

Psychiatry and Psychology in the Writings of L. Ron Hubbard

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ABSTRACT: *Objectives:* Celebrity followers of the Church of Scientology have recently used their public forum to attack the modern practice of mental health. The practice of Scientology is rooted in the religious writings of its founder, L. Ron Hubbard. This paper will review the religious writings of L Ron Hubbard to understand Scientology's position on mental health. *Method:* This paper reviews four of the major religious books written by L Ron Hubbard, in addition to a comprehensive overview of Scientology compiled by Scientology staff. *Results:* Hubbard's theory of mind borrowed heavily from the earlier writings of Freud, until Hubbard's psychological theory extended to include a spiritual existence that goes beyond the material world. The goal of Hubbard's psychology and religion were to optimize the freedom of the individual, and he viewed psychiatry and psychology as inherently anti-spiritual and opposed to personal freedom and self-realization. Ultimately Hubbard presents a world view of potential nuclear world cataclysm, fueled by the geopolitical climate and mental health theories that dominated the mid 20th century. *Conclusions:* Hubbard's writings mirrored the times in which he lived. His views that mental health practices are inherently anti-religious, freedom-inhibiting, and brain damaging do not reflect the modern-day practices of mental health.

KEY WORDS: psychiatry; psychology; mental health; Dianetics; Scientology; L. Ron Hubbard.

Introduction

High-profile celebrities who are members of the Church of Scientology have recently loudly criticized the field of psychiatry. The persistent and effective

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campaign of the Church against the practices of psychiatry require that all mental health providers gain some understanding on the Church of Scientology's beliefs as they pertain to mental health and psychological functioning. We are not aware of a prior scholarly review of the Church of Scientology's publications on the topic of mental health within the psychiatric literature. The present paper summarizes available public writings of the Church's founder, L. Ron Hubbard, on this topic. The paper hopes to satisfy three needs. First, it gives mental health practitioners the background information necessary to discuss and rebut Scientology's positions. Second, the paper describes the theoretical parallels between psychiatry/psychology and Scientology that lead to competitive antagonism, and an imperative on the part of Scientology to attempt to keep psychiatrically ill persons out of mental health treatment. Third, the paper provides a historical context that explains why Scientology appeared on the scene at a particular point in world history.

Methods

This paper summarizes 5 books written by L. Ron Hubbard and or the Church of Scientology pertaining to the topic of mental health. These five books do not necessarily constitute an exhaustive review, in part because some critical literature may be secret and available only to the select members of the Church. Similarly, it is unknown whether all the teachings of L. Ron Hubbard as revealed in these five texts are still uncritically accepted by the Church of Scientology, or whether there has been any formal internal revisionism of the earliest principles. Still, these five books are readily available in public libraries, and are still sold in the "electronic bookstore" on the Church's website. Therefore, we assume that these five books are still relevant to understanding the Church of Scientology.

Results

The founder of Dianetics and Scientology

Dianetics and Scientology were founded by L. Ron Hubbard, who lived from 1911 to 1986. Hubbard served as an officer in the US Navy during World War II, and was stationed in the Philippines. He is reported to have been injured during the war, and subsequently attended college and had some education in physics. He supported himself in part as a science fiction writer, and among his most successful science fiction books was "Battlefield Earth". He traveled widely, and his exposure to multiple cultures was reported to have a major influence on his subsequent philosophical writings. Later Hubbard was to credit a long list of persons as intellectual contributors to his own work,

including Aristotle, Thomas Jefferson, Socrates, Descartes, Plato, Voltaire, Charcot, and Freud, among others (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 542).

