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PC, M.D.: How Political Correctness Is Corrupting Medicine

by Sally Satel, M.D.

Basic Books • 2000 • 285 pages • \$27.00

Reviewed by Sue A. Blevins

When one thinks about “political correctness” (PC), the term conjures up thoughts about left-wing politics. Sally Satel's *PC, M.D.: How Political Correctness Is Corrupting Medicine* focuses on U.S. schools of public health and their quest for “social justice,” the anti-psychiatry movement among former psychiatric patients, nurse feminists, alternative medicine, involuntary treatment for drug addicts, and racial issues in health care. The author finds that the PC mindset is doing considerable damage in the field of medicine.

Satel, an M.D. who is also a lecturer at Yale University School of Medicine, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, and a former staff psychiatrist for the superior court in Washington, D.C., writes knowingly on a variety of important issues regarding public health. She provides persuasive evidence that schools of public health, traditionally focused on infection control and population-based diseases, have lately shifted to social and political issues. This new public-health activism stems from “political correctness,” which is an outgrowth of postmodernist philosophy. Postmodernists accuse the dominant culture of imposing its values on the “powerless and disenfranchised” members of society. One of Satel's key observations is that postmodernists in medicine want to topple the dominant culture in order to close the health gap between whites and blacks. It's a case of doctors playing social engineers.

Satel notes that at the 1998 annual meet-

ing of the American Public Health Association, a PC public-health academician offered these five recommendations for curbing the AIDS epidemic: “limit the power of corporations, cap salaries of CEOs, eliminate corporate subsidies, prohibit corporate contributions to politicians and strengthen labor unions.” None of those mostly statist nostrums would have any impact on the transmission or curing of AIDS; the statist is trying to use that health issue as a Trojan Horse for their agenda.

Moreover, Satel points out that PC public-health activists aren't the least bit objective when it comes to examining the relationships between various social factors and health. “For example, noting that wealth and health correlate, some public health experts condemn capitalism. . . . However, if they must be social activists, these experts could just as easily fight for school choice. . . . After all, we know that education is linked to both future earnings and health. And wouldn't it make sense to encourage marriage and religious activity, since both are associated with better health?” the author asks.

Satel's concerns about the anti-psychiatry movement, however, aren't convincing. In fact, the book presents a major contradiction: In chapter two, “Inmates Take Over the Asylum,” Satel challenges the claims made by “consumer-survivors”—individuals who assert they were harmed by psychiatrists/psychotherapists and who vehemently oppose involuntary treatment. Yet in chapter seven, “Therapy for Victims,” she provides rational evidence that the “trauma services movement” is seriously damaging patients. This type of therapy is based on the premise that early trauma results in catastrophic problems and therapists should work on helping patients express their repressed memories of abuse. But could this therapy actually help implant false memories? Satel notes that “The American Psychological Association is so concerned about the ethical and legal implications of ‘implanting’ memories of abuse through suggestion that it published a primer for therapists.”

So could it be that the consumer-survivors in chapter two were truly harmed by the memory implanters noted in chapter seven? It seems illogical to debunk the consumer-survivors' claims of being harmed by psychiatry in one place, while highlighting a dangerous type of therapy (the trauma services movement) in another.

This book is a must-read for anyone interested in the issues of involuntary treatment for drug addiction and psychiatric illnesses. Satel clearly supports compulsory treatment for drug addiction and "mental diseases"—not just to make sure those so diagnosed don't hurt others, but to help them improve their own lives. She writes, "The point of imposing treatment is to help patients attain autonomy, to help them break out of the figurative straightjacket binding thought and will. . . . Being required to take medication is hardly a violation of the civil rights of a person who is too ill to exercise free will in the first place. The freedom to be psychotic is not freedom." Anyone who fears the spread of legalized coercion will find this part of the book most troubling.

PC, M.D. will engender many different reactions. In general, authoritarians will probably love it. Libertarians, conservatives, and classical liberals will appreciate the insights into the PC public-health movement, but will likely disagree with the author's support for state-mandated psychiatry and treatment for drug addicts. Finally, socialists, especially those espousing diversity and egalitarianism, will abhor that Satel has blown the whistle on their efforts to turn the medical profession into a tool for their increasing control of society. □

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Escape from Leviathan: Liberty, Welfare and Anarchy Reconciled

by J. C. Lester

St. Martin's Press • 2000 • 246 pages • \$59.95

Reviewed by Andrew I. Cohen

Since the author focuses entirely on criticisms of libertarianism, a less felicitous but more descriptive subtitle would be: "Against Arguments that Liberty, Welfare, and Anarchy Are Incompatible."

J. C. Lester, a scholar in social and political theory trained at the London School of Economics and Political Science, applies Karl Popper's theory of knowledge to social theory. On Popper's view, we ought to uphold theories that withstand efforts at disproof by critics. Lester thus argues that leading criticisms of liberalism fail to falsify the "compatibility thesis" his subtitle expresses. Starting with accounts of rationality, liberty, and welfare presented in light of objections, Lester defends a completely unregulated market.

Lester is certainly doing important work. There are powerful scholarly criticisms of liberalism (in its original sense) worthy of libertarian notice. Lester's approach could furnish a weapon in the arsenal against anti-liberalism. Unfortunately, he moves with considerable, sometimes blinding, speed against critics of liberalism. He defends the brisk pace both by urging the reader to consult the original sources and by saying that any errors he made here would have persisted in lengthier discussions.

His cursory reviews of key arguments presuppose an intimate familiarity with scholarly criticisms of liberalism. This book might then be of little value for the layperson. For those familiar with the relevant contemporary scholarship, the monograph, though sometimes problematically quick, has some value as an anti-anti-liberal guidebook.

On Lester's account, rational persons invariably calculate how best to promote their perceived interests. He quickly surveys some objections to this picture of *homo economicus* and counters that persons rational-