Values and Psychiatric Diagnosis

by John Z. Sadler, M.D. In book series: International Perspectives in Philosophy and Psychiatry. Oxford University Press, New York, N.Y., 2005, 540+xvii pages, $59.50 (paper).

If *Values and Psychiatric Diagnosis*, John Z. Sadler's brilliant tour de force, is any yardstick of the intellectual health of contemporary psychiatry, the field is alive and well. When I received this book for review, I must admit initially feeling intimidated—its 470 pages of mostly 10-point type, focusing on a philosophical analysis of the "values" underpinning the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), each chapter capped by extensive endnotes, topped off with an additional nearly 50 pages of references, seemed like a burden. However, as I got into the book, I quickly realized that it was a great gift.

Starting from the somewhat modest, narrowly stated ambition of conducting an analysis of the values underpinning psychiatric diagnosis in the DSM and *International Classification of Diseases* (ICD), Sadler actually accomplishes much more. He has produced a far-ranging treatise on basic concepts of psychiatry that envelops virtually all aspects of the field. The book is obviously a work of great love and devotion, 10 years in the making. It's clear that Sadler, a professor of psychiatry and director of undergraduate medical education at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center, has carefully read, assimilated, and reflected on an enormous literature to drill down to formulate questions-behind-questions regarding the meaning systems, worldviews, and prejudices that have led to current conciliations that constitute the DSM.

Sadler starts by setting in boldface value-laden words in illustrative excerpts from the DSM and ICD volumes as well as from works by their advocates and critics to show exactly what he's talking about. He rigorously subjects these terms to an analysis based on their core underlying values—aesthetic, epistemic (rational-science based), ethical, ontological (based on deepest assumptions about meaning and reality), and pragmatic. Thankfully, he always carefully and respectfully defines all philosophical and technical terms in plain English so that, although quite erudite, he is never pedantic or obfuscating. After this careful introduction, in a series of meaty chapters Sadler "unpacks" (to use one of his favorite terms) a whole bundle of associated themes that impact psychiatric concepts and diagnoses. To name but a few, these include scientific perspectives of taxonomy, validity, and reliability; professional guild issues and how they affect patients; ontological themes of how space, time, and being impact diagnostic thought; sex and gender biases; cultural and cross-cultural issues; contemporary (and I do mean contemporary) molecular genetics; technology; and politics.

Here, in a very readable text, is a comprehensive course in what psychiatric diagnoses are *all* about—history, philosophy, implicit and explicit values, assumptions and biases, scientific underpinnings and limitations, and critiques from within and outside psychiatry, other mental health fields, and other cultures. Here are the conflicts and compromises—political, philosophical, personality-based, and pragmatic, rigorously scientific versus individually contextual—that have shaped the historical evolution of psychiatric diagnosis in the past century and that will continue to shape its evolution in the future. While the influence of implicit and explicit values is clearly unavoidable, it's Sadler's position that they should be made as explicit as possible. He wraps up with a thoughtful summary regarding what the implications of his analysis might be for future psychiatric diagnosis and discourse.

What comes through, too, is that Sadler values being a clinician who loves patients, and he refuses to lose the realities of patients' holistic struggles in sterile diagnostic traps. The throwaway lines, musings, conjectures, and questions that Sadler poses offer up many careers' worth of intellectual challenges. While I don't agree with everything that he has to say, that's the point. He hopes to engage the field in ongoing discussions as diagnostic processes inevitably shift and change—they will never be static. I hope that, in future work, Sadler will continue to comment on the processes leading to DSM-V and that he will address additional questions surfacing in cognitive science and philosophy that bear on diagnostic systems, such as humans' innate cognitive tendencies to classify according to prototypes and to make use of "fuzzy logic."

Although this book is likely to be read with pleasure primarily by solitary intellectuals, it would better serve as the source of fruitful and undoubtedly animated discussions if taken up in leisurely seminars or intellectual salons. Few of these exist anywhere in the field these days, even in major academic centers. Too many people in our field are too busy to read serious works like this one with the thoroughness that they deserve. Perhaps we need to create "virtual salons," World Wide Web–based discussion groups and book blogs, to supplement or replace local centers of intellectual activity. This book deserves to be thoughtfully read and discussed by psychiatry's liveliest minds. Are you one of those?

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The Neurobiology of Autism, 2nd ed.

edited by Margaret L. Bauman, M.D., and Thomas L. Kemper, M.D. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, Md., 2005, 404 pages, $80.80; $45.00 (paper).

This book is one you might give to a graduate student who is beginning a master's or doctoral project on the neurobiology of autism. In a single volume, it reviews what one needs to know about current state-of-the-art theorizing and research in the field. I would also recommend the book to parents of persons with autism who are interested in reading a clearly written text on the latest neurobiological hypotheses on the subject.

What is especially notable about this book is the number of preeminent experts who have written chapters: Fombonne on epidemiology, Tager-Flusberg on language and communication, Rodier and Bachevalier on brain structures, Cook on genetics, Hagerman on fragile X syndrome, Smalley on autism and tuberous sclerosis, and Zimmerman on the immune system, to name a few. While all of these individuals have published extensively in the past decade, having their observations assembled into one book is helpful to readers who may not have been following the literature in the specialty journals.

Almost all of the current observations and hypotheses about autism are covered: the remarkable increase in prevalence rate of autism spectrum disorder (approximately 1 in 300 persons), the finding that many persons with autism have very large brains, the role of genetics in predisposing to the syndrome, and the various types of executive function deficits associated with autism. Of course, executive functioning deficits have been purported to be present in many other psychiatric disorders, but the topic is important and may eventually prove

integral to sorting out frontal lobe dysfunctions across a number of psychopathologies.

The discussion of memory by Killiany, Moore, Rehbein, and Moss is the one chapter that falls somewhat short of being fully up-to-date. They provide a good overview of our traditional understanding of memory, but they might have extended this to a discussion of the types of memory involved in the encoding of intuitive social behavior, the absence of which is so central to the autism spectrum. I admit that not much is known of such memory; however, studies have been reported in the past several years which suggest that this type of memory is quite different in its location and operation in contrast to declarative memory and memory for facts.

In their wish to be comprehensive, the editors have included invited contributions on subjects that appear to have only a hypothetical, or even a tenuous, relationship to autism. Even such topics usefully instruct in their own right. Porges provides a masterful review of the vagus nerve as an organizing system, though it may be stretching too much to suggest the system is dysfunctional in autism. Similarly, Perry and Lee provide a useful review of the cholinergic systems in the brain, Blatt reviews the GABAergic system, and Fatemi reviews the role of reelin in brain development. These discussions may or may not prove fruitful to understanding autism, but they each instruct in their own right. They might even inspire a graduate to go into a different line of research, not necessarily involving autism, but one relevant to the brain system in question. If so, the book will still have had a useful purpose.

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