

***Humanizing Madness: Psychiatry and the Cognitive Neurosciences, an Application of the Philosophy of Science to Psychiatry***

Niall McLaren, M.D.

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Reviewed by Paige Lovitt for Reader Views (7/07)

“Humanizing Madness” was written to show what the author, Dr. McLaren, believes a scientific theory of psychiatry should look like. He makes a valid point when he discusses that the large number of theories that already exist show us that, “the more there are, the less likely any of them is right.” This thought occurred to me when I was in graduate school. I wondered how we could have so many different professionals with their practices based on different psychological theories. I was pleased to see that this idea is being addressed in an intelligent way.

By answering the question, “What causes mental disorder,” Dr. McLaren is able to explain how a rational theory of psychiatry should be derived. I found that his discussion of the other theories and their inherent flaws helped me to further understand the rational, or lack of, behind them.

“Humanizing Madness,” is divided into three parts. In the second section Dr. McLaren discusses two theories of mental life that could help us form an accurate general theory for psychiatry. He also says “...if we are going to advocate mental control, we need a viable mentalist theory.” The theory that he presents is based upon the physical structure of the brain. This forms an integrative model of a general theory of psychiatry that he believes, “restores the essence of humanity, our mentalism, to rightful primacy.”

I found “Humanizing Madness” to be an incredibly well-written and thought-provoking. It is not, by any means, easy reading. It is also not for someone who doesn’t have some form of background in understanding the various psychological theories and mental health conditions. I think that this would make an excellent textbook for a graduate class that allows students to question the theories that we already have.