

Alternatives Beyond Psychiatry

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This marvellous collection brings together innovative alternatives to psychiatry from different parts of the world. It will stimulate

new connections between those who are struggling to speak about experiences of abuse at the hands of those who claim to understand and 'cure' them.

There are some intriguing common themes that emerge as we read about initiatives like Soteria, Hotel Magnus Stenbock or The Windhorse Project (to name but three that get an airing here). There is an assumption that 'psychotherapy' of some kind can be counterposed to 'psychiatry', and that genuine psychotherapeutic work is in the good place, beyond bad psychiatry. Each brief scattered mention of Freud in the book, for example, is positive, and quasi-psychodynamic notions jostle alongside humanist perspectives. There is a further assumption that appears in the description of these and other organisations (ranging from Icarus to the Berlin Runaway House to La Cura), which is that this therapeutic work should be conducted in a way that brings people together – even perhaps in some kind of therapeutic community – rather than working with each person individually.

There are, of course, tensions between the strategies that are adopted in different cultures. So, for example, the Open Dialogue initiative in Finland works on the assumption that contributions should be tailored to an evolving discussion (and so here the community ethos is very strong), whereas the Law Project for Psychiatric Rights in the United States appeals to individuals to assert their power to seek compensation for wrongs they have suffered at the hands of the psychiatric system.

One thing that is striking about the collection is how people faced with psychiatry have often had to reinvent their critique of the medical model in ways that are suited to particular political-cultural circumstances but in ways which also enable them to forge a common cause that is increasingly internationalist. Medical psychiatry has for sure been one of the forces of globalisation, and its proponents have been keen to use 'cross-cultural' research to

reinforce its claims to find universal underlying disease entities. This book shows that radical non-psychiatric approaches to suffering are also now able to turn diversity of experience from apparent weakness into strength. Readers can follow the links from the Lehmann website to access debates in and across the various groups that are represented in the book (at www.peter-lehmann-publishing.com) and those debates will no doubt be augmented by the voices of groups that are fighting on the same ground who are not directly involved in this edition.

The disclaimers at the beginning of the book about the liability of contributors for harm that might arise from readers coming off medication highlights an issue that is hinted at in different chapters but is not tackled head-on; the conditions in which we try to go 'beyond psychiatry' today are now circled by legal procedures which mostly favour medical psychiatry. But, this book shows that there are ways out. At 431 pages, this sprawling compendium will be an invaluable resource for all those building alliances for a world without psychiatry.

Ian Parker