

Louis Menand, (March 1, 2010), makes many accurate and important observations about the dilemmas of modern psychiatry, and raises the question "Can psychiatry be a science?"

But in his impressive critique of diagnostic syndromes and almost every modality of therapeutic approach, in throwing out a truckload of disposable concepts, he includes a diamond in the rough that has withstood a century of testing, application and searing critical scrutiny. I am referring to his sparsely-stated "rapid collapse of Freudianism".

Of all the changing phases and contradictory streams of thought that have rightly confounded anyone who values logic and reason, only the psychoanalytic opus has steadily resisted the quick fashions and practices that have followed each other in rapid succession in the history of the mental sciences.

Psychoanalysis never acquiesced with the group rush to successive popular labels, be they bipolar, ADD, ADHD, serotonin metabolism, or dysfunction of the amygdala. And to the extent to which CBT or any specific approach to anxiety or depression or sexual dysfunction is offered on the busy bulletin boards of any college town or in the larger Society, practitioners of every hue aim to apply the basic tenets of the psychoanalytic understanding of unconscious life.

The science of the psyche, whether as the nucleus of psychiatry or psychoanalysis, is to be judged not by the measuring instruments of the biological or physical sciences, but by its own criteria and evidences of validation. It constitutes one link, the central one, of the biopsychosocial spine of human life, a term contributed by the psychiatrist George Engel of Rochester, New York.

The quintessential characteristics of the scientific method were at the base of the new psychology. It was the discovery of the unconscious at the end of the 19th century that was the entry into a new level of rational thought applied to abnormal behavior. Referring to the "talking cure" of mental symptoms that appeared around 1895, Gregory Zilboorg (1941), the premier historian of medical psychology, pointed out that the thinking behind this historic event marked the beginning of rationality applied to mental processes on a level with Pasteur, Koch, and Semelweis in the somatic sphere

"This was the first time in the history of medical psychology that a therapeutic agent has led to the discovery of the cause of the illness while attacking or attempting to remove the cause... For the first time Koch's postulates in the biological sciences were shown to apply in mental life: the causes, the symptoms generated by the cause, and the removal of the symptoms by removing the cause were demonstrated in one continuous set of concepts and experiences." The mental was making an entry into the world of science"

Leo Rangell
Los Angeles, CA.