

DISCERNING MENTAL ILLNESS (PART 2)

Introduction

Several reasons Christians ought to reject the current cultural understanding of mental illness:

1. The term is a misnomer according to Scripture.
2. The term lacks any concrete definition.
3. It requires an evolutionary, materialistic anthropology.
4. Diagnosing mental disorders lacks the objectivity of true medical diagnoses.

5. There is no psychological standard for normal human behavior, therefore, abnormality is indeterminable.
 - a. The standards for what qualifies as a mental illness is ever-changing.

6. Psychological labels are inherently instructive.
 - a. They teach us about identity.

 - b. They teach us about morality.

QUOTES

1. "Munchausen syndrome (also known as factitious disorder imposed on self) is a mental health disorder where you falsify, exaggerate, or induce physical, emotional or cognitive disorders. People with factitious disorders act this way because of an inner need to be seen as ill or injured, not to achieve a concrete benefit, such as getting medications or financial gain. This is distinguishable from malingering which is where someone exaggerates or fakes an illness to, for example, get out of work."¹
2. "We in the West have undergone an astonishing cultural-perceptual change of which we seem largely, perhaps wholly, unaware... the medical profession defines imaginary illnesses as real illnesses, in effect abolishing the notion of pretended illness. Malingering has become a disease 'just as real' as melanoma."² — Thomas Szasz:
3. "A lot of people who come into my course say, 'Well, of course, you guys have figured it out. You know where to draw the line. You have criteria. You have blood tests, right, that tell me whether I have depression or schizophrenia or one of the things I've read about.' Well, the reality is that we don't. First of all, there are no biological tests for any of the known mental disorders right now and instead what we have are a set of behavior criteria for how to diagnose different mental disorders. And what I mean by behavioral criteria is a set of symptoms that a person reports to you about how they feel, about how they think, and a set of observations about their behavior and how typical or atypical it is. And you take the sort of set of symptoms that the person shows or reports and you match them up against the existing criteria for different mental disorders. And then it comes down to a fairly subjective judgment call about whether the person meets the criteria or not. Unfortunately, because they are so subjective, they can be influenced by a lot of factors."³ — Susan Nolen-Hoeksema
4. "Although these criteria are useful guidelines for thinking about and identifying mental disorders, they are by nature ambiguous, open to a wide range of interpretations" and "These are tough questions that can never be answered strictly scientifically. The answers always represent human judgments, and they are always tinged by the social values and pragmatic concerns of those doing the judging."⁴ — Peter Gray
5. "Except for a few objectively identifiable brain diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease, there are neither biological or chemical tests nor biopsy or necropsy findings for verifying or falsifying DSM diagnoses."⁵ — Thomas Szasz

¹ (<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9833-munchausen-syndrome-factitious-disorder-imposed-on-self>), accessed August 26, 2023.

² Thomas Szasz, *Psychiatry: The Science of Lies* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 1-2.

³ Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, "18 - What Happens When Things Go Wrong: Mental Illness, Part 1" on Psychology, Open Yale courses (Apple Podcasts, October 12, 2009).

⁴ Peter Gray, *Psychology*, sixth edition (New York: Worth Publishers, 2011), 594-595.

⁵ Thomas Szasz, *Psychiatry: The Science of Lies* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 2.

6. "There are true chemical imbalances in the body, but when they are present, the condition is no longer labeled chemical imbalance. It is labeled according to the chemical that is out of balance, and it is given a medical disease label. Low thyroid is a chemical imbalance, but it is called 'hypothyroid' instead of 'chemical imbalance.' Low potassium is a chemical imbalance, but it is called 'hypokalemia.' High blood sugar is a chemical imbalance, but it is called 'diabetes.' When people talk about 'chemical imbalance' as a cause for depression, it is because there are no laboratory tests to prove this. Remember, an illness means something is wrong in the tissues of the body. If there is truly something wrong with the body, it can be proved by objective tests performed by an objective observer. The reality is that there are no laboratory tests that can prove the presence of a chemical imbalance. The chemical imbalance diagnosis of an illness is not proven by tests, but is based on what a person thinks and feels as described by DSM-IV (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fourth edition). Whenever the term 'chemical imbalance' is used, it is as a generic term without proof that any change is present in any chemical."⁶ — Robert D. Smith, M. D.
7. "The *DSM* offers hundreds of diagnoses to categorize abnormal human behaviors and emotions, all without ever defining normal human experience. For Christians, this ought to be a somewhat alarming revelation, or at least raise a yellow flag of caution. How do we define abnormal states of human experience without first having some sort of understanding of normalcy? It seems as though the *DSM* begins with a cultural appraisal of normalcy, and then on the basis of this ever-shifting understanding proceeds to describe unwanted emotions and behaviors as 'abnormal!'"⁷ — Dale Johnson
8. "In 1973, when the APA [American Psychological Association] removed homosexuality from its roster of mental illnesses, it first replaced it with ego-dystonic homosexuality; when that term, too, became an embarrassment, it too was abolished."⁸ — Thomas Szasz
9. "For a psychiatrist to say that you have the disease of depression is to tell you not only about your health, but also about who you are, what is wrong with your life and how it should be set right, and who you would be if only you were healthy. In making these pronouncements, the doctor draws on the authority of science, which presumably has no stake in the outcome. He couches his judgments in the language of sickness and health rather than sin and virtue, which means that he is cloaking his morality, even from himself, in science."⁹ — Gary Greenberg
10. "Our children are the first in human history to grow up under the constant shadow of 'mental illness.' Not too long ago, good-offs, cut-ups, bullies, nerds, shy kids, teachers' pets, and any number of other recognizable types filled the schoolyard, and all were considered more or less normal. Nobody really knew what to expect from such children as adults. That was part of the glorious uncertainty of life—the goof-off in the fifth grade might show up at his high school's twenty-year reunion as a wealthy entrepreneur, the shy girl as an accomplished actress. But

⁶ Robert D. Smith, M. D., *The Christian Counselor's Medical Desk Reference* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2000), 66.

⁷ T. Dale Johnson Jr., *The Church as a Culture of Care: Finding Hope in Biblical Community* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021), 33.

⁸ Thomas Szasz, *Psychiatry: The Science of Lies* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 2.

⁹ Gary Greenberg, *Manufacturing Depression: The Secret History of a Modern Disease* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2010), 229.

today, children diagnosed with mental disorders—most notably, ADHD, depression, and bipolar illness—help populate the schoolyard. These children have been told that they have something wrong with their brains and that they may have to take psychiatric medications the rest of their lives, just like a ‘diabetic takes insulin.’ That medical dictum teaches all of the children on the playground a lesson about the nature of humankind, and that lesson differs in a radical way from what children used to be taught.”¹⁰ — Robert Whitaker

¹⁰ Robert Whitaker, *Anatomy of an Epidemic: Magic Bullets, Psychiatric Drugs, and the Astonishing Rise of Mental Illness in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010), 10-11.