Dianetics

Hubbard began to circulate a manuscript among his friends in the late 1940s which was ultimately published in 1951 as *Dianetics*. The word Dianetics comes from the Greek words *dia* meaning 'through' and *nous* meaning soul. Hubbard variously defined Dianetics as "a spiritual healing technology" and "an organized science of thought" (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 14 and *To the Reader*). Hubbard describes the functions of the mind as a tripartite topology, reminiscent of Freud's theory of mind as id, ego, and superego. Hubbard divides mental function as the somatic mind, the reactive mind, and the analytic mind (Hubbard, 1988, 67–72). The somatic mind is unthinking and reflexive. The reactive mind is impressionable and literal in its interpretation of the environment. The analytic mind is logical and incapable of error. The individual is most capable when the analytic mind is dominant. The reactive mind may become dominant when the analytic mind is incapacitated, for example during anesthesia. Without the mediating influence of the analytic mind, the reactive mind is subject to being overwhelmed by misinterpretation of sensations and experiences, and the impressions upon the reactive mind may be durable. These durable impressions are called *engrams* (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 80). Similar to Freud's idea that unconscious memories or fantasies can have produce maladaptive responses to reality, Hubbard postulated that engrams may lie latent yet control behavior. However, while Freud's conception of unconscious memory was a psychological construct, Hubbard's engram included physical representation of the past experience on cellular structure of the affected individual (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 165). Notably, the imprinting of engrams upon the individual does not require fully developed sensory organs, as Hubbard stated that up to two hundred engrams may be in place by birth, with the earliest accumulations of engrams in utero before the mother even realizes she is pregnant (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 167). Engrams can be linked in a chain through "restimulation" of an earlier engram in a new context (Hubbard, 1990b, p. 36). The earliest engram in an individual is called "basic-basic" (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 352). Thus Hubbard believed that the fundamental problem in human existence is an individual's irrational response to environmental demands under the influence of engrams.

The intent of Dianetics is to free individuals of the influence of engrams by the systematic exposure and removal of engrams, a process called "clearing". Prior to the decision to pursue "clearing", an individual is called "aberrated". Once an individual decides to pursue "clearing", the individual is called a "pre-clear". The process of becoming cleared is called "auditing" (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 554).

Auditing

Successful auditing requires a commitment of many hours over many days from the “pre-clear”. Auditing is typically conducted in a one-on-one session between the pre-clear and the auditor, who may be a lay minister, or a professional minister within the Church of Scientology. A single session of auditing can run up to 5 h (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 564), during which time the auditor encourages the pre-clear to “confront” (Hubbard, 1977, p. 61) the sources of their engrams to “resolve the case” (Hubbard, 1977, p. 249). The auditing experience may be extremely stressful, as in Hubbard’s description of the following auditing experience, “She remarked it was like being questioned by the police and she did not like it (Hubbard, 1977, p. 61)..... This all seemed make believe to the [pre clear], but with the use of the meter one incident was disentangled and worked on for a further two and one half hours with increasing reality and increasing ability to face up to what was going on” (Hubbard, 1977, p. 194). The ‘meter’ described in the previous passage is the “E-Meter”, an instrument that continuously measures skin electrical resistance (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 555). The large measurement electrodes are called “cans”, and do resemble food cans. The cans are held in the hands of the pre-clear, while the auditor examines the resistance within the circuit as a guide to where to probe next in the auditing session. The auditor may also snap their fingers to facilitate the confronting of engrams (Hubbard, 1977, p. 249).

Hubbard made ambitious claims for Dianetics, stating “it contains a therapeutic technique with which can be treated all organic mental ills and all organic psychosomatic ills, with assurance of a complete cure in unselected cases” (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 14). Hubbard went further, stating; “the problem of psychosomatic illness is entirely embraced by Dianetics, and by Dianetic technique such illness has been eradicated entirely in every case. About 70% of the physician’s current roster of diseases falls into the category of psychosomatic illness” (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 119). Elsewhere Hubbard named asthma, peptic ulcer disease, arthritis, allergies, and some coronary disease as specific examples of psychosomatic illness that can be relieved through Dianetics (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 121).

