MENTAL ILLNESS

THE GREAT ILLUSION

Ivor Browne

LIFE IS A SEA OF TROUBLES

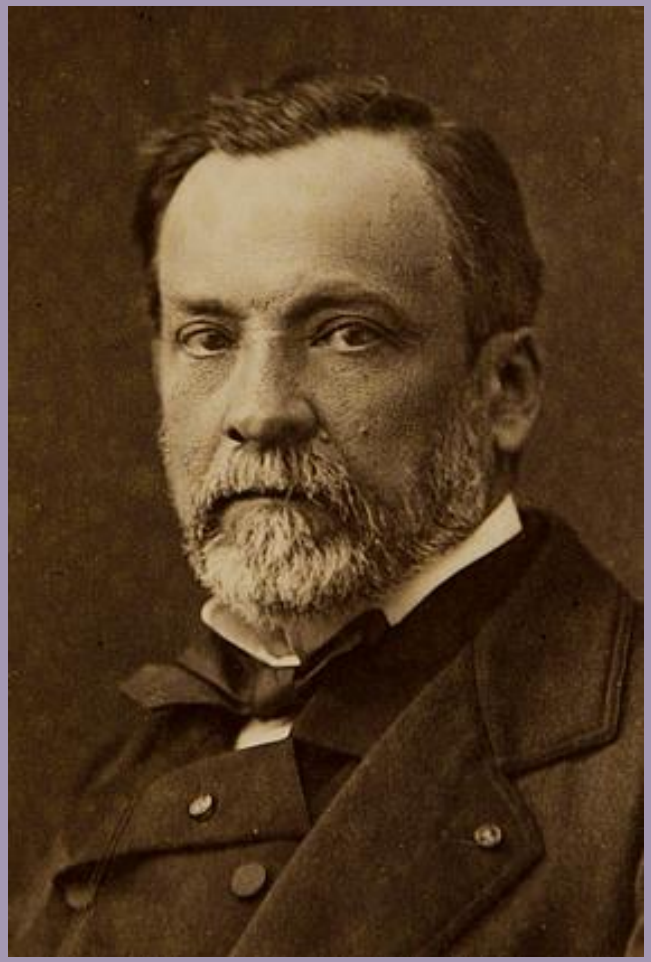
- We have to adapt to these as best we can,
- People use all kinds of ways to try to manage, some are better than others.
- Some are counterproductive and land us in trouble.
- We all suffer from anxiety or depression and so on, at some time in our lives.
- And when things become unbearable even try to escape into a fantasy reality.
- But how does it help to turn these human conditions into medical diseases?

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A Question?

- What is the view of the average doctor and their understanding of the nature of health and disease?
- To get to grips with this we need to look back at how medicine has developed over the past two hundred years.

Louis Pasteur



(1822 – 1895)

THE GERM THEORY VS. IMMUNITY

- During the nineteenth century Louis Pasteur demonstrated that fermentation is caused by micro-organisms,
- That the emergent growth of bacteria was due to biogenesis, not spontaneous generation.

THUS THE GERM THEORY WAS BORN

Claude Bernard

(1813 – 1878)

THE CONCEPT OF IMMUNITY

- Claude Bernard (1813 – 1878), another Frenchman, made an equally significant contribution to our understanding of health and disease.
- He was a celebrated physiologist and a contemporary of Louis Pasteur (1822 – 1895).
- Their work was carried out during the same period of the nineteenth century.
- But he approached the question of the management of our health from the opposite direction.

MILIEU INTERIEUR

- He was fascinated by, and emphasised, our inner ability to manage our health and to resist disease.
- He said: “ The constancy of the internal environment is the condition for a free and independent life.”
- This is the underlying principle of ‘homeostasis’,(a term that was coined later by Walter Cannon in 1928), the way we maintain our physiology in a balanced state and manage our immune responses in general.
- Caude Bernard could thus be said to be the father of the whole concept of immunity.

A HERESY

- It is not something that is untrue or false.
- Rather the emphasis of one aspect of the truth at the expense of other equally valid aspects of reality.
- The Germ Theory brought about a major paradigm shift in medicine.
- Medicine now concentrated almost entirely on the elimination of pathogenic organisms.

THE GERM THEORY OF DISEASE (cont.)

- No doubt great advances were made by this change of emphasis.

- Introduction of clean water, sewage systems and later antibiotics virtually eliminated many infectious diseases. So it seemed for a time we were on the brink of conquering disease.

TWO REASONS WHY THIS FAILED

- The advent of new pathogenic organisms which are resistant to almost everything.
- With the reduction in infectious diseases other problems such as - cancer, heart disease, hypertension, stroke and psychiatric problems took their place.
- The vital contribution of Claude Bernard was virtually obliterated for almost two hundred years.
- Tragically, if the insights of Claude Bernard had only been given equal emphasis to the germ theory think how much our understanding of health and illness would have progressed by now.

