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# **Defining Mental Disorder**

## **Jerome Wakefield and His Critics**

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## Wakefield Critiques: Introductory Comments

**Jerome Wakefield**

To the Reader,

Because I eventually chose to answer each of my critics in a separate and detailed reply rather than answering all in one summary essay, there was no natural place for me to offer overarching acknowledgments and caveats. Given the magnitude of this project, that seemed unacceptable. Hence, this “comment” after the editors’ introduction that the editors graciously allowed me.

The future role of psychiatry in a free society, including the scope and limits of the application of the concept of mental disorder and its consequences, is a crucial question confronting philosophy of psychiatry. Getting clear about the meaning of psychiatry’s foundational concept of mental disorder is an important and highly controversial step in that inquiry. I hope the reader will feel as I do that the extraordinary intellectual power assembled in this unique volume, with contributions by leading philosophers of psychiatry who all focus on the concept of mental disorder, illuminatingly and provocatively advances our understanding of the options and stakes in the debate over the definition of mental disorder.

This volume includes essays by thirteen critics of my harmful dysfunction analysis (HDA) of the concept of medical, including mental, disorder, and my replies. Within the psychiatric and psychological literatures, the HDA is by far the most cited view in researchers’ and scholars’ discussions of the diagnostic status of various conditions. Within this volume, not only the HDA but also the most important proposed alternatives to the HDA are explored and disputed at a level of detail unavailable elsewhere. Taken together, these essays in my view give as comprehensive and in-depth an introduction to the current status of the philosophy of psychiatry’s attempts to understand psychiatry’s foundational concept as one is likely to find. For those readers familiar with the HDA, I should mention that the critics’ compelling arguments have moved me to alter or amplify or clarify my view on several issues. The HDA survives intact but in a more nuanced and elaborated form.

Now, to the pleasure of acknowledging those to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. I am most exceptionally grateful to Denis Forest and Luc Faucher for undertaking this

project and for their superhuman patience in seeing it through to fruition despite so many delays and some major adjustments in its structure. Beyond the editors, my greatest debt of gratitude is to the thirteen critics (which includes the editors) who contributed the fruits of their thinking about the philosophy of psychiatry to this volume. Each of their angles of attack on the HDA was of value to me and provoked me to learn and think in new ways as I engaged intensively with the arguments of each critical essay. I have tried my best but I can scarcely do justice to all of their efforts.

My greatest personal debt is to my research assistant and visiting scholar at the New York University (NYU) Center for Bioethics, Jordan Conrad, who read and provided feedback and editing and reference help on multiple drafts of each reply. His insightful probing and critical feedback, always done in the friendliest of ways, has saved me from many embarrassments and made my replies more measured and focused than they would have been.

I also thank Reinier Schuur for helpful discussions of some of the critics' positions at an early stage of my thinking about this project and for some comments on several of the critics' papers. I am also deeply indebted to my wife, Lisa Peters, and my sons, Joshua and Zachary Wakefield, for not only putting up with the lengthy period of out-of-control workaholicism that it took to reply to the thirteen critics and tolerating all the missed or constricted family time that resulted but for actively cheering me on in this task when my spirits flagged.

A few caveats: Given the possibility of downloading individual essays in today's digital world, I have written each of my replies to be relatively self-contained, including references. I have tried to make the essays reasonably accessible to nonphilosophers in the clinical sciences, so I have eschewed some usual philosopher's stylistic choices that are confusing to others, such as the use of single quotation marks to indicate the word versus double quotation marks to indicate the concept and have just used double quotes for both and relied on context for the distinction. Also, to make lengthy quotes more readable, I have freely eliminated citations. Unless otherwise specified, italics are in the original quoted passage.

I have several apologies to make to the critics who so generously contributed their papers. First and foremost is an apology for the exceptionally long time it took to complete my responses and reach publication. As the contributors know, some vicissitudes of life intervened to lengthen the process. More constructively, many of the critics cited various areas of scientific or philosophical scholarship with which I was not sufficiently familiar to feel confident answering. As is evident from my replies, I took these references seriously and often did a deep dive into the relevant literature to understand and evaluate the objection. This enormously enjoyable approach took considerable time.

However, even considering those factors, the delay to the contributors' essays seeing the light of publication was considerable. Despite this, all the contributors hung in there, for which I am grateful. A further caveat on their behalf is only fair. Some of them

have probably evolved in their thinking since writing their chapters and might argue their case differently and perhaps more persuasively if writing today; others might take an entirely different position today. So, their critiques, illuminating and intrinsically worthwhile as they are, must be understood as potentially time-stamped and anachronistic from the perspectives of some critics themselves. In such cases, I look forward to an updated interchange in the future.

I also apologize for the limitations of my replies. Even with exceptional freedom as to length generously granted to me by MIT Press and my editors, I could not possibly address every important argument put forward by each critic. So, frustratingly, I picked out what I considered the most compelling and interesting objections to answer and tried to be thorough about those, and other arguments of necessity went unanswered and await future interchanges. These choices are captured in the titles of my replies. However, very often an issue raised in one critic's essay that went unaddressed there is addressed in my reply to another critic who raised a related point, and in my replies, I frequently direct the reader to other replies. The replies are in this sense complementary and together form a comprehensive account of my current thinking about the HDA.

Finally, getting critiqued by thirteen very smart folks is a great privilege and pleasure, but it can also be challenging and try one's emotional fiber. I believe that the HDA amply stands up to the critics' objections—in fact, emerges from this trial considerably strengthened. Nevertheless, allow me to add an apology for anything in my replies that may seem to go beyond argument analysis in tone. Generally, the critics did not hold back in the vigor and bluntness of their arguments, and neither did I. I can only hope that when reading my replies, my critics will not think of me along the lines of what Schopenhauer's mother wrote to her son in a letter: "You have everything that could make you a credit to human society...but you are nevertheless irritating and unbearable. ... All of your good qualities... are made useless to the world merely because of your rage at wanting to know everything better than others... no one can tolerate being reproved by you, who also still show so many weaknesses yourself, least of all in your adverse manner, which in oracular tones, proclaims this is so and so, without ever supposing an objection. ... If you were less like you, you would only be ridiculous, but thus as you are, you are highly annoying." One thing my critics have taught me for sure: when I henceforth proclaim in oracular tones that the HDA is better than other analyses of "disorder," I will never again suppose that there is no objection! Hopefully, this will allow me to climb from highly annoying to merely ridiculous.

Again, I thank the contributors, the editors, and MIT Press for this opportunity to air what I believe are critically important issues in the philosophy of psychiatry.

