



IS EVIDENCE-BASED PSYCHIATRY ETHICAL? by Mona Gupta. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 224 pages, appendix, references, index. Paperback; \$52.95. ISBN: 9780199641116.

What would make anyone question the ubiquitous authority of evidence-based practice in healthcare today? Evidence-based practice is the *sine qua non* of practice in all areas of healthcare. It is the guiding light by which the expert clinician steps through the maze of clinical, legal, ethical, moral, and political issues that affect contemporary practice. It is the holy grail of clinical science. But not for Mona Gupta, who, in her book *Is Evidence-Based Psychiatry Ethical?*, reminds readers that clinical practice involves a rational appreciation for the needs and goals of individual persons who have come for treatment and that determination of those practice goals needs to take place with an understanding of personal values in the context of human relationships, not only in the utilitarian context of statistical analyses and significant findings. In less technical language, I would summarize Gupta's message as the idea that clinical practice in psychiatry should be administered with a large dose of humility and rational, self-reflexive critique, so that psychiatrists do not repeat psychiatry's past abuses of power or utilitarian motivations that have nothing to do with the treatment goals of a particular individual.

Gupta lays out her argument in nine chapters that act as a primer to understanding the field of evidence-based psychiatry (EBP) in the context of the larger field of evidence-based medicine (EBM). In her first chapter, she provides an overview and justification of the book. Gupta unreservedly points out some of the problems faced by contemporary psychiatry—that it has a history of association with harmful treatments and poor public opinion, that it is not viewed as a real science, that distinctions between normalcy and abnormality seem based on beliefs and values, and that psychiatry's ethical value is, therefore, questionable. Gupta engages a discussion of how psychiatrists have migrated EBM to psychiatry without considering whether the assumptions inherent in EBM can even be applied ethically and morally to the practice of psychiatry.

In chapter 2, Gupta defines concepts and terms associated with EBM, as well as the basic steps inherent to ethical decision making in medicine. Her writing is informed by analysis of two foundational texts, as well as interviews of people whom she considers experts in EBM. Chapter 2 amounts to a close reading of ideas in the field of EBM and stands as an informed critique of its basic premises and promises, including gaps, which she identifies as "areas of uncertainty" (p. 6). She extends her critique of EBM in chapter 3 through a discussion of the broader literature concerning not only the role of ethics in EBM, but also the conflicting views on the benefits and difficulties of its use and promotion.

Chapters 4–6 have a similar structure and intent as chapters 1–3, but they are more specifically applied to EBP. An interesting aspect of this discussion focuses on the epistemology of psychiatry and its ties to philosophical concepts of mind. Another is an analysis of basic assumptions and

biases within the discipline of psychiatry and EBM as well as how the ethics of EBM apply to psychiatry. What becomes very apparent in this discussion is the increasing gap between clinicians who see psychiatric conditions as having a fundamentally biological etiology and those who take a more biopsychosocial and spiritual approach to the understanding of health. In addition, Gupta points to disagreements in terms of how health resources are allocated in our society, and whether a utilitarian approach to psychiatry constitutes ethical practice.

Chapter 7 is a report on Gupta's group interviews of mental health experts, philosophers, and EBM developers about their views of ethics in the context of EBM. Main points that emerge from the interviews include (1) how EBM arises out of political and social trends; (2) whether EBM "is value-free or value-laden" (p. 149); (3) discussion and contrasting of the main goals of EBM, these being to improve health outcomes and satisfy patient preferences; and (4) whether EBM should be used to allocate resources. Gupta elaborates on each of these main points, but at one point overgeneralizes the discussion, stating that "mental health experts and philosophers disagree. Evidence is not value-free ..." (p. 164). It would be more prudent, in the context of her discussion, to claim that "EBM developers and philosophers disagree," as many mental health experts are eager to point out that social science and, indeed, all of science is anything but a values-free endeavor.

In chapters 8 and 9, Gupta provides a summative discussion and offers conclusions about the ethics of EBM, contrasting it with several other approaches to practice, including the biopsychosocial model. Essentially, Gupta argues that EBM cannot form the totality of ethical practice, which must always be situated within the values-informed reality, what I would call the "phenomenology" of the person seeking treatment. However, she acknowledges the virtue of EBM's "call to cultivate intellectual virtues, both intellectual (e.g., judiciousness and explicitness) and moral (e.g., conscientiousness, honesty, courage; p. 177).

Throughout this text, Gupta methodically works through complicated and detailed information about ethics, psychiatry, medicine, and evidence-based practice. The book is a goldmine of information about these issues as they pertain to psychiatry and ethics. For people working in psychiatry who have not been exposed to these arguments, the book is a comprehensive introduction to the assumptions, biases, ideological influences, and moral divides within the discipline.

For those who have considered these matters before, the book provides more-limited insight into the differences in thought and approach to the topic of ethics between philosophers, clinicians, and clinical researchers invested in EBP. However, some readers might find the discussion familiar, as many of the arguments in the book parallel discourse in the philosophy of science that critiques positivism and scientism. In fact, at many points in the book, the reader might replace EBM and EBP with the word "science," and the discussion would be very reminiscent of arguments about scientism, objectivity and neutrality, researcher bias, and concept reification that have been debated widely over the years.

