

**Review: Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness*, Granada Publishing, 1972 (1975)**

Pages: 296

**Refreshing Honesty on the ‘Mental Illness’ Scam**

Dr Szasz uses clear reasoning and logic to undercut the false foundation of all psychiatry; that mental illness as an organic condition. Particularly powerful is his comparison of psychiatry under Communism against affluent Capitalism, which exposes the subjective nature of these ‘illnesses’.

Since the behaviour of patients is real and requires explanation, Szasz proposes it is a form of malingering people use to evade difficult life situations (which sadly is self-defeating).

Far from being ‘above’ petty interests and political pressures, doctors are discovered as game players themselves, changing allegiances depending on circumstances.

Understanding and applying Szasz’ findings will help to identify malingering and game-playing in both others and oneself.

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**Preface (pp. 9-15)**

“Mental illness is a metaphorical disease.”

People readily think of and call themselves ‘sick’, but rarely ‘mentally sick’.

Psychiatric diagnoses are stigmatising labels.

**Introduction (pp. 16-32)**

False substantives of contemporary psychiatric thought must be demolished.

Medicine rests on physics and chemistry.

Historicist doctrine holds the future is irrevocably determined by the past.

Under Marxism, all 'causes' are economic conditions.

Change can be foreseen because it is ruled by an unchanging law.

Malingering: the alleged entity of 'mental illness' which when deliberately counterfeited is *still* 'mental illness'.

Marxism holds mind is a product of social environment and so determined by roles and rules.

Psychiatry thrives on the rewarding of disability.

The end-goal of the metagame is to live as a free man must take precedence over that of the object game; to survive at any cost.

### **I) Charcot and the Problem of Hysteria (pp. 37-50)**

Charcot was a neurologist, anatomy professor at the Sorbonne who pioneered work on hysteria.

Guillotin was a French physician.

“Charcot made it easier for the sufferer ... a malingerer, to be sick.”

Malingering was found in every kind of hysteria.

*Reaction-formation*: an overcompensation against the original influence.

Enormous effort has been expended to create the impression 'mental illness is like any other illness'. [p49]

### **II) Illness and Counterfeit Illness (pp. 50-64)**

Aristotelian logic is 'normal' deductive reasoning.

Physicians confronted with counterfeit body illness:

1. React like the police and punish.
2. As a pawnbroker who bargains and sells them away.
3. Changes the rules so that even a malingerer is now 'mentally ill'.

Munchausen's syndrome is based on the adventures of the fictional Baron Munchausen. Such patients are an economic threat and extreme nuisance to doctors.

Hysteria is sometimes seen as *unconscious* malingering.

Legitimising malingering is the same as redefining an imitation as an original.

The patient's communicated package includes the situation in which behaviour is presented.

Some insists patients offer illness in good faith; the malingering 'line'.

The non-psychiatric physician treats all forms of disability as objects.

Neurology is concerned with functions *qua* objects, but psychiatry with signs *qua* signs.

### **III) Sociology of the Therapeutic Situation (pp. 65-86)**

The existence of huge numbers in confined cities was a new phenomenon, and individualism became pitted against collectivism.

Private and public care is often likened to a palace and a hovel.

A psychiatrist can be the agent of multiple parties, depending upon the situation:

-Private practice: contract between patient and physician.

-Society's agent if in disagreement with the patient.

-Self when maximising his own life prospects.

-The State under a Communist regime.

Higher wealth individuals create a desire for 'happiness' and for which they are willing to spend money on. The affluent receive psychotherapy, the poor drugs and physical intervention.

Private care is only available to top-tier individuals under Socialism. Falling sick is one of the most important escape avenues for people.

Under the Soviets, all patients were assumed malingerers till proven otherwise since there was always the possibility of them being an *agent-provocateur*. Doctors had a low social status.