Although modern mainstream psychiatry no longer argues that common medical illnesses are primarily caused by neurotic processes and best treated with psychotherapy, these ideas were common in psychiatry from 1920 to 1950. Psychiatrist Franz Alexander proposed that specific unconscious conflicts were responsible for specific somatic illness, like peptic ulcer disease (Alexander, 1950), but support for Alexander’s theories were already on the wane by 1955 (Lipowski, 1977).

The transition from Dianetics to Scientology

While Hubbard described Dianetics as a ‘healing technology’ and ‘an organized science of thought’, Scientology is introduced as a religion in 1954 in

Los Angeles. The word Scientology comes from *scio*, meaning ‘knowing’, and *logos*, meaning ‘study of.’ Thus “Scientology means literally knowing how to know”. While Dianetics is focused on freeing the mind from the distorting influence of engrams, Scientology “is the study and handling of the spirit in relationship to itself, universes, and other life” (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 541). It is used to increase spiritual freedom, intelligence and ability and to enable a person to realize his own immortality (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 4). The field of Dianetics can be held entirely within the religion of Scientology, and is in the service of the goals of Scientology.

Dianetics states the primary motivating force in human life is to *Survive!* (emphasis and explanation point are Hubbard’s). The urge to *Survive!* was codified in four dynamics: (1) the urge to existence as oneself, (2) the urge to exist in procreation and families, (3) the urge to survive as groups of nations and races, and (4) the urge to exist as the species of mankind. Scientology accepted these four dynamics and expanded upon them by adding three more: (5) the urge to existence in the animal kingdom, (6) the urge to existence in the physical universe, and (7) the urge to existence in spirits (Hubbard, 1988, 40–41).

The urge to existence of spirits includes the possibility that a given spirit has existed across time in many different physical states. The Church of Scientology states, “Today in Scientology, many people have certainty that they have lived lives prior to their current one. These are referred to as past lives, not reincarnation. Individuals are free to believe this or not; past lives are not a dogma in Scientology” (Church of Scientology, 1992, 546–547). The individual’s realization of prior lives may be one outcome of the auditing experience. Hubbard gives a brief accounting of many individual’s prior lives as encountered during auditing, with description of prior lives that occurred up to a trillion (sic) years ago, and lives that transpired on other planets and other galaxies. Themes within these past lives histories include alien abduction, torture by aliens, space travel, gender identity confusion, sexual orientation issues, and occupying animal bodies (Hubbard, 1977).

Beyond clear

A Scientology term for spirit is ‘Thetan’. Hubbard notes that the three parts of man are body, mind, and thetan, with the thetan being the senior part that has an existence apart from either the body or the mind (Hubbard, 1988, p. 63). The thetan is associated with its own electrical field (Hubbard, 1977, p. 33). The mind is viewed as a “communication and control system” between the thetan and the environment (Hubbard, 1988, p. 65). To emphasize the centrality of the thetan, Hubbard stresses that the “thetan *is* the person” (his emphasis) (Hubbard, 1988, p. 74). Just as in Dianetics a primary goal is for the analytic mind to maintain dominance over the reactive mind, in Scientology a goal is for the thetan to gain control over the environment. If a member of the Church of Scientology pursues additional auditing sessions beyond achieving

“clear’, and pursues study of materials that are called confidential within the Church, the practitioner may reach a higher state “Operating Thetan”. Achieving Operating Thetan means one can “operate without dependency on things. ... [and can]... be at cause over life, thought, matter, energy, space, and time” (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 566).

“Clear Body, Clear Mind”

