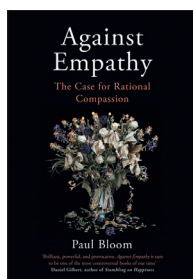


Against Empathy: the Case for Rational Compassion

Paul Bloom

Bodley Head, 2017, HB, 304pp, £18.99, 978-1847923141



FORMING A BRIDGE

At first glance, presenting an argument against empathy seems counterintuitive. However, Bloom's argument is against a narrowly defined form of empathy restricted to the affective domain.

Much of the research and debate around empathy is hampered by the muddle surrounding the definition of this nuanced concept and this book adds to this conceptual confusion. The author's concept of empathy is more aligned to sympathy, which is linked to causing personal distress and burnout. His subtitle to the book 'Rational Compassion', which he supports, is attuned with current thinking on empathy as a broad concept that has cognitive, affective, moral, and behavioural aspects.

Bloom adopts a utilitarian approach to ethics and empathy, which many doctors may find difficult to reconcile with their clinical practice. Empathy in clinical medicine involves individuals in a face-to-face encounter; it is a relational concept. Bloom argues that, because empathy may be biased towards people we like, it is not a force for moral good. Many might argue that empathy attempts to be non-judgemental and forms a bridge across cultural and ethnic divisions.

Empathy is not simply a cognitive or an affective phenomenon, but a combination of the two in varying amounts according to the clinical situation. Bloom's controversial title and ethos on empathy may be more relevant to the current politics in the US than to medical practice in this country.

David Jeffrey,

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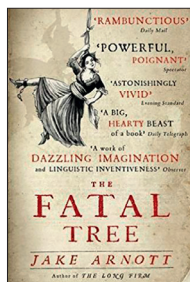
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The Fatal Tree

Jake Arnott

Sceptre, Hodder & Stoughton, 2017, PB, 352pp, £8.99, 978-1473637764



A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO 18TH-CENTURY CRIMINALITY

With general practice being such a busy profession, at present it's difficult to find the time to do all those other things you've been meaning to do. Reading more books, learning a language, satisfying an amateur historical interest — they've all had to be put on the back burner. However, with Jake Arnott's new novel *The Fatal Tree* it may be possible to achieve all three during a short holiday.

The 'fatal tree' of the title refers to the gallows at Tyburn, the final destination of many of the characters who belong to the criminal underworld of 1720s London. They are members of the slang-speaking 'canting crew' and, with the help of the glossary, you too will prattle flash (speak slang) like a rum prig (good thief) within a couple of chapters.

Some of these criminals were the celebrities of the age, their final confessions ghostwritten by Daniel Defoe and life stories dramatised for the stage. Arnott however takes the rare step of writing the story of a woman — Elizabeth Lyon, alias 'Edgworth Bess', close associate of the great thief-taker Jonathan Wild and wife of the famous jail-breaker Jack Sheppard.

Hers was an untold story, but one, as a GP in modern times, that still rings true. We often meet young women who, having lost parental guidance and protection in their teens, made choices that put them in dangerous and exploitative situations. We also see the effect of a financial crash on the poorest in society — be it the credit crunch or the South Sea Bubble. Arnott's attention to the loves and vulnerabilities of Bess mean that, despite all

her crimes and exploitation of others, it is very hard not to take her side.

Not only do the themes reach into today's world, but also, if you care to visit the Hunterian Museum, you can stand next to her associate Jonathan Wild. After his execution he suffered the fate most feared by the canting crew — to fall into the hands of surgeons. He was dissected and his skeleton is still on display today.

Jacqueline Harris,

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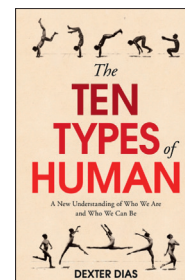
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The Ten Types of Human: a New Understanding of Who We Are, and Who We Can Be

Dexter Dias

William Heinemann, 2017, HB, 848pp, £25.00, 978-1785150166



THE NEED FOR COMPASSIONATE KINDNESS

Dias has looked at the 'ten types of human' in his quest to understand the human mind. He believes it must have evolved in the same way the human body evolved and adapted, and in this first part he deals with what he calls the perceiver of pain. The thread that runs through this is the story of Anthony, a child sold to the slave trade in Africa, although he also looks at various areas of research into brain function and our ability to detect emotion. He asks, 'Why do we try to save the drowning child and how do we choose between a group of children and one of our own? Do we perceive children in other countries differently? Do we have a protective mechanism against too much pain we can't control?' He senses that we all perceive the pain of others but, as the numbers become greater, our system is unable to cope, so switches off, hence 'burnout'. He finds compassion reduces this.