

The Propagation of Knowledge

There is one large force that propagates “knowledge,” this force is *incentive*. Ideas are propagated by self-interested people intent on passing on knowledge that benefits them. The truth value of a piece of knowledge can often play a strong effect in this, the truth value of a claim can be an obstacle to cross, or the truth can play little part since it is obscure and vague. Accurate knowledge about farming can benefit many farmers, while accurate knowledge about government benefits few people in powerful positions (often people will never get powerful positions without believing in highly flawed information).

People don’t pass you information because it is true, they pass you information because it benefits them to do so. People don’t study information because it is true, people study what information benefits them. This isn’t a slight at scientists. Few people would suggest that scientists ought to spend time studying information that has no benefit. Many scientists study information based off of flawed premises built within the culture. Few scientists get grants from disinterested parties.

The force that links “knowledge” to accuracy or truth is incentives. When farmers wish to grow delicious apples, they will desire to know accurate information, and if the market is largely decentralized, people will experiment and compete in order to test new ideas and bring the apples to market which yield the highest profits. When the market is not decentralized, people who have power within the centralized institutions will desire to control information to the ends they are able to in order to maximize their own perceived profit. In a centralized market, there is no mechanism for information discovery and challenging the status quo.

There are certain industries which are not only centralized, but “truth” or accuracy is highly vague and obscured. Mental health, psychology, psychiatry, therapy and understanding the human mind and behavior in general fall within this realm. Certain ideas are cemented within the industry based off of ideas people had at certain pivotal points in history. Challenging these ideas is incredibly difficult due to the institutions which control information within this realm, the industries highly invested in these ideas, the physicians who have been taught this information, and the government which heavily regulates this industry. Someone with superior ideas within this realm is unlikely able to prove their ideas to be better since there is little incentive for people to propagate this knowledge, but also because there is no way to accurately measure and quantify the quality of ideas within this realm (this is what I mean by saying that accuracy is vague and obscured).

The roots of the ideas established in the mental health field were not created by scientists who had a wealth of information available, created hypothesis and followed the scientific method to develop relatively accurate information. These ideas were built from smart men

with good intentions creating theories and haphazardly trying to developing a greater understanding out of it (with no strong link to reality). From there, other people used these models to create further models. Today, we have a cartoonish picture of what mental illness is and a highly flawed understanding of human behavior.

This is an oversimplification ... but roll with me a minute. Imagine I am a biologist. I go to study a species of animal on an island. I sample 10,000 animals to study in depth and I write a research paper. In that research paper I detail how 50% of this animal is dysfunctional and highly flawed. The root of their problem is a result of birth. From here, I would hope people would look at my paper highly skeptically. Survival occurs on a razor's edge. You can't have such flawed creatures occur in such high percentages. Evolution would have controlled for this. Sure, maybe 1-5% would be acceptable (even necessary in order to inspire adaptation) ... but 50% is such a high number that this species is spending vastly too much resources breeding failures. This analogy is a little problematic, for reasons I could expand upon, but you get what I am saying.

Humans have different personalities to inspire specialization and adaptation. The abnormalities within us aren't malfunctions. People who lack patience might be best served in an industry that is exciting. People who are low energy might be wonderfully patient people who are best served as researchers or stay at home parents. The kids who don't listen to their parents or teachers might strive for admiration and be best served becoming a leader. I can go on for a while.

We develop life strategies based off of our environments and our personalities in order to acquire the resources we desire to acquire. Sometimes the life strategies don't succeed as planned. However, this might be because we have centralized educational institutions that force everyone into a similar box regardless of personality. This might be because our prosperity has made it so people have lost touch with their individual subconscious purpose. This might be because of the problematic incentives that exist in the culture. These are rarely the focus of the centralized mental health industry. Why would it be? Who would it benefit to upend the current structure? We have a situation where there is highly centralized benefits with highly dispersed costs in a field of vague information.

Not every idea that comes from every psychologist, therapist, psychiatrist, or whatever is bad. I also don't think these people are evil villains. These people just have extremely poor foundations to their ideas, and extremely poor mechanisms for evaluation and correction. The incentives within this industry don't lead towards vigorous debate on clear information ... rather conformity. Sure, incredible studying, thought and research has been done within these fields, but more studying thought and research have been done within Islam (or if you think that is true, Christianity).

If you have a bad marriage, maybe try counseling, maybe it will work. If you chronically feel

bad, and you feel lost, try anti-depressants. Do whatever you think might work. I don't have the answers. I am just highly skeptical of the answers provided by the mental health industry. They have a poor track record, they have horrible incentives, and they have no intent on trying to fix it (since they have no means in which to evaluate their ideas).

I think our conception of ADD, ODD, Bipolar, depression, and many other 'mental disorders' are bullshit in our current conception. They are pieces of "knowledge" without foundations. This isn't to say that some people aren't more hyper than others, more strong willed than others, are chronically sad, or has wild mood swings. I just think the categorizations are arbitrary lines and the implications are absolutely horrible. I think our conception of "addiction" creates a problem more than it solves it. I also think many books promoting self-help are horrible and tend to lead people into neurotic behavior. We aren't a species meant to recede into our brains and contemplate our feelings and existence. Our feelings are tools meant to guide us to action.