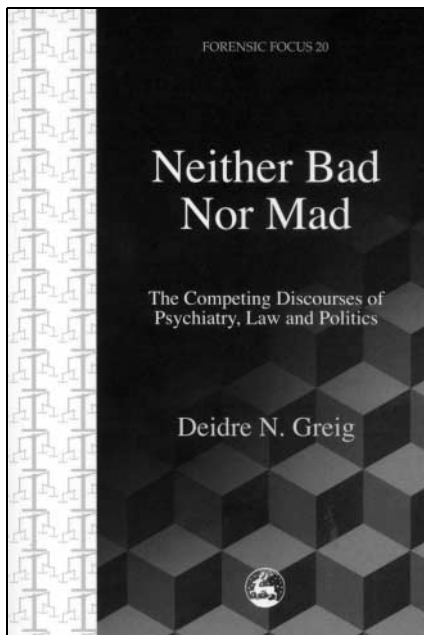


Book reviews

EDITED BY SIDNEY CROWN, FEMI OYEBODE and ROSALIND RAMSAY

Neither Bad Nor Mad. The Competing Discourses of Psychiatry, Law and Politics

By Diedre N. Greig. London: Jessica Kingsley.
2002. 256 pp. £18.95 (pb). ISBN 1 84310 006 1



The 18th-century wit, the Reverend Sydney Smith, when walking through an Edinburgh alleyway, saw two women shouting abuse at one another across the alley from their tenement windows. He famously concluded that they were never likely to agree, as they were arguing from different premises. *Neither Bad Nor Mad* has as its subtitle *The Competing Discourses of Psychiatry, Law and Politics*, and examines, through the specific case of Garry David, how these different groupings with different 'premises' resolve their conflicts. No prizes for guessing the winner.

Garry David was a serving prisoner in Australia in the 1980s, who (although something of a nonentity within the custodial system) became celebrated nationally because of his dramatic threats of violence against individuals and the community were he to be released – and released he would be, because he was serving a fixed-term

sentence. These threats caused panic among politicians, resulting in a determination to prevent David's release at any cost. The cost to the State of Victoria was high, as it was forced to introduce a special Act of Parliament, the Community Protection Act 1990, that not only effectively subjected David to preventive detention, but also was a unique piece of legislation in that it was enacted to detain him as an individual. The process had an enormous financial cost; Garry David eventually died of peritonitis during the course of his continued incarceration, as a result of repeated self-injury, thereby relieving everyone of the burden of deciding how to manage him.

The theme of the different priorities of politics, psychiatry and the law dominates the book. If the first (and perhaps the only) objective of the state is to safeguard its citizens, then one ought not to expect that this would overlap with the law, whose purpose is justice through a proper legal process, or with psychiatry, whose objective (at least on a good day) is the delivery of care and treatment for those with a mental disorder. As Greig, a criminologist with an interest in the interaction of law and psychiatry, makes clear in this thoughtful book, individuals with extreme behavioural disturbance are only too capable of exposing the fault lines between these competing interests.

In addition to prison disruption and threats of violence against the public, David had another major weapon – self-mutilation. Cue for psychiatry to enter the debate. Psychiatry's dithering in trying to decide between incommensurable alternatives (mad *v.* bad; mentally ill *v.* personality disordered, etc.) is paralleled by David's oscillation between prison and mental health facilities, depending on whether his needs or those of the state were paramount. Greig, in the main, is generous to psychiatry, while recognising that it was out of its depth in this instance, where psychiatrists' assessment of the issues and advice to the authorities were hopelessly contradictory.

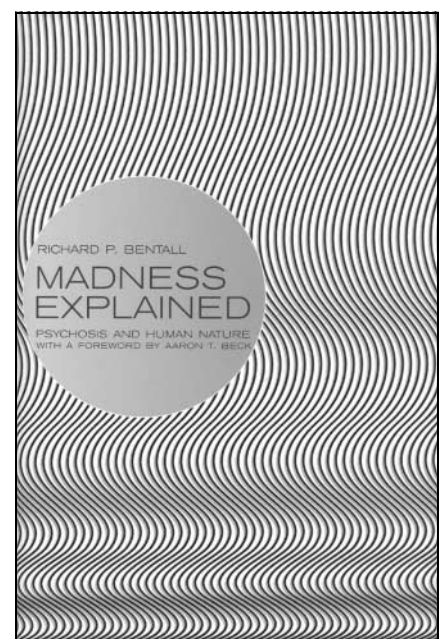
From a clinical perspective, the issue insufficiently addressed in this book is the reason why David behaved in this way. Although he claimed that his purpose was to wreak havoc in Victoria, he could more easily have accomplished this by not drawing attention to himself and thereby automatically gaining his release. By signalling his destructive intent, he effectively sabotaged his release and involved himself and the authorities in a *danse macabre* from which no one emerged as a winner. As the signalling of destructive intent is a common presentation in forensic psychiatry, it is odd that it was the judiciary – rather than psychiatrists – who appeared to be more interested in the causes of David's abnormal behaviour. The reader will not find this book easy going, but it is worth the effort, and should inform our thinking in a difficult and topical area.

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Madness Explained. Psychosis and Human Nature

By Richard P. Bentall. London: Penguin Books.
2003. 640 pp. £25.00 (hb). ISBN 0 713 99249 2

This is a maddening book. The author is determined to flatten the neo-Kraepelinians, as he calls them, with knock-down arguments that occupy the



first 145 pages. He presents his fundamental principle in these words: 'We should abandon psychiatric diagnoses altogether and instead try to explain and understand the actual experiences and behaviours of psychotic people'. But wait a minute, Bentall, isn't the term 'psychotic' a diagnosis? In addition to this obvious bloomer, he misunderstands the nature and present status of diagnosis in psychiatry. Terms such as 'schizophrenia', 'mania' and 'anxiety disorder', which rest entirely on patterns of symptoms, have the same status as did 'dropsy' in 19th-century medicine. Once the various causes of oedema were sorted out, dropsy as a diagnosis became redundant and disappeared. Oedema can result from problems in a number of different bodily systems, and even within a single system can be produced by different causes. There is no reason to think

that the brain is any different from other bodily organs in this respect, although Bentall is sceptical that organic disease will ever be found to underlie psychiatric disturbances. He is entitled to his opinion, which is not based on evidence but on conviction, but there is no need to attempt to 'offer a damning portrait of Kraepelinian psychiatry', as he describes his efforts, in order to justify examining the psychological origins of individual symptoms. The two approaches are not mutually contradictory. If diagnostics were as rigid as he makes out, we would not already have been through four editions of DSM and ten of ICD.

In the middle section of his book, Bentall does a praiseworthy job of assembling and summarising the evidence for the psychological and psychosocial influences on the development of delusions, hallucinations, paranoid attitudes and other unusual

modes of thought. This substantial chunk is worth reading, but just as you are warming to his ability to present diverse material from different disciplines, he vaults onto his hobby-horse and gallops off into a haze of half-truths and blinkered interpretations. One example from the last few pages will suffice: here, he quotes the evidence that non-White people living in White neighbourhoods are more likely to become psychotic than those surrounded by their own ethnic group. He concludes 'Exposure to racial tension, it seems, can drive people mad.' He cites no evidence for this (there is none), and he ignores other possible explanations such as lack of social support.

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