



Alien Landscapes?: Interpreting Disordered Minds

Prof. Jonathan Glover

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We have made huge progress in understanding the biology of mental illnesses, but comparatively little in interpreting them at the psychological level. The eminent philosopher Jonathan Glover believes that there is real hope of progress in the human interpretation of disordered minds.

The challenge is that the inner worlds of people with psychiatric disorders can seem strange, like alien landscapes, and this strangeness can deter attempts at understanding. Do people with disorders share enough psychology with other people to make interpretation possible? To explore this question, Glover tackles the hard cases—the inner worlds of hospitalized violent criminals, of people with delusions, and of those diagnosed with autism or schizophrenia. Their first-person accounts offer glimpses of inner worlds behind apparently bizarre psychiatric conditions and allow us to begin to learn the “language” used to express psychiatric disturbance. Art by psychiatric patients, or by such complex figures as van Gogh and William Blake, give insight when interpreted from Glover’s unique perspective. He also draws on dark chapters in psychiatry’s past to show the importance of not medicalizing behavior that merely transgresses social norms. And finally, Glover suggests values, especially those linked with agency and identity, to guide how the boundaries of psychiatry should be drawn.

Seamlessly blending philosophy, science, literature, and art, *Alien Landscapes?* is both a sustained defense of humanistic psychological interpretation and a compelling example of the rich and generous approach to mental life for which it argues.

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