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BOOKS

**Abstract:** Reviews the book 'Substance Abuse As Symptom: A Psychoanalytic Critique of Treatment Approaches and the Cultural Beliefs That Sustain Them,' by Louis S.Berger.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Substance abuse as symptom: A psychoanalytic critique of treatment approaches and the cultural beliefs that sustain them. By Louis S. Berger. \$33.95. Pp. 259. Hillsdale, NJ: Analytic Press, 1991.

Berger has, in effect, written two books in one, using the ideas and implications of each to support the other. One book is about substance abuse, the psychopathology he believes causes addiction, and the failure of current models of treatment to address that psychopathology. The other is about widespread cultural psychopathology and the implications for psychological treatment in general.

The author describes substance abuse as a symptom of massive, prevalent, individual psychopathology that is both supported by and reflected in cultural psychopathology. He sets out to debunk a simplistic approach to substance abuse that relies primarily on a biological model of addiction. Berger finds that the proponents of the medical model ignore what he considers to be ubiquitous "mid-range" psychopathology underlying addictions of all kinds. He considers all addictions to be symptoms of psychopathology, originating in early developmental disturbances, characterized by inadequate reality testing, problems with morals and values, a deficient interest in an inner life and an impoverished relationship to the self, and a narcissistic relationship to others organized primarily around gratification. Berger explicitly rejects a biological model and in so doing, he falls into a simplification parallel to what he criticizes in the mainstream, Alcoholics Anonymous-based approach to treatment. To ignore biology and behavior in favor of addressing

psychopathology is to look at only one part of the elephant.

Berger's "other book" is a provocative and deep examination of widespread cultural psychopathology and the implications for treatment. He makes an unfortunate choice of descriptions in his use of the terms "good enough" and "not good enough" to describe both patients and treatment. (He believes that only about 10% of patients are good enough for what he considers to be good-enough psychotherapy, that is, psychoanalytic treatment for severe character pathology.) The reader is challenged to bypass the resulting condescending tone to consider the author's radical notions about the implications of theory for treatment and consequent concepts of training.

Berger's book should appeal to a wide audience, both clinical and academic. He challenges adherents of all disciplines and belief systems to suspend theory and look to developmental research and clinical practice for treatment guidelines. This book is not a how-to manual, but rather a well-written, complicated, wide-ranging exploration of individual and cultural dynamics.

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