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The Age of Insanity: Modernity and mental health

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Abstrak

The initial idea for this book came to me after a lecture that I gave in 1995 at the University of Newcastle in Australia. The lecture itself dealt with the psychological toxicity of certain patterns of contemporary enculturation, most notably those related to materialism and consumerism. In my usual fashion, I tried to ruffle a few feathers by challenging the audience to question some of the cultural realities to which they had become accustomed. Afterward, a man in his late thirties said to me on his way out, ?I want you to know that you just changed my life.? He went on to say that he had a financially rewarding career, as well as all the trappings that make up the proverbial good life. But he added that he had been living for years with the nagging sense that his entire life somehow lacked meaning, substance, and grounding. In his words, his life was a sham. This man told me that, somewhere in the course of my lecture, he finally found the courage to make the radical changes that might help to bring him alive. Yet he never once made reference to anything that was actually wrong with him or his life. Those comments reminded me of similar things I have heard from so manyother people, including students, therapy clients, and acquaintances. In most cases, they talk about ill-defined forms of mental distress that cannot be traced to specific causes. Instead, it seems the good life of the modern consumer is often mocked by feelings of discontent, disorientation, and psychic numbness.