

overlap with both schizophrenia and unipolar disorder and also a significant comorbidity with addictions and personality disorders. Most major classes of psychotropic drugs have been used for the treatment of this disorder and it has been argued that the psychopharmacological revolution was initiated by the discovery by John Cade in 1949 of lithium as a treatment for mania. Lithium, of course, remains the gold standard against which all other treatments of this disorder must be measured.

It is with the subject of bipolar medications and their mechanisms of action that this volume edited by Manji, Bowden & Belmaker, three leading US researchers, is concerned. In it they seek to understand lithium and other 'bipolar' medications such as the anticonvulsants and atypical antipsychotics. If we understood how these treatments work we would have a better grasp of the neural basis of this devastating disorder. Despite 50 years of research we still do not really understand the action of lithium or of any of the other putative mood stabilisers. However, this volume investigates most of the major leads and reviews results from clinical studies of lithium withdrawal and evidence of the efficacy of new treatments.

This is predominantly a North American textbook, with a few contributions from Israel and the occasional chapter from the UK, Denmark, Canada and Japan. Contributors are mostly academic psychiatrists, basic scientists interested in this area and representatives from the pharmaceutical industry who are primarily concerned with the development of new treatments.

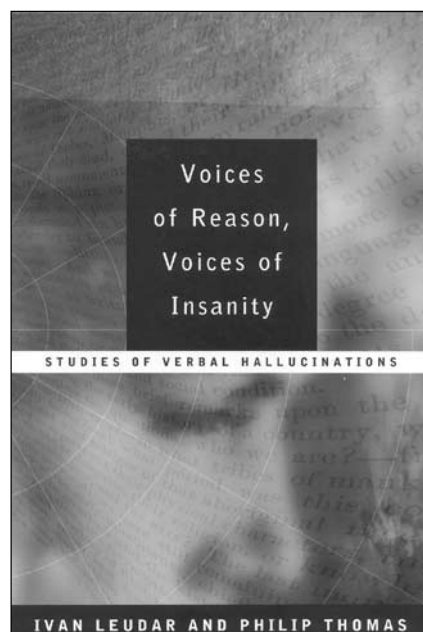
Overall, this is a very good book for the aficionado. It is frustrating that many of the chapters take a rather blinkered view of the various medications' mechanisms of action, often seeking to explain them entirely within a single frame of reference. There is no attempt to integrate the plethora of different findings and the book would be considerably enhanced by an authoritative concluding chapter by the editors. Notwithstanding this caveat, the book is a mine of information that should be purchased by departmental libraries. And although I would not recommend that trainees buy it, they should

dip into a library copy, as might established consultants and students.

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Voices of Reason, Voices of Insanity: Studies of Verbal Hallucinations

By Ivan Leudar & Philip Thomas. London: Routledge. 2000. 214 pp. £15.99 (hb). ISBN 0 415 14797 5



What does it mean if you experience verbal hallucinations? Are you mad or divinely inspired? And what does the content of your hallucinations signify? Is it meaningful? Or is it un-understandable nonsense, an epiphenomenon of biological processes that points only to a neuropsychological address and a diagnosis?

Leudar & Thomas explore how people explain verbal hallucinations. They consider the voice hearers, the psychiatrist, the press and the public. They provide accounts from voice hearers with a psychiatric diagnosis and from those without. They document what these experiences have been held to

mean in the past and what meaning we place on them now. To Socrates, it meant that he was hearing a wise and divine daemon. To the contemporary British press, it typically means madness and unreasoning violence. To psychiatrists it is often a symptom of psychosis to be suppressed with medication. To voice hearers nowadays it is usually as mundane as most inner speech, similarly influencing their behaviour by directing and judging.

The authors aim to describe experiences and explicitly step back from explanations. They conclude that voices do not necessarily indicate insanity any more than thinking, imagining or seeing do: they are an unusual kind of private speech. So they have meaning to the hearer which can be understood if one listens.

This book is part of the growing body of opinion that believes hallucinations to be not random events but metaphors related to the hearer's personality and the stresses that precipitate his or her condition. This has therapeutic implications, recognised by cognitive techniques that draw out the structure and meaning of the voices. But Leudar & Thomas depart from some cognitive therapists' approach on one point: they have no wish to challenge the voice hearer's explanation of the voices, preferring instead to elucidate how the phenomenon is rooted in the patient's past experiences and life history.

The book offers a wide and detailed perspective. It struggles at times to bring material from diverse sources into focus and to maintain a coherent argument. But the content is fascinating and leads to a clear and important message. Leudar & Thomas sum up nicely the clinical perspective from which we have come: "The question 'Who is speaking?' is answered by 'Nobody, it's just hallucinations'. And 'What do the voices mean?' is answered by 'They mean your illness, nothing else' ". Through their book they remind us that, by listening to the patient, we will discover where to go.

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