



Junk Medicine: Doctors, Lies and the Addiction Bureaucracy

Theodore Dalrymple

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Almost everything you know about heroin addiction is wrong. Not only is it wrong, but it is obviously wrong. Heroin is not highly addictive; withdrawal from it is not medically serious; addicts do not become criminals to feed their habit; addicts do not need any medical assistance to stop taking heroin; and contrary to received wisdom, heroin addiction most certainly IS a moral or spiritual problem. Based on his experience as a prison doctor and as a psychiatrist in a large general hospital in Birmingham, Dr. Dalrymple argues that addiction to heroin is not an illness at all, and that doctors only make it worse. They deceive both the addicts and themselves by pretending that they have something to offer. In this brilliant, entertaining and provocative book, Theodore Dalrymple explains how and why a literary tradition dating back to De Quincey and Coleridge, and continuing up to the deeply sociopathic William Burroughs and beyond, has misled all Western societies for generations about the nature of heroin addiction. These writers' self-dramatizing and dishonest accounts of their own addiction have been accepted uncritically, and have been more influential by far in forming public attitudes than the whole of pharmacological science. As a result, a self-serving, self-perpetuating and completely useless medical bureaucracy has been set up to deal with the problem. With scathing wit, implacable logic and savage denunciation, Dr. Dalrymple exposes the mythology surrounding heroin addiction. Moving seamlessly between literature, pharmacology, history and philosophy, he demonstrates what happens when the nature of a social problem is so thoroughly misunderstood, and when human beings are regarded as inanimate objects rather than as agents of their own destiny. His scintillating, iconoclastic little book has an importance far beyond its immediate subject matter.

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