Nevertheless, the author situates these arguments within the particularities of psychiatry, which makes the book use-

Book Reviews

ful to those in that field. For example, the book addresses topics such as the social context and politics of mental health funding; service structure and administration; who sets the mental health agenda; and the influence of insurance, governments, and research-focused organizations. Moral issues related to prioritization of the needs of the individual versus the needs of government, funding bodies, personal bankrolls, and corporations are discussed at several points in a fashion that provides for rich perspective with a tone of *parrhesia*, candidly laying bare some of the most difficult moral concerns of the discipline.

The book is not without other challenges. As I read, I wondered who the audience for the book really was and, at times, found the structure and content somewhat tedious. I found myself thinking that it reads like a doctoral dissertation, only to realize later that the text is based largely on the author's (2009) dissertation. The text is thick on detail but not fast on delivery. A clinician having limited time for continuing education would well be advised that the text is not a page-turner. Transforming a dissertation into a published monograph is not easy, in part because the audiences can be quite different. As a result, the book is useful for those who have, or are required to have, the time to devote to this text. Unfortunately, Gupta's text does not actually succeed in bridging that gap between academia and clinical practice that she identifies as a basic problem within the discipline.

Throughout the text, I was also distracted by vacillation between EBM and EBP. While Gupta defined the differences between these terms well, at times I found her discussing EBM, when I really was wondering more specifically about the implications for EBP.

Finally, I have some concerns about the scope of the text itself. Focusing specifically on psychiatry is reasonable, as this is the author's area of training and practice. However, Gupta has addressed a topic important to mental health, not just to psychiatry. As a result, the text contributes to the fragmentation of discourse in mental health that detracts from ethical and moral delivery of services to those in need. A considerable amount of thought and research comes from psychology, nursing, and other allied health disciplines. Psychiatrists would do best not to reinforce the intellectual silos within mental health, as this perpetuates the very problems Gupta discusses as being central to her field.

Reviewed by Theresa Zolner, Associate Professor of Psychology, The King's University, Edmonton, AB T6B 2H3.

PHILOSOPHY & THEOLOGY

BEING AS COMMUNION: A Metaphysics of Information by William Dembski. Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014. xvii + 218 pages. Paperback; \$34.95. ISBN: 9780754638582.

William Dembski, author of *Being as Communion: A Metaphysics of Information*, holds a PhD in philosophy and another in mathematics. A Christian theist of broadly evangelical leanings, he is probably best known for his role in the emergence of the controversial intelligent design movement. His previous two books, *The Design Inference* (1998) and *No Free Lunch* (2002), develop and deploy an information-theoretic apparatus for identifying and ana-

lyzing patterns in nature whose origin and development, Dembski argues, materialism is constitutionally incapable of explaining. In these two books, he argues that materialist science only appears to account for the informational complexity of nature because it surreptitiously helps itself (as in a "free lunch") to an unconfessed teleology disguised as chance and necessity, thereby appearing to keep the world free of nonnatural sources of telic agency such as God or immanent teleology (which might require a "design inference"). His most recent book, the subject of this review, completes Dembski's trilogy on intelligent design by further expanding on and articulating the philosophical underpinnings of the two earlier books' themes. While he wrote *Being as Communion* to give us "a metaphysical picture of what the world must be like for intelligent design to be credible" (xiii), much of its content holds interest and value beyond the vicissitudes of the intelligent design research program itself, and therefore (despite its place in the trilogy) functions well as a "stand-alone" book for those new to Dembski's work.

The numerous philosophical, scientific, and theological ideas that find their way into these 200 or more pages of sophisticated critique, argumentation, and speculation cannot be adequately represented in a review of this size. My goal, therefore, will be merely to give the reader a sense of some of what this book offers in the way of topics and issues, and then conclude with a few brief comments on its accomplishment.

Dembski opens his book, setting the stage for what he will call his metaphysics of "informational realism," by drawing attention to a deep, yet largely ignored, tension between our present age of information and the West's underlying materialistic worldview: if we embrace materialism, which renders reality into nothing but massy particles agglomerated by nontelic material forces, then most of the things (information included) that we have valued throughout history (values included) "become dim reflections of their former selves," a disenchantment of reality which, when squarely faced, cannot but lead to "the ultimate dissolution of all human aspiration" (pp. 4–5). Dembski believes that his informational realism lays the basis for preserving the transcendent realities of human aspiration which materialism must render as mere appearances. In the final sentence of his book, Dembski concludes that "the information approach to reality takes the world as it is" (p. 203). And "the world as it is" gives itself to us already rife with minds, meanings, values, and purposes, none of which can be taken seriously for long by either materialism or a civilization beholden to materialism's atomistic and reductionistic strictures. Thus, what we find between the first and the last chapters of this book is an attempt not only to preserve the West's humanistic heritage but also to resituate it in the context of a metaphysics of information that establishes a fundamentally relational ontology capable of fostering unfettered scientific inquiry that is open to wherever evidence leads and is thus free to take "the world as it is." Dembski's two principal aims in this book are, therefore (1) to build a convincing case for the many explanatory and existential advantages of an info-centric paradigm switch that would replace the interaction of particles with the exchange of information as reality's most basic modality of operation, and (2) to supply the conceptual and theoretical sub-structure to support this rather radical move.