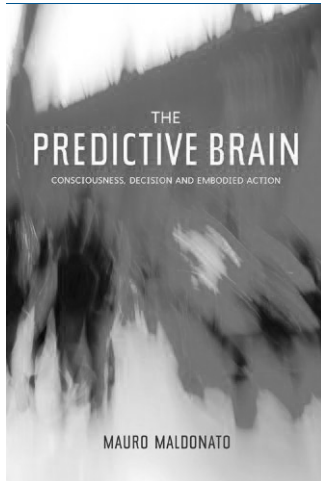


## Book reviews

Edited by Allan Beveridge, Femi Oyeboode  
and Rosalind Ramsay



**The Predictive Brain:  
Consciousness, Decision  
and Embodied Action**

By Mauro Maldonato  
Sussex Academic Press, 2014.  
£17.95 (pb). 112 pp.  
ISBN: 9781845196394

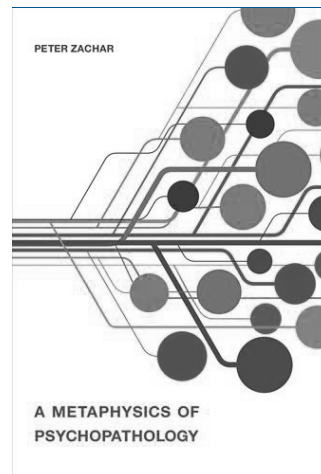
This is a concise but detailed book which covers a lot of ground. Mauro Maldonato is an academic psychiatrist and neuroscientist with a strong track record in motor control and decision-making. This book links abstract symbolic thought and decision-making to evolutionary origins in motor control. The text is generally accessible to inquisitive readers in addition to the target audience of neuroscientists, psychiatrists and philosophers of mind. A rich account of the history of consciousness, decision-making and motor action is presented that, importantly, goes beyond the English-language literature. The remit stretches from evolutionary perspectives to influential modern views of consciousness and even to the experience-dependent application of medical knowledge. The reader is not patronised, but drawn into the detail and complexity of theoretical and evidence-based understanding of the subject of the volitional and rational mind. The chapters serve as self-contained essays that share a common theme. This style, reviewing the topic broadly, provides a fresh contrast to recent monographs of consciousness, where the aim is often to convince the reader of the central merits of a single theory.

The study of consciousness is now at the forefront of cognitive neuroscience. Major advances in understanding the neurobiological origins of the human mind are anticipated over the next few decades, which will bring with them practical applications and interventions that will necessarily affect mental health and psychiatry. Present progress with technical and methodological aspects of consciousness science is accompanied by the development and refinement of theoretical models among which the notion of predictive coding and the Bayesian brain is beginning to dominate. The central premise of the predictive brain, first formulated by von Helmholtz, is that to make sense of the wealth of dynamic sensory information the brain must try to predict the source of sensory inputs. Friston and others present these concepts as driven by functional efficiency, a need to minimise 'free energy'. Sensation is inference, wherein predictive codes represent hypotheses that are tested against incoming data, generating prediction errors. In this context actions become embodied means for active inference, enhancing the precision and accuracy of future predictions. Embodiment also applies to the concept of interoceptive predictive coding, relating to internal bodily control and viscerosensory information. This notion is emerging as a potent model for the neural mechanisms

that underlie self-representation and emotion states and, by extension, disorders of selfhood and affect that have pervasive relevance to psychiatry. Professor Maldonado's book provides a valuable framework to consider such elaborations of the predictive brain and represents a scholarly resource from an erudite perspective.

**Hugo Critchley** Chair in Psychiatry, Brighton and Sussex Medical School, and Co-Director of Sackler Centre for Consciousness Science, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RR, UK. Email: h.critchley@bsms.ac.uk

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**A Metaphysics  
of Psychopathology**

By Peter Zachar  
MIT Press, 2014.  
£27.95 (hb). 288 pp.  
ISBN 9780262027045

Book titles are often misleading. I once looked up books on Chinese cooking, having just acquired a wok, and found *From Woking to Portsmouth*. Sections of this book could equally well be accommodated by the title *A Psychopathology of Metaphysics*, as they concern how the mindset and personal foibles of certain philosophers coloured their philosophical views.

This preamble is occasioned by my disappointment with the actual contents of the book given its highfalutin title. The book is essentially a neo-Szaszian argument for why psychiatric diagnosis is a contentious issue. All the old chestnuts are brought out – the 'death of hysteria', drapetomania (escaping slaves in the Southern States labelled as having mental disorder) – but the author illustrates his thesis by nibbling away at the edges. 'Can grief really be a disorder?' and 'Is narcissistic personality disorder real?' are actual chapter headings. To be sure, there are numerous dubious nosological entities in DSM-5, as there have been in any diagnostic scheme from Galen onwards. The author is tackling small fry here, and to grace his deliberations with the title 'a metaphysics of psychopathology' seems overblown.

It is not even clear quite what the author's specific thesis is, other than to praise the contributions of general philosophers and philosophers of science to the problem of psychiatric diagnosis. At least Szasz made his message clear: psychiatric diagnostic entities were artefacts of a self-serving doctor–patient relationship, epitomised by Charcot's hysterics, who derived social status as performing artists of illness behaviour while pandering to Charcot's own prejudices. The Szaszian legacy that all psychiatric diagnosis is to a greater or lesser extent iatrogenic pervades this book, but is never explicitly addressed.

There are several things to say about a book like this, and I shall not pull any punches.

