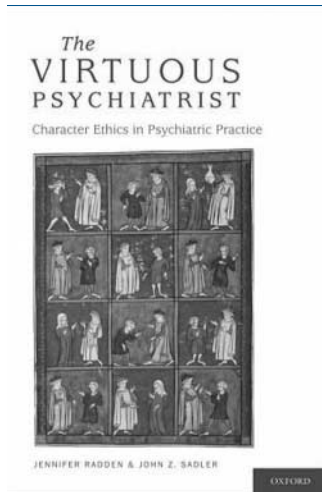


Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode
and Rosalind Ramsay



The Virtuous Psychiatrist: Character Ethics in Psychiatric Practice

By Jennifer Radden & John Sadler.
Oxford University Press. 2010.
£32.50 (hb). 248pp.
ISBN: 9780195389371

This is a book on psychiatric ethics based on the moral framework traditionally associated with Aristotle. It is written by an academic philosopher and a psychiatrist.

'Virtue ethics' holds that right conduct is founded on traits of character rather than adherence to rules, although these may also have their place. Such traits can be developed by training and practice (habituation). Having been eclipsed for some time by the rival approaches of consequentialism (e.g. the English Utilitarians) and deontology (following Kant), the Aristotelian approach has enjoyed a renaissance in recent decades and the authors argue, successfully in my view, that it has particular relevance to psychiatry.

The authors start by making the case for specifically psychiatric ethics, closely related to general medical ethics but tailored to the psychiatric context with its particular moral dilemmas, for example those relating to compulsory detention and treatment, issues of sex and gender and the close personal relationship between doctor and patient which can lead to abuse of the skewed power balance. They also discuss the latent ethical implications of psychiatric diagnosis with its risks of invalidation and stigma.

They accept that psychiatric virtues are nested within professional virtues which are embedded within those appropriate to the pursuit of the general good. Among psychiatric virtues, they discuss trustworthiness, gender sensitivity, empathy, respectfulness, genuine personal warmth, self-knowledge, integrity, hopeful patience and authenticity. They coin a word, 'unselfing', to describe a quality unique to the psychiatric encounter and they repeatedly emphasise a virtue (or meta-virtue), recognised by Aristotle, of *phronesis* or practical wisdom.

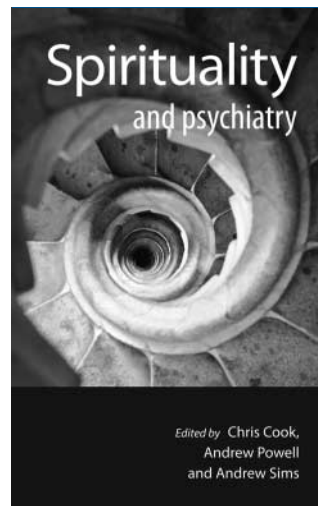
It is interesting that the Greek *arete*, conventionally translated as 'virtue' in the Aristotelian context, can also mean 'excellence'. This is important because some of the qualities Radden & Sadler commend could be seen as technical skills rather than moral virtues. If the desired end facilitated by the application of traditional virtues is that of the good life, often identified with human flourishing (*eudaemonia*), then the goal of the psychiatric virtues could be seen as the more limited one of healing in a clinical sense. Radden & Sadler are unwavering in their conviction that the doctor–patient relationship is the crucial ingredient in this process and that this incorporates irreducibly moral elements.

Their discussion of these complex issues is thoughtful and scholarly yet readable and accessible.

The book is a timely antidote to an excessively technological psychiatry and one might hope that journal clubs could find some time for it in addition to the usual diet of evidence-based medicine.

Sandy Robertson Consultant Psychiatrist, c/o British Journal of Psychiatry,
17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG, UK. Email: jarsandy@btinternet.com

doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.110.084608



Spirituality and Psychiatry

Edited by Chris Cook,
Andrew Powell & Andrew Sims.
RCPsych Publications. 2009.
£25.00. 300 pp (pb).
ISBN: 9781904671718

This is a good book. The relationship between spirituality and psychiatry has always been tense and fraught, sometimes for good reasons. The need for clarity, thoughtfulness and balanced thinking is paramount if this aspect of the patient's experience is to be recognised and cared for sensitively. This book makes a useful contribution to enabling such a process. It provides a clear and well structured overview of some of the ways in which spirituality, in both its religious and non-religious forms, relates to psychiatry, and offers theoretical and practical insights that help readers to see the possibilities and the pitfalls of exploring this aspect of care.

The book consists of 14 essays written by psychiatrists from a variety of different theoretical backgrounds, all of whom have been deeply involved in exploring spirituality and psychiatry for a number of years. The book functions on two levels. At one level, it is a textbook which provides information and evidence that helps to show the significance of spirituality for practice. The chapters on suicide, psychotherapy, substance misuse, psychotic disorder and neuroscience help to locate the text firmly within mainstream psychiatry, thus enabling the reader to see the strong connections between the spiritual dimension and what is currently going on. Similarly, the chapters on assessing spiritual needs and the role of spirituality in the National Health Service help to ground the text in contemporary systems and practices. Second, the fact that the authors are embedded practitioners who have reflected on this dimension of patient care for many years means the text is grounded in the day-to-day reality of psychiatric practice. The book is therefore both informative and practical.

Importantly, the text is not idealistic or overly optimistic. Crowley & Jenkinson's chapter on pathological spirituality brings to the conversation an important self-critical dimension that is often missing from publications like this. It is of course not possible to cover all of the ground necessary within a single text. The omission of affective disorders and dementia for example, two areas where spirituality can be particularly significant, leaves the reader wishing for more. But that might not be a bad thing and