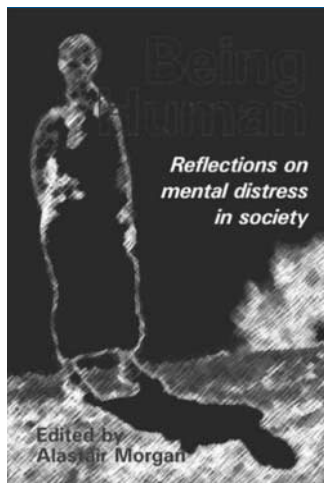


provides an impressive account of painstaking work, including impressive longitudinal studies, to develop theoretically driven and empirically tested interventions.

This volume cannot be used as a manual for clinical work but it definitely can and should be used to inform our thinking about how to understand and work with those at risk or struggling with bereavement-related distress.

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### Being Human: Reflections on Mental Distress in Society

Edited by Alastair Morgan.  
PCCS Books. 2008.  
£20.00 (pb). 213pp.  
ISBN: 9781906254063

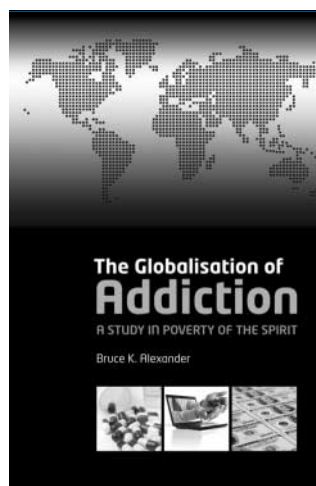
This is a bravely written book. Deriving from a series of seminars presented under the auspices of the HUMAN Research Project at Nottingham University, it consists of 13 chapters reflecting on 'the interface between mental health, mental distress, and the humanities, broadly conceived'. Contributors mainly derive from the fields of psychotherapy and psychology, but include a neurologist, a mental health nurse and those trained in philosophy and humanities. The editor, Alastair Morgan, has a particular interest in critical theory and has trained as a philosopher. In his introduction, he fears for psychiatry disappearing as a discipline, 'as it fragments into a number of subspecialties, and as it eats its own diagnostic categories, only for them to be functionalised as specific behavioural disorders'.

The topics in themselves indicate the breadth and thoughtfulness of the contributions. For example, Ian Parker's 'Constructions, reconstructions and deconstructions of mental health' is a fascinating exploration of names, images (e.g. animals, samurai, orcs), whereas Dave R. Wilson's 'A phenomenological encounter: prelude to a mental health assessment in a magistrate's cells' is a startlingly unique outline of the practical processes of working in mental health reflected in the light of true phenomenology and the psychology of interpersonal communication. More historical outlines are provided by Christopher Ward in 'Symptoms in society: the cultural significance of fatigue in Victorian Britain' and by Susanna Wilson in 'Writing from the asylum: a re-assessment of the voices of female patients in the history of psychiatry in France'. The former considers the relationship between neurasthenia and chronic fatigue syndrome, looking at the real distress and disability generated (regardless of the label) and the social relationships in which such symptoms occur. The latter studies two particular cases from French treatises, suggesting that their 'partially delusional accounts are not meaningless' and that there was an apparent failure of medical professionals 'to place any value on what they had to say'.

As in any multi-authored volume there are of course infelicities in terms of the language used, the approach taken or the sense of psychiatrists being criticised just for being psychiatrists. What work like this does show is the need for all of us to spend more time thinking about, perhaps talking about, and perhaps describing (to the powers that be) the real nature of our task. As noted by David Smail in his final contribution on 'Clinical psychology and truth', we need to understand that 'the service of truth, philosophically complex though it may be and deeply unfashionable though it is, is no minor cause'. One can only recommend reading at least some of this multi-textured volume, which in the main serves its purpose very well.

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.108.060319



### The Globalisation of Addiction: A Study in Poverty of the Spirit

By Bruce K. Alexander.  
Oxford University Press. 2008.  
£34.95 (hb). 396pp.  
ISBN: 9780199230129

Several years ago I was asked to participate in a Royal College of Psychiatrists' debate for young people. I was proposing the motion that 'we are all a nation of addicts', and a show of hands before the debate started revealed a strong majority in my favour. Unfortunately, an articulate description of the ICD-10 definitions of dependence by the opposition allowed the audience to re-evaluate their excesses as falling below the 'addictive' threshold defined by scientific medicine, and the motion was soundly defeated. Had I read this scholarly and extremely entertaining book before this debate, the result might have been different.

Here the term 'addiction' is reclaimed from its current use in reference to alcohol and drugs and instead defined as an 'overwhelming involvement with any pursuit whatsoever that is harmful to the addicted person and his or her society'. This change of emphasis is crucial, as the author then goes on to present a thesis every bit as bold as his title suggests. His central argument is that 'psychosocial integration' is a 'profound interdependence between individual and society' that 'reconciles people's vital needs for individual autonomy and achievement'. An enduring lack of such psychosocial integration is called 'dislocation' and is both individually painful and socially destructive. Free-market society undermines this and 'addiction' is a way of adapting to this dislocation, thus explaining why huge numbers of people are addicted to destructive habits in the 21st century.

The author is a psychologist with many years experience in the addictions field and has drawn on an impressive array of materials to support his theory. Evidence from clinical and scientific sources is supplemented by historical and anthropological studies, case