"The Hippocratic oath, was abolished after the revolution because it 'symbolized' bourgeois medicine and was considered incompatible with the spirit of Soviet medicine ... because the oath tends to define the physician as an agent of the patient ... a Bill of Rights." [p79]

The core conflict between psychology and Communism is privacy of the individual.

"Organized medicine is ... a form of social tranquilisation ... in Russia ... the state that employs the physicians, and thus may use them to control the population." [p81]

The State believes it provides free and faultless medical care, meaning any blame lies with the physician ... The citizen (patient, child) ... as being caught between the bad doctor (father) and the good state (mother).

The 1953 doctors' plot killed several key Soviet officials and is said to have contributed to Stalin's death.

"Physicians are the natural attorneys of the poor."

'Mental illness' may be viewed as a manifestation of strain in an individualistic society."

A person uses intrapersonal conflicts to avoid facing up to interpersonal and socio-political difficulties.

#### **IV) Breuer and Freud's *Studies on Hysteria* (pp. 87-95)**

The central dogma of psychoanalytic treatment is, "known thyself".

#### **V) Contemporary Views on Hysteria and Mental Illness (pp. 96-105)**

"Psychiatry is characterised with a plethora of diverse, competing, and often mutually exclusive theories and practices ... psychiatry is more like religion and politics than science ... theories are nearly as numerous and varied as psychiatric symptoms." [96]

Many believe mental illness has an organic cause.

#### **VI) Language and Protolanguage (pp. 106-127)**

The "language game" consists of symbols, language rules, and social customs.

Freud never conceptualised the "unconscious".

#### **VII) Hysteria as Communication (pp. 128-152)**

Psychoanalytic assumes we cannot know what troubles patients until we have become attuned to them.

Indirect communication is a protective technique; a classic example is the doctor's secretary, which he uses to handle billing and collection giving him the appearance he is 'above' money (the "illusion of independence").

Hinting also acts as an insurance to disappointment.

#### **VIII) The Rule-Following Model of Human Behaviour (pp. 153-168)**

Much of psychoanalysis is motivational psychology.

"Where id was, ego shall be."

## **IX) The Ethics of Helplessness and Helpfulness (pp. 169-187)**

‘Medical ethics’ is persistent infantilisation and domination of patients.

For practical tasks of survival, children are a liability, as are the disabled.

Fear of acknowledging satisfaction is a characteristic of slave psychology.

A free man is defined by his ability to set his own tempo of work.

## **X) Theology, Witchcraft, and Hysteria (pp. 188-203)**

Zilboorg (1935): “The *Malleus Maleficarum* might, with a little editing, serve as an excellent modern textbook of descriptive clinical psychiatry of the fifteenth century, if the word *witch* were substituted by the word *patient*, and the devil eliminated.” [p190]

Freud (1932): “It must be admitted that women have but little sense of justice, and this is no doubt connected with the preponderance of envy in their mental life; for the demands of justice *are* a modification of envy; they lay down the conditions under which one is willing to part with it. We also say of women that their *social interests are weaker* than those of men, and that their capacity for the sublimation of their instincts is less.” [p197]

*Mens sana in corpora sano.*

## **XI) The Game-Playing Model of Human Behaviour (pp. 204-220)**

## **XII) Impersonation and Cheating (pp. 221-238)**

The ground rule of Anglo-American law is the adult’s responsibility to know what games the state requires him to play.

“Authentic existence is life-role consciously and responsibly assumed”.

In 1898, S. Ganser described prisoners awaiting trial who became stupid and unable to comprehend questions or instructions, a form of malingering.

### **XIII) Hysteria as a Game (pp. 239-255)**

Freud advocated sexual enlightenment of children.

The hysteric malingers since he is afraid of failure in real-world situations, which ends up becoming self-defeating.

### **XIV) Object Relationships and the Game Model (pp. 256-267)**

Speaking in a foreign language creates a “transference effect”.

The psychiatrist must be an expert on game playing.

### **Conclusions/Epilogue (pp. 268-276)**

Old games are constantly scrapped and new ones started, leaving most people unprepared.