The Dianetic processing of clearing the mind of engrams is paralleled in Scientology by a physical purification process for the body. Hubbard postulates that toxins, including environmental toxins, prescribed toxins, and recreational drugs can be stored in the body in small but relevant amounts for years after exposure. Hubbard states that these toxins may lie dormant for extended periods, stored in body fat, only to be re-activated at a later time, causing psychological and physiological symptoms (Hubbard, 1990b, p. 23–26), analogous to an illegal drug “flashback”. Hubbard proposes the “Purification Program” to move toxins from fat storage, into the circulation, then ready for excretion. The Purification Program typically includes 18–20 days of 5 h sessions, each of which begins with 30 min of running to dislodge toxins, followed by 4.5 h of sauna to sweat the toxins out (Hubbard, 1990b, p. 43). To improve the likelihood that the body’s fat will be ready to release its storage of toxins, Hubbard recommends the daily ingestion of 2 tablespoons up to ½ cup of pure polyunsaturated oil in the diet to facilitate the exchange of toxic fat for non-toxic fat (Hubbard, 1990b, p. 76–80). The regimen also includes 1–3 glasses per day of a calcium-magnesium drink and fresh fruits and vegetables.

The agenda and authority of Scientology

While Dianetics was proposed to have as its agenda the eradication of “all inorganic mental ills and all organic psychosomatic ills.” (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 14) in the individual, Scientology has global betterment and salvation as its agenda. Scientologists want to “clear the planet”; much as Dianetics clears the individual. Further “Scientologists want to clear the planet of insanity, war, and crime” (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 551). Hubbard says the future of the planet depends on Scientology as “The use or neglect of this material [Scientology] may well determine the use or neglect of the atomic bomb by man. Which force wins depends in a large measure of your use of Scientology” (Hubbard, 1988, p. 2–3).

The ambitious agenda of Scientology, and its demanding practices, are supported by science, according to Hubbard. He notes Scientology “is the only thoroughly tested system of improving human relations, intelligence, and character, and is the only one which does” (Hubbard, 1988, p. 79), [and] “there are no tenets in Scientology which can not be demonstrated with entirely scientific procedures” (Hubbard, 1988, p. 79).

Points of commonality and difference between Freud and Hubbard

Hubbard had conceded Freud's theories as a major precursor to Scientology, and the borrowing of Scientology is evident. Both Freudian theory and Hubbard assume that there are unconscious mental processes that may be shaped by early life experiences, and that these influence later behavior and thought. Both Freud and Hubbard postulated a tripartite structure of the mind, and that these parts can be in conflict in their relationship to the external world. Both Freud and Hubbard believed that adverse early life experiences may become lodged in the unconscious, and should be removed with specific psychological procedures. Why then is there such open antagonism between Scientology and psychology/psychiatry?

Although a significant segment of modern mental health practitioners believe that spirituality is relevant to mental health, this was not always so. Freud said religion is "the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity" (Freud, 1964). Hubbard reacted strongly to this position of psychoanalysis, saying "Only those who believe, as do psychiatrists and psychologists, that man is a soulless animal or who wish for their own reasons to keep man unhappy and oppressed are in conflict with Scientology" (Hubbard, 1988, p. 11). Similarly the Church of Scientology states, "Scientology is a religion. Psychiatry is strongly opposed to all religions as it does not recognize that man is a spiritual being" (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 26).

Scientology's opposition to psychiatric biological interventions

Hubbard's opposition to psychiatry on spiritual grounds was paralleled by his objections to biological treatment approaches in psychiatry. Consistent with his theory that toxins are stored in the body and can have delayed effects, he wrote against psychotropics, stating that drug residues produce a "woodenness of personality and a noticeable difficulty in the ability to absorb and comprehend or retain and apply new data..." (Hubbard, 1990b, p. 26). The prohibition against psychoactive drugs extended to medications that are not traditionally viewed as having significant psychoactive properties, such as aspirin (Hubbard, 1990b, p. 197).

Hubbard took an even dimmer view of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) which would put the patient at risk for the accumulation of new engrams since the period of unconsciousness and confusion would disengage the analytic mind, and allow dominance of the reactive mind (Hubbard, 1990, p. 390). Hubbard also suggested that ECT might move preexisting engrams around in the mind, making their subsequent removal more difficult (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 128). Even worse, Hubbard stated that ECT "sears the brain with 110 volts" (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 242), producing irreversible brain damage that might make it impossible for Scientology to take the pre-clear to clear.