First, psychiatrists are fed up with the continual sniping at their professional position. Originally it was sociologists who

inveigled bogus patients into psychiatric hospitals, then it was psychologists who claimed that psychosis was only some point on a dimensional scale of human distress. Now philosophers wade in but, note, steer clear of madness and debilitating mood disorders, as if the problematic nature of narcissistic personality disorder undermined the entire psychiatric enterprise.

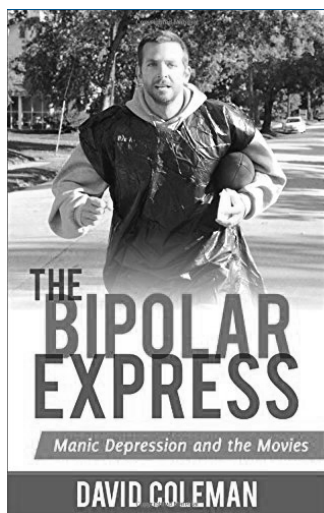
Second, no credit is given to the insight that people with schizophrenia and depression themselves provide into the nature of the human being. Eugene Minkowski, a French psychiatrist, saw clearly nearly a century ago that the former held a philosophical idealist position and the latter a materialist position, completely undermining philosophical notions that the 'normal' human being could be one of these. 'Philosopher cure thyself' might be salutary advice for a philosopher presuming to disabuse psychiatrists of their mistakes.

Third, no cognisance is taken of those philosophers, outside the Anglo-American tradition, who realised that the human being is a spiritual entity as well as an animal, and that psychiatric disorders are not 'natural kinds' of things such as gold (which the author seriously considers) and are not even like physical illnesses.

I could go on. Luckily, psychiatrists, certainly of my acquaintance, are made of stern stuff and are unlikely to be worried by the new wave of critics of their profession.

**John Cutting** Honorary Senior Lecturer, Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College London, Mill Wood, Wall Hill, Forest Row, East Sussex RH18 5EG, UK. Email: jscutting@outlook.com

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### **The Bipolar Express: Manic Depression and the Movies**

By David Coleman.  
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.  
2014.  
£27.95 (hb). 382 pp.  
ISBN: 9780810891937

David Coleman's theme is declared in his subtitle, to which he brings credentials as a produced screenwriter who knows about bipolar disorder from the inside. He argues for what he calls 'bipolar cinema' – that body of film work which portrays the disorder in its on-screen characters, or is created by people who experience it. He argues that bipolarity enhances the perspectives of these film-makers and therefore the work they produce: and further still, that many film-makers effectively use their work as a kind of therapy.

He argues his case with a decade-by-decade survey of cinema from its very beginnings to 2012's *Silver Linings Playbook*, picking out in detail many cases of films and film-makers to demonstrate his central theses. There is clearly something in this, and some of his examples, such as Charlie Chaplin, provide strong backing to his argument. But he undermines his position by overstating it, in prose which is by turns breathless or overwrought and which uses

the near-sneering term 'neurotypicals' to describe those who do not have bipolar disorder.

Although Coleman pays lip service to the existence of other mental disorders, he repeatedly falls back to the implied view that all mental disorder is manic depression and any portrayal of mental instability or distress in movies is a portrayal of bipolar disorder. He goes further: any film made by someone with bipolar disorder – whether it is about mental disorder or not – is part of 'bipolar cinema' which 'can be argued to include every slasher film ever made, as well as nearly every film noir, war movie, superhero film and other genre variants in which psychopathologies are examined (however inaccurately)'. That is a lot of movies.

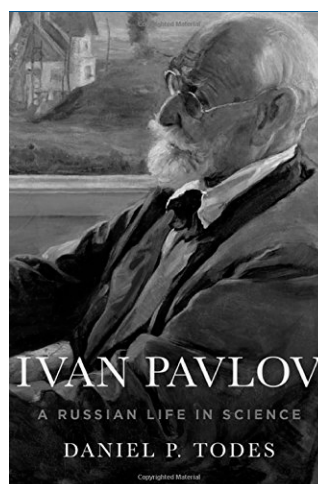
A single case in point: he includes in the canon of bipolar cinema the 1962 adaptation of Scott Fitzgerald's semi-autobiographical classic novel *Tender is the Night*. But Fitzgerald, like his protagonist Dick Diver, was an alcoholic, and his wife Zelda, like his heroine Nicole, had schizophrenia.

Coleman also risks alienating his fellow screenwriters when he asks: 'if a director or actor is bipolar should every film or performance therefore be included [in the filmography of bipolar cinema]?' The implication is that either all the output of writers with bipolar disorder is so classified, and they are therefore defined by their condition in a way other film-makers are not, or they are the anonymous surrogates who first bring films to life but whose progeny are immediately adopted by others.

By overstating his case, Coleman does himself and his subject a disservice, because the meat of the book is a well-researched resource about films portraying – or made by – those with mental disorder. Interested readers are advised to buy it for that meat, even if they do not swallow whole the message.

**Stephen Potts** Consultant in Transplant Psychiatry, and Honorary Senior Clinical Lecturer, University of Edinburgh, Department of Psychological Medicine, Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH16 4SA, UK. Email: Stephen.Potts@nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk

doi: 10.1192/bjp.bp.114.161810



### **Ivan Pavlov. A Russian Life in Science**

By Daniel P. Todes.  
Oxford University Press USA. 2014.  
£25.00 (hb). 880 pp.  
ISBN: 9780199925193

The great Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936) is usually remembered as the man who trained dogs to salivate at the sound of a bell. Indeed the term 'Pavlovian', meaning a conditioned response to stimuli, has entered the language. In this monumental and highly scholarly biography, the American historian of medicine Daniel P. Todes points out that Pavlov never trained a dog to salivate to a bell. Rather he was interested in what a study of dogs would reveal about man and, in particular, 'our psychical