REDUCTIONIST VS. SYSTEMIC View of Reality

- To understand these two contrasting views of health and illness it is necessary to make a clear distinction between a ‘reductionist’ and ‘systemic’ view of reality.
- Once again it is not a question of one approach being right and the other wrong, but rather of when and in what circumstances each approach is appropriate.

REDUCTIONISM

- The disturbance in the ‘Whole’ person is seen as caused by something wrong with the ‘Parts’ which make it up.
- When the engine in a car lets us down, we find the part which is not functioning and replace it.
- When a surgeon is carrying out a hip or knee replacement this is essentially treating the body as a machine.
- This is an appropriate reductionist approach which has served us well.

SYSTEMIC VIEW

‘The whole is more than the sum of its parts.’

- When we put this limited view within the context of the whole person a much more comprehensive reality opens up.
- The bedrock of this holistic view is the principle of ‘Self-organisation.’
- When molecules or cells join together a new reality emerges and the direction of causality reverses. It now takes on the task of managing all the organs, cells, molecules, and biochemistry of which it is composed.
- At the physical level this is our ‘immune system.’

SYSTEMIC VIEW (cont.)

But of course the same principle also applies at the psychological level, indeed this separation into physical and mental is just an illusion, there is simply one totally integrated human being, and this totality has the task of managing its overall relation to the surrounding world.

Systems Causality

Reductionist

PART → **WHOLE**

Systemic

PART ← **WHOLE**

SYSTEMS THEORY & REDUCTIONISM

‘Living systems’ theory is able to encompass the ‘reductionist’ aproach all the way down to subatomic particles, but the reverse is not true, reductionism is incapable of encompassing the systemic approach in the same way.

CONVENTIONAL PSYCHIATRIC VIEW

- Mental illness is seen as a ‘Disease’, just like diabetes or tuberculosis.
- This is caused by either a disturbance in our biochemistry or
- By genetic influences, or both.
- In my opinion, this is a Myth.

A FUNDAMENTALY FALSE PREMISE

- The idea that a psychiatrist can do something to another human being to bring about real change in them is the greatest misconception that has been perpetrated by orthodox psychiatry for the past two hundred years
- No drug or procedure can teach you what you need to know to manage your life. You have to undertake the work yourself perhaps with the help and support of a guide or therapist.

A FALSE PREMISE (cont.)

- The shocking history of interventions perpetrated by psychiatrists:-
- The swinging chairs, being dropped in ice cold water, beatings, institutionalisation, starvation, isolation, etc. of the early days.
- Then, leading on to the atrocity of Lobotomy,
- Deep insulin coma therapy,
- Electro-convulsive therapy and gross overuse of psychoactive drugs,
- These have all been shown, or will be shown, eventually to be ineffective and highly damaging.
- The final outcome of this approach has been the ‘Diagnostic and Statistical Manual’ (DSM) with the naming of hundreds of ‘diseases’, creating an apparent reality.
- This is a closed delusion system that suits the pharmaceutical and health insurance industries perfectly.

BACK TO THE GERM THEORY

- All this has arisen because psychiatrists are desperately seeking to be accepted as real doctors by their medical colleagues.
- But the view of medicine they are espousing is already many years out of date, that dominated by the germ theory of disease.
- See the language used – in medicine there are antibiotics, anti-hypertensive's, in psychiatry –
- Anti-depressants and anti-psychotics.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR PSYCHIATRY

- Now at last ways to strengthen our Immunity are once again coming into their own.
- The rest of medicine is already moving away, be it all unwillingly, from this preoccupation with pathogenic organisms. From now on its activity will be much more centred on immunity, and a role supportive of people's self-management of their health.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR PSYCHIATRY (cont.)

- Far from trying to be accepted in this way, psychiatry should be at the forefront of the change to a more ‘holistic’ approach.
- The main emphasis being on human beings taking responsibility for their own health.
- To have a medical degree as well as a profound psychotherapeutic understanding would place psychiatrists in a unique position to be trailblazers in moving the whole of medicine forward, to foster ‘wellness’ rather than concentrating on controlling ‘sickness’.

THE TRAINING OF PSYCHIATRISTS

- There is one serious difficulty, however, at present, psychiatrists get virtually no direct experience or training in psychotherapy.
- If they are to take on an innovative role along these lines then a total root and branch reorganisation of their training will be absolutely essential.

IN SUMMARY

- When will psychiatrists finally accept that we are dealing with sensitive, delicately poised human beings, not machines to be tampered with?
- When will they accept that the very definition of human life is one of self-management and self-organisation?
- And that the only real change comes about when we help a person to undertake the painful work of changing themselves from within.

END