



Medication Madness, by Peter Breggin, M.D.

reviewed by Charles Sigler, D.Phil.

In *Medication Madness*, Peter Breggin describes dozens of cases that he has personally evaluated as a practicing psychiatrist. These stories were told without embellishment; their truth was dramatic enough. Through his clearly sympathetic retelling, we hear “about children and adults who have been emotionally injured and sometimes driven mad by psychiatric medications, many committing horrific crimes.” (p. 1) Antidepressants, anti-anxiety medications, antipsychotics and ADHD stimulants are all, at various times, villains in these tales of medication insanity.

A key concept in Breggin’s discussion is *medication spellbinding*, which describes how drugs mask their harmful mental and emotional effects from the people who are taking them. Many individuals feel better when in reality they are doing worse; sometimes becoming intensely depressed or violently aggressive—without realizing that their medication is causing the reaction.

Breggin described a man on Paxil who became so obsessed with killing himself, that he pinned a police officer against his cruiser with his own car in order to get his revolver to kill himself. Both Harry and the police officer survived the incident. A surgeon taking medication for ADHD compulsively stole construction vehicles: a tanker truck, a back hoe, and a cherry picker, among others. A man in his late thirties was prescribed Zoloft to help him cope with worrying. After seven days of taking the medication, he became convinced that his wife was the leader of an alien race; and that he had to kill her in order to save himself and the world. So he drove his car full speed into road barrier and unsnapped his wife’s safety belt just before the crash. She was thrown from the car, but was still alive. So the man began to bang her head against the

concrete and choke her. His wife survived, but their marriage didn't. Breggin refers to this extreme form of medication spellbinding as *medication madness*, in which people behave in ways which would otherwise "terrify and appall them." He offers up a principle for his readers to remember: "Tampering with the human brain to influence human emotions and actions is not a good idea." (p. 277)

It should really be no surprise, he pointed out, that the brain is so sensitive to drugs, as it is an organ with an intricacy "far beyond our current understanding." Each human brain "is more complex than the entire physical universe of stars, galaxies, black holes, gravity, and electromagnetic fields." It contains approximately one hundred billion neurons; meaning that "there are more neurons in our brain than there are stars in the universe." These neurons and their connections are triggered by about two hundred neurotransmitters; only a few of which (like serotonin and dopamine) we have been able to identify. Even those we know best "we nonetheless know little about." (p. 276)

Within his discussion of antipsychotic drugs to treat 'schizophrenia' and mood-stabilizers to treat 'bipolar disorder' Breggin commented how these toxic substances disable the brain and produce profound deactivation and spellbinding. Instead of using physical restraints for control, "modern psychiatry disables the brain and mind, producing relative degrees of apathy and indifference." (p. 238) "Drugs that impair the higher centers of the brain will inevitably impair the function of the mind and dampen or distort what we call the human identity and spirit." (p. 279)

Relentless in his discussion and presentation of case studies and scientific research to make his point, Breggin convincingly shows how psychiatric drugs do more harm than good; how they impair the proper functioning of brain and mind, spellbinding individuals into believing they are doing better when in reality they are often doing worse. These medications have no 'curative power.' Instead, they blunt the emotions, cause indifference, or produce an artificial euphoria that creates the illusion of improvement. "Beyond that, reliance on drugs undermines the ultimate purpose of human life—learning to know and to guide our own mental processes and emotions in order to live as ethically and fully as possible." (p. 321)

Medication Madness is both informative and easy to read. A general, public audience as well as mental health and medical professionals will find his discussion helpful. For a more detailed discussion of the issues Breggin touches on in *Medication Madness*, see the newly revised edition of his book, *Brain-Disabling Treatments in Psychiatry*.