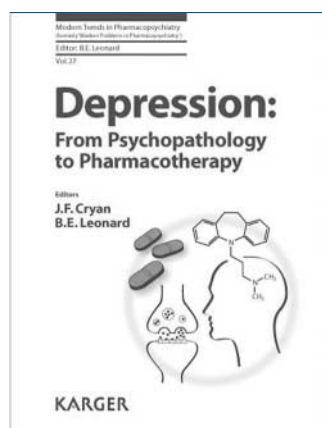
The heart of the book is in the chapters that deal with the major conceptual questions. These include the role of ethology in understanding mental disorder and in identifying human, species-specific psychological traits. There is a chapter evaluating an evolutionary framework for determining the nature of mental disorder through the application of Wakefield's harmful dysfunction analysis and one proposing evolutionary foundations for psychiatric diagnosis and a new basis for psychiatric classification. Finally, there is a chapter exploring the limitations of evolutionary theory in identifying the line of demarcation between normality and disorder. These chapters would be of interest to any reader who wishes to reflect on the meaning of mental disorder and on the shortcomings and limitations of current psychiatric diagnosis, whether or not they have an interest in Darwinian theory. These chapters are very well written and are accessible to the non-specialist.

A further chapter presents an interesting hypothesis to explain the gender differences in empathy that lie at the root of the higher prevalence of autism-spectrum disorders among males. This proposes that in the ancestral environment males remained with their kin group (philopatry) forming kin-based male coalitions, whereas females migrated on sexual maturity to a different group and thus needed to bond with non-kin. Additionally, males regularly engaged in intergroup violence whereby empathy had to be 'switched off'. It is therefore argued that the pay-offs of empathy were drastically different for males and females and they were, therefore, subject to distinct selection pressures. Evolutionary formulations on depression, schizophrenia and sexual imprinting in humans are also discussed.

This is not an introductory text for anyone new to the subject of evolutionary psychiatry, nor is it a book that one would necessarily read from cover to cover in a single sitting. Each chapter is self-contained and can be read separately without reference to the rest of the book. Would I recommend it? Yes, I certainly would. So long as the reader remembers that not all chapters are of equal worth or quality.

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### Depression: From Psychopathology to Pharmacotherapy

Edited by J. F. Cryan  
& B. E. Leonard.  
Karger. 2010.  
US\$148.00 (hb). 274pp.  
ISBN: 9783805596053

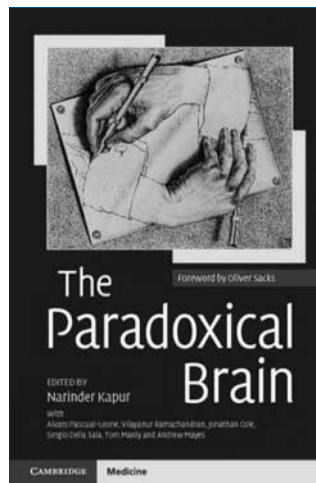
The book is well structured and reasonably comprehensive in its coverage. It comprises chapters on the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis, brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF)

along with more innovative fair. Like in any multi-authored publication there are variations in quality of contributions. A couple of chapters are clinically naive and a rather poorly put together rehash of previously published reviews. However, there are also well-written chapters by prominent authors in the field. I found several gems, such as an excellent overview of the biology of dysfunctional circadian rhythms and mood disorders by Norman and an exciting chapter on chromatin-based treatments for affective disorders by Covington & Berton. Martin *et al* write really well on the role of the oft-forgotten 5-HT<sub>2C</sub> receptor in antidepressant action and provide a fairly comprehensive review of the current evidence base. Cannon's chapter on neuroimaging, albeit rather 'textually dense', is superb if you are short of ideas for grant applications for research in this area.

Would I recommend this book? There is little for the clinician interested in new insights to assist their work in the clinic, with just two relatively lightweight chapters relating to current clinical practice. Otherwise, the science described may influence treatment in the future, most likely in at least a decade's time. For scientists working in the area, much of the views and data described can be found by searching the published literature. However, the book is a useful quick and easy source of information, especially for the real 'anoraks' interested in the pathophysiology and treatment of depression.

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### The Paradoxical Brain

Edited by Narinder Kapur.  
Cambridge University Press. 2011.  
£65.00 (hb). 488 pp.  
ISBN: 9780521115575

The ancient Greek term *paradoxon* is composed of the prefix 'para' (against) and the word 'doxa' (opinion) and literally means 'beside belief' or 'contrary to expectation'. Explaining what we currently know about brain function by means of paradoxes – brain findings that are counterintuitive and go against the grain of established neuroscientific thinking – can appear a paradoxical exercise itself. However, this original, entertaining and informative approach has been successfully undertaken by Narinder Kapur and a panel of leading researchers in the fields of clinical and cognitive neuroscience.

Featuring a foreword by Oliver Sacks, this multi-authored volume covers a wide range of brain paradoxes across different disciplines. Clinical neuropharmacology informs clinical epileptologists about the paradoxical worsening of seizures by some anti-epileptic drugs (e.g. carbamazepine in absence seizures). One