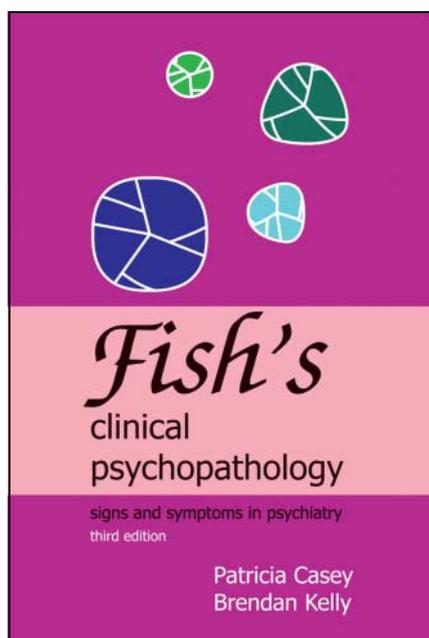


Book reviews

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Fish's Clinical Psychopathology: Signs and Symptoms in Psychiatry (3rd edn)

By Patricia Casey & Brendan Kelly.
Gaskell. 2007. 138pp. £18.00 (pb).
ISBN 9781904671329



The above can be variously reviewed. At its blandest, the reviewer could say that one should be grateful to the Royal College of Psychiatrists for the idea of putting out this third 'edition'. In the same vein, it could be added that the book needed updating and that the editors have done a good job; and then the crowning platitude included: it should be on the bookshelf of all UK trainees. This waffling, however, would be unfair to Frank Fish, Max Hamilton and indeed to current trainees, all of whom deserve better than that.

A new edition should have taken the opportunity to explain: (a) the meaning, history and significance of this work; (b) what clinical psychopathology is and what its role should be in current psychiatric research; and, most of all, (c) it should have included an essential excursus on what it means to 'update' a book on clinical psychopathology. I well remember Max

Hamilton (I was then his lecturer at Leeds) worrying about how this could be done: would that entail changing the 'descriptions' that Frank had 'got wrong'? 'Adding' symptoms missed out or recently 'discovered'? These questions are as valid today as they were in 1974.

Hamilton was careful to keep (almost intact) the introduction because he considered it as one of the most important parts of the book. Where is it now? Equally respectful was he of the chapter on classification as it dealt with psychiatric taxonomy and not with the latest classification in the market. In the third edition, this chapter has been distorted by replacing the classical Störing & Schneider conceptual taxonomy with a classification taken from an American manual. The same can be said of the bibliography to which Hamilton added but did not subtract: the third edition has replaced all the classical references by ephemera thereby leaving many of Fish's claims unreferenced.

To decide on the appropriateness of the current changes, a serious review (which this book needs) should collate all editions. Just one example of an idle addition should suffice. Fish and Hamilton say all that can be said about the clinical psychopathology of hallucinations. The current edition adds: 'SCAN (WHO, 1998) defines hallucinations as "false perceptions"'. In what way does this gem improve things? Has that 'definition' not been around since 1817? And so on and so forth.

The publication policy of Gaskell remains a mystery to most of us but if this work is typical of it then we should be concerned. What was wrong with reprinting the original or Hamilton 1974 effort? Ideally, of course, the book should have been contextualised particularly in relation to the blending of the newly arrived German ideas and the remnants of the in-house psychodynamic approach, as epitomised in the books by Hart and Nicole, that had dominated British psychopathology until the Second World War.

My advice to anyone curious about this book is: borrow the 1967 edition! It will contain strange concepts and names but

this is OK as that might induce you to read up further. If thus, the old book will have achieved its objective.

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Most psychiatrists of a certain age possess a luridly pink slim volume known to them simply as 'Fish'. Frank Fish's first edition is now 40 years old; the second edition, prepared by Max Hamilton, first appeared in 1974 and was last printed in 1985. Does a revised third edition have anything to offer a new generation of psychiatrists?

It has certainly managed to keep some of the main strengths of the original. The vivid clinical descriptions capture something of the strangeness that abnormal thoughts and experiences must have for those who suffer them. This should be helpful to exam-weary MRCPsych candidates, and their supervisors, in demonstrating that the systematic assessment of mental symptoms is both fascinating and rewarding. The chapters on disorders of emotion, disorders of the experience of self and (unsurprisingly in view of the senior author's interests) on personality disorders are up-to-date, well referenced and provide lucid summaries both of new evidence and of areas of persisting controversy (such as the status of borderline personality disorder).

Some of the other chapters have not been updated as extensively: all but one of the references in the chapter on classification, for example, are from before 2000. This chapter would also have benefited from more critical discussion of the currently used classificatory systems and the challenges for DSM-V and ICD-11. Although symptoms are lucidly described throughout the book, there is little guidance on how to elicit them and the cultural dimension is all but ignored. This is particularly striking in the appendix on 'psychiatric syndromes' which has a single paragraph on 'culture-bound disorders'. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is omitted entirely, which is particularly surprising given the vivid and varied range of psychopathology with which PTSD victims can present. The appendix on 'defences and distortions' provides clear, exam-friendly definitions but fails to place them in the