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Book Review

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE OF ADDICTION

HANNA PICKARD AND SERGE H. AHMED (Eds.)

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When our present era comes to be considered by future historians of addiction studies, it will be seen as a time when old certainties came to be challenged – when the limits of application of the addiction concept were reconsidered, when oversimplified dichotomies like compulsion versus free choice were abandoned, and when the useful meaning and ‘added value’ of the concept itself were questioned. Central to this task of rethinking what addiction means is the work of philosophers. Of course, philosophers have always been interested in addiction because it poses for them fundamental questions about human agency, autonomy and rationality. But over the last decade there have been a number of books edited and partly written by philosophers that have made especially significant contributions to the clarification of concepts in our field [1-3]. Philosophers like Bennett Foddy, Edmund Henden, Jeanette Kennett, and Neil Levy, among others, have shown that the philosophy and the science of addiction are continuous and mutually dependent. There have also been direct collaborations between philosophers and neuroscientists, such as that between Richard Holton and Kent Berridge [4] and between Hanna Pickard and Serge Ahmed [5].

It is the latter collaboration that provides the editors of this Routledge handbook which could be seen as a sort of culmination of the recent intersection of philosophy and science in addiction studies. Previously, Pickard had authored several enlightening analyses of some of the concepts central to addiction [6-8], while Ahmed had argued for the introduction of ‘choice’ in animal models of addiction [9-11]. A partnership between these two was always likely to be fruitful and so, indeed, it has proved.

The handbook is a chunky volume, consisting of 45 chapters, 580 pages, and a cost for the hardback copy of £175. Thankfully, chapters are relatively short and mostly well-written. In their Introduction, the editors state as their aim the collecting together of “original, substantial, and in places provocative perspectives on addiction, written by leading researchers in the field from a variety of disciplines.” It is divided into 3 parts: I. What is addiction?; II. Explaining addiction: culture, pathways and mechanisms; and III. Consequences, responses and the meaning of addiction. These parts are

further subdivided into 2 or 3 sections each. In addition to the marriage of philosophy and science, perhaps the most striking aspects of the book are the interdisciplinary mix of authors and wide range of topics and perspectives it contains. At the same time, the editors have persuaded many of the 'big hitters' in our field to contribute.

Among so many excellent chapters, it is invidious to pick out some for special mention and any selection is bound to reflect the particular interests of the reviewer. Nevertheless, I found especially useful chapters in Part I, Section A by Edmund Henden on addiction as a disorder of self-control, by Neil Levy on the belief oscillation hypothesis of addiction, and by Hanna Pickard herself on what she sees as the puzzle of addiction. Rivalling the first section of the book for my interest was the final Section C, Part III. This includes a breath-taking account of addiction as a structural problem of modern global society by Bruce K. Alexander, a forceful protest against the racist war against drugs in the USA by Carl Hart, and a careful analysis of the arguments for drug legalisation, with special reference to cannabis, by Robin Room, as well as two densely-argued chapters on legal aspects of addiction by Douglas Husak and Stephen Morse.

My main criticism of the book concerns Part II, Section B on 'Prevention, treatment and spontaneous recovery'. The chapters in this section are fine as far as they go but the problem is that there are only four of them. A section focussing on the main ways addictive behaviour can be changed and how attempts at change might be improved surely deserves more space than this. There are good chapters by recognised experts on contingency management, twelve-step fellowship, opioid maintenance treatment and self-change but nothing on, for example, pharmacotherapies, mindfulness, brief interventions, and cognitive-behavioural therapy in general.

Despite this weakness and despite the presence of a few chapters that do not meet the standards of the rest, the editors have succeeded in their aim for the book. I recommend it to anyone interested in keeping abreast of the main currents in theory and research on addiction and in being

stimulated to think more deeply about our subject. If you can't afford to buy it, get your library to order a copy.

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