

Psychotherapy as Religion: The Civil Divide in America

by William M. Epstein, D.S.W.

University of Nevada Press, Reno, Nev., 2006, 271 pages,
\$24.95.

In *Psychotherapy as Religion*, author William M. Epstein seeks to demonstrate that the entire field of psychotherapy is based upon unscientific concepts and has never been shown to effectively treat any mental disorder. Dr. Epstein, a professor of social work at the University of Nevada, reports that the basis of his premises are derived from reviewing randomized controlled trials that addressed effectiveness and were published within the past decade in either the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *Archives of General Psychiatry*, or the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. The introduction presents the author's conclusion that psychotherapy, while lacking in efficacy, is widely accepted in America because it is in concordance with the nation's "heroic individualism" and belief in personal responsibility for social ills. He argues that psychotherapy has taken on the role of social religion, and finds similarities with Christian Science.

The major portion of the book is devoted to criticism of individual studies and meta-analyses. Specific topics include depression, anxiety, eating disorders, addictions, testing methodology, psychodynamic psychotherapy, and cognitive-behavioral therapy. In each chapter, the author identifies apparent limitations in every study he encounters. Many of his arguments appear articulate and well crafted, such as rejecting studies with high attrition rates or lack of an adequate comparison arm. In other instances, he discounts studies on the basis of the argument that psychologists have an inherent conflict of interest when evaluating the validity of their own field, and therefore might not be able to objectively report upon the patients they evaluate.

The author's use of complicated sentence structure and obscure vocabulary impairs the readability of the text. Likewise, redundant editorializing detracts from what would otherwise be a straightforward and logical presentation. The book may appeal most to those with an interest in evidence-based medicine and to those true believers in psychotherapy who enjoy having their faith challenged.

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Trial Designs and Outcomes in Dementia Therapeutic Research

edited by Kenneth Rockwood and Serge Gauthier.

Taylor and Francis, Oxford, U.K., 2005, 300 pages,
\$169.95.

This book was compiled to aid the interpretation of previously done dementia trials and provide assistance in creating meaningful future ones. The volume starts with a brief history of work done to date and proceeds through various clinical trial designs. A considerable amount of time is spent on different potential outcome variables, including a discussion of the representation of these outcomes via scale. Ethical considerations in treatment of dementia as well as in conducting dementia research are also discussed.

Trial Designs and Outcomes in Dementia Therapeutic Research, which was edited by 2 Canadian experts on Alzheimer's disease and geriatric medicine, is well organized and indexed. Topics of interest can be easily located. It has useful discussions of different study designs that can be employed in dementia research and the types of bias that can be introduced.

Chapters concerning the currently available treatments for dementia, both pharmacologic and psychosocial, are useful reviews now but will very likely rapidly become out of date and contribute little to the overall purpose of the book.

The book concludes with the recognition that, while progress has been made in the treatment of dementia, the outcomes wanted by patients—a return to former functioning—are, for the most part, unavailable. Included is an impassioned discussion of what the goals of dementia research should be and how to measure them and consideration of the different aims of different stakeholders. The complexity of dementia and its impact on the elements of personhood, family, caregivers, and the health care system are stressed.

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