

# Dianetics and Psychosomatic Disturbances

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There is widespread agreement amongst medical professionals and lay public that a large proportion of man's ills are psychosomatic. By "psychosomatic disturbances" is meant "disturbances in the body caused by disturbances in the mind." These may range from minor ones, like Excedrin Headache Number 57, caused by burned Jello, through "compensationitis", e.g., delayed healing of a back injury because the patient continues to receive pay for having the injury, to actual recognized disease entities, such as asthma, that are thought to be psychologically caused or aggravated.

That mental disturbances can and do cause physical disturbances is now beyond dispute. A study done at Yale Medical Clinic in 1951 showed that 76% of all patients suffered from what was called "emotionally induced illness." Having personally worked at the Yale Clinic, I would agree that this "disease" category far outweighs all others in that and other medical establishments.

Psychosomatic disturbances fall into several different categories. The most classic form is the so-called "conversion reaction." This name comes from the psychoanalytic theory that emotional disturbances or complexes are "converted" into physical manifestations so that the individual can express or defend against expressing these complexes without having to be aware of doing so. Thus, a person may be hysterically blind to defend against the memory of having seen his parents having intercourse or paralyzed to defend against aggressive impulses. A rather dramatic example of this kind of psychosomatic phenomenon is pseudocyesis or pseudo-pregnancy, in which a woman or even a man may induce a physical condition similar in appearance to pregnancy, complete with hormonal changes, as an expression of a repressed desire to be pregnant.

In addition to these rather dramatic—and rare—instances of physical disabilities for which there is no classifiable physical disease process, there is the less dramatic manifestation of hypochondriasis, a constant preoccupation with the body and real or imagined physical problems. A fact often overlooked by hurried physicians who have to deal with these patients is that hypochondriacs are characteristically

in real physical distress, with real aches, pains, and other abnormal sensations.

Even illness with well-defined physical causes are profoundly affected by the psychological state of the individual. It is well known, for instance, that epileptic seizures and diabetic crises—not to mention heart attacks and ulcers—are frequently precipitated or aggravated by emotional crises. Asthma, migraine headaches, ulcerative colitis, atopic dermatitis, and a variety of other very real physical illnesses are thought by many to have mainly psychological causes. And it is currently being widely acknowledged that all forms of illness may be strongly influenced by psychological factors.

At any rate, doctors find that a large proportion of their patients are "crocks." "Crock" is a term of contempt for people who, for psychological reasons, refuse to get well and continually haunt clinics and physician's offices, frequently "shopping around" from doctor to doctor, giving them all failures and making themselves very unpopular. When confronted with such a patient (who is more politely called a case with "psychological overlay"), a family physician will, if he is ambitious, administer psychotherapy himself insofar as he can, but more often he will refer the patient to a psychiatrist. Having received many such referrals, as a psychiatrist, I can attest that these cases are quite frustrating to handle within the framework of traditional psychotherapy. Although psychoanalysts have for decades felt that treatment of psychosomatic conditions was possible, they have only had any real success in the rarest category of psychosomatic disorders—conversion reactions, and while these cases in Freud's time seemed to resolve in months, the current psychoanalytic timetable is measured in years.

A patient who suffers from an immediate physical problem characteristically has little interest in a long-term therapy. He wants relief now and is usually not satisfied with the explanation that his Oedipus complex will take 3-7 years to resolve. Consequently, tranquilizers and reassurance is the most common form of treatment, since this affords immediate relief and is therefore acceptable to the patient. Moreover, this form of treatment does not cure his condition. Rather, it serves two purposes: It

dulls the patient's awareness of the condition by partially obtunding him and it renders him apathetic by giving him the message that it's hopeless to effect a real cure. This is a desirable outcome, not for the patient, but for the referring physician, who is no longer harassed by the patient.

Most psychiatrists are trying to make the best of a job for which they lack adequate tools. If it is in fact impossible to afford psychosomatic cases relief from or cure of their conditions, then the sooner everyone knows it's hopeless, the better. One could get very frustrated and unhappy trying to run the 10-second mile. However, the psychiatrist who wishes to treat such patients has, whether he knows it or not, incurred an obligation to have a very good look around to see if *anyone* has a way to handle these disorders before deciding they are untreatable. Any method which is *claimed* to be workable by its proponents needs to be looked at carefully to see whether it is or not. If psychiatry had an effective way to handle psychosomatic problems, psychiatrists could afford to ignore lay techniques, but since it doesn't, they can't.

I was lucky enough to have a close friend who told me enough about Dianetics to make it seem worthwhile to investigate further. I found, first of all, that Dianetics has a sound theoretical structure, one whose principles are readily understandable and intuitively acceptable. Dianetic theory, like most theories that are close to the truth, is simple, of wide application, and predicts further data which, when sought after, will be found. Its results are duplicatable in practice by anyone who is willing to get trained in its techniques. Dianetic counselling acts by eliminating the psychological factors that tend to hold an illness in place, thus allowing the natural course of healing or medical treatment to proceed unimpeded.

Dianetics does not compete with medicine as a healing technique. A Dianetic counselor requires the counselee to obtain a complete medical exam and appropriate medical treatment before starting Dianetic counseling. Thus it turns out that Dianetic

groups are a major source of referrals for doctors. And doctors whose patients are concurrently getting Dianetics have the gratifying experience of having their treatments work well.

The primary purpose of Dianetics is not healing but the elimination of distractions which a non-optimum bodily and emotional state causes. Even a relatively minor disorder such as hay fever or a headache can greatly lower a person's efficiency in life. Phobias, such as fear of heights or less "clinical" fears such as fear of talking in front of groups, can restrict one's life considerably. Drug addiction could be said to be caused by the presence of unwanted body sensations and emotions that compel use of drugs for their alleviation. When these unwanted sensations and emotions are handled Dianetically, a person has no further need to use drugs. He is then free to go about the business of living a full life.

#### SUMMARY

1. Psychosomatic disorders and emotional upsets make up the vast majority of human suffering.
2. Standard medical treatment alone is inadequate to alleviate much of this suffering.
3. Psychiatric resources are few, consisting mainly of offering support and drugs to help a person live with a condition he cannot hope to cure.
4. Outside the standard psychiatric framework, there is a precise, duplicatable technique which, when correctly applied, uniformly and predictably leads to cure or great improvement in psychosomatic disorders when combined with standard medical treatment.
5. The purpose of Dianetics, however, is not primarily to heal bodies but to free an individual from physical and emotional distractions so that he can pursue the business of living with maximum efficiency.