

The View from the Summit

Sigmund Koch points out that in psychiatry, unlike in a true science, the body of knowledge does not build. Instead, each new theory “typically disenfranchises the theoretical fictions of the past.”¹

This means we do not yet know the first thing. Psychiatry and psychology know nothing. They have established nothing. Everything they have postulated so far has turned out to be wrong.

That Freud was wrong is not controversial within psychology itself any longer. But a lot of Freud’s mistaken assertions are still embedded in the humanities and the popular culture.

Alice Miller has had a great deal of influence as well, including influence on current legislation.

Jordan Peterson is doing well currently with the ideas of Carl Jung. You might find the ideas of Jung attractive, but they are based on nothing verifiable.

Many still hold to the “chemical imbalance” concept: that is, that “mental illness” is due to a chemical imbalance in the brain. When examined, this is nonsensical.

Many people these days have discarded religion. So they rely on their preferred psychology to form their world view and explain themselves to themselves. They can hold to these dogmas with a greater than religious fervor.

But they are based on nothing. They are like patent medicines, snake oil for the soul.

Psychiatry and psychology cannot understand mental illness.

The “scientific” model is fundamentally incapable of approaching the psyche. It is like trying to hammer a thought to the wall. The psyche is too complex and protean to devise a meaningful experiment with meaningful controls. Moreover, in the end, nobody can directly observe other than their own psyche. The clinical record is second or third hand anecdotal, and cannot be independently verified. And there is an insurmountable observer paradox: the act of observation falsifies the data.

Most critically of all, psychiatry and psychology, in seeking to mimic the “objectivity” of physical science, exclude all moral as well as metaphysical considerations. Yet nothing is more vital to the soul than the issue of right and wrong.

“Mental illness” is a false analogy to physical illness. It is like speaking of how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. There is no such thing.

We have better sources for understanding the psyche in literature.

Crowdsourced sites like *Quora* or self-help groups like Alcoholics Anonymous or Adult Children of Alcoholics offer vastly larger and more reliable bodies of evidence than the established professional fields of psychology or psychiatry can possibly produce. Here we learn firsthand instead of second or third hand from those able to directly observe “mental illness,” whatever it is, in their own psyches, as most psychologists cannot. And we have a vastly larger sample size than in any likely survey or clinical study.

But literature is an even better source. This is largely why we have myth and literature: to examine, understand, and treat psychological issues. As they have been passed down through generations, such myths and stories come with even stronger empirical warrant than the crowd-sourced groups. They have resonated with and seemed vitally important to many generations. Important enough to memorize. Important enough to teach all children.

Myth and literature are not expressions of the unconscious or subconscious, but conscious wisdom on the psyche.

Freud, Jung, Miller, and others have always used literary and mythical examples to support their theories. It is inevitable; literature is the only available objective evidence on the contents of the human psyche.

But Freud and Jung and psychologists generally speak of it as if they were dealing with patients having hallucinations. This presumes that literature is beyond conscious control.

Obviously, that is not true. One is not unconscious when writing a story, and one is not unconscious when listening to one.

It is the wisdom of the ages as well as of many recent surveys that major writers and artists are generally melancholics, what we would call depressives. This means they have both incentive to address the issue of depression, and insight into it.

The metaphoric language of myth and poetry, and the narrative form of myth, is the most effective language for speaking of interior states; through the use of what Eliot called “objective correlatives.” When asked what one of his poems meant, Eliot responded, “had I been able to say it any more plainly, I would have.” A good writer or artist is expressing his psychic insights in the clearest way possible.

Trying to do psychology without using narrative and metaphor is like trying to do mathematics without using numerals.

Then the test of prolonged popularity, of entering a culture’s literary canon, shows that the insights of a given tale or legend resonate with many other psyches as well. It is the best empirical evidence for what is true about the psyche.

Short, that is, of those elements of literature that have been elevated to religious significance. These, obviously, are those that resonate most strongly.

Through a study of hero legends, fairy tales, and the like, we may then conclude the following:

1. Depression, and mental illness generally, is not an individual problem. It is a problem relationship, and most often found in the context of a family.

It is therefore not possible to deal with melancholia on a strictly individual level. Simply treating the individual’s symptoms instead of addressing causes will probably make the problem worse; the symptoms are there for a reason. The relationship must be dealt with.

2. The core issue is moral.

This is completely missed by conventional psychology. In this diseased relationship, someone has done wrong, and someone has been wronged.

Morality is of fundamental importance to the soul. To treat the soul without reference to right and wrong is malpractice.

We need to speak in terms of virtue, vice, and justice.

3. The core issue is emotional betrayal.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is emerging as the most popular current explanation for depression. The emerging consensus is that what we call mental illness is the result of prolonged childhood abuse.

But the stories say something else. There need be no prolonged abuse, nor is there anything critical about physical abuse or sexual abuse, as present opinion seems to think. The issue is emotional betrayal. It is the Judas kiss.

4. The most likely source of this emotional betrayal is a self-obsessed parent.

Emotional betrayal can come from a spouse or lover, brother or sister, a close friend, an organization or a community one has identified with, or one's children.

But a parent is the most likely source. Their emotional influence and their opportunity is greatest.

The ultimate source will most probably be a parent who either rejected, abused, or tried to completely assimilate their child to themselves.

5. Those most likely to experience such an emotional betrayal are the best and brightest among us.

The smartest, best-looking, most talented or most moral child is the one most likely to either inspire envy, resentment, or a desire to own, in a parent. Or, for that matter, in others throughout life.

Melancholics generally suffer from low self-esteem; that is one of the central problems, if not the central problem, in melancholia.

For healing, it is important to realize that this is the opposite of the truth.

6. Hero legends and fairy tales trace a course of treatment for the melancholic.

That is why they are "quests." That is what they are questing for. They present a path.

The melancholic is called upon to be a hero or heroine.

7. By following this path, one has the genuine prospect of living happily ever after.

¹ Sigmund Koch, "Psychology Cannot Be a Coherent Science," *Psychology Today*, September 1969, p. 66.