

# Toxic Psychiatry

Review

Mirror

a review of

*Toxic Psychiatry* by Peter R. Breggin. St. Martins Press. 1991. 464 pages. \$18.

“The only known biochemical imbalances in the brains of nearly all psychiatric patients are those caused by the treatments.”

–Peter Breggin, *Talking Back to Prozac*

This book is as important and radical as R.D. Laing’s “The Politics Of Experience” or Thomas Szasz’s “The Myth of Mental Illness.” Breggin has been a long time campaigner for reform of the mental health system and in the early seventies he led a successful movement to end the horrific practice of Lobotomy in the US.

In this book he takes aim at the Hydra of the Psychiatric/Pharmaceutical complex and systematically disassembles the underlying rationale of Bio-Psychiatry. His essential thesis is that there is not now nor has there ever been a shred of credible scientific evidence for the theory that the personal experiences named as mental illness can be linked to specific neurochemical states or that genetics plays any role in these experiences. Instead, mental illness is not a disease, there are no such things as “bad chemicals in the brain” and “treatable neurochemical imbalances,” and diagnoses such as schizophrenia, compulsive behavior, anxiety, substance abuse, depression, and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are not based on any identifiable biological problem. (Breggin provides copious references supporting the striking points he makes. For example, in relation to ADHD he notes that in 1998 at the National Institutes of Health Consensus on ADHD, the following statement was issued: “We do not have an independent, valid test for ADHD, and there is no data to indicate that ADHD is due to a brain malfunction.”)

But the Government, an especially toxic head of the Hydra, backs this pseudo-scientific ideology. Thus a psychiatrist, with police backing, can declare a diagnosis for you, then drug you and even imprison you against your will. Whether your concern is personal—your brother’s on Ritalin—or just that the ideology of psychiatry informed and made possible the Holocaust, read *Toxic Psychiatry*, weep—and act.

## Quote from R.D. Laing:

There is a great deal of pain in life and perhaps the only pain that can be avoided is the pain that comes from trying to avoid pain.

Whether life is worth living depends on whether there is love in life.

We are effectively destroying ourselves by violence masquerading as love.

We live in a moment of history where change is so speeded up that we begin to see the present only when it is already disappearing.

We are bemused and crazed creatures, strangers to our true selves, to one another, and to the spiritual and material world—mad, even, from an ideal standpoint we can glimpse but not adopt.

The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice, there is little we can do to change; until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds.

Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be break-through. It is potential liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death.

*FE note:* see also Anti-psychiatry: the Psychology of Freedom: a selected bibliography in this issue.

# fifth Estate

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