As mentioned earlier, Hubbard believed "a fixed electrical field existed surrounding a human body..... The balance structure of the body.....can be changed by changing this electrical field which exists at a distance from, or

within, the body..... The use of electric shocks upon a body for any purpose is therefore considered very dangerous..... Electric shocks deranges the electronic field in the vicinity of the body and is always succeeded by bad health..." (Hubbard, 1988, p. 193). Despite Hubbard's position that the application of electricity is always harmful to humans, Scientology has not taken a vocal stand against cardioversion for cardiac dysrhythmias and deep brain stimulation for Parkinson's Disease like the stand it has taken with ECT.

Given Hubbard's views on psychological and psychiatric treatments, it is not surprising that he condemned mental health practitioners as individuals. For example, he stated that "no thinking doctor.....would touch.....electroconvulsive therapy.....unless that doctor.....is himself so thoroughly aberrated that the act springs not from and desire to heal, but from the most utter and craven sadism to which engrams can bring man" (Hubbard, 1990a, p. 193). The Church of Scientology's attribution of evil intent within psychiatry and psychology culminated in its attribution of psychological principles as the rationale for genocide, saying "As the stepchildren of German dictator Bismark and later Hitler and the Nazis, psychiatry and psychology formed the philosophical basis for the wholesale slaughter of human beings in World Wars I and II" (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 570).

Hubbard's opposition to psychology and psychiatry was reflected in his call for activism in regards to mental health. Hubbard wrote that *The Code of a Scientologist* is to "expose and abolish any and all physically damaging practices in the field of mental health... to help clean up and keep clean the field of mental health... [and] to bring about an atmosphere of safety and security in the field of mental health by eradicating its abuses and brutality" (Hubbard, 1988, p. 110). These admonishments make the public behavior of Scientology celebrities more understandable, as they are simply following what is within their Code.

The life of L Ron Hubbard, the origins of Scientology, and its antagonism to psychology/psychiatry

Hubbard wrote, "Scientology.....was born in the same crucible as the atomic bomb" (Hubbard, 1988, p. 133). This statement is a key to understanding much about Scientology in general and why it opposes psychiatry.

Hubbard had fought in the US Navy in the Pacific as part of the Allied forces that overturned fascist governments, only to watch the fall of fascism followed by the rise of communism. Limitations upon personal freedoms were a harsh reality of both fascism and communism, and Hubbard responded with a psychology and a religion that were fiercely rooted in the achievement of freedoms. Dianetics is intent on freeing the individual from irrational behavior driven by engrams, while Scientology takes the broader approach of nations, and ultimately of spirits that transcend time. Scientology promises for some a state of Operating Thetan in which the individual's freedoms are no longer constrained by the material world as they master time and space, and fully

realize their potential. In this respect, Scientology may be viewed as a radical reaction to the fascism and communism.

At this point psychiatry and psychology may become intertwined with communism. While Freud had stated that religion is “the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity”, Karl Marx had said “religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people” (Marx, 1970, p. 131). In this context Hubbard may have viewed both psychiatry/psychology and communism collectively as anti-religious systems of suppressing individual freedoms. Fascism, and later communism, limited freedom by force, while psychiatry was construed of stripping people of intellectual freedoms and capacity through drugs, ECT, and prefrontal leucotomy.

The development of the atomic bomb by the Soviet Union in 1949, and the success of the Communist party in mainland China in 1949, completed the loop between mental health, geopolitics, and Scientology. The urge to *Survive* as nations and as a species is paramount within Scientology and this urge is threatened by nuclear war. This linkage might be conceptualized as follows: (1) the threat of irresponsible use of atomic weapons is enhanced as engrams drive irrational behavior and thinking; (2) A godless psychology/psychiatry divert aberrated persons from the correct road to “clear”, and enhance the likelihood of annihilation of mankind; (3) godless psychology and godless political systems are hand-in-glove, and together represent the gravest threat to man.

The response of psychology/psychiatry to Hubbard's writing

Scientology's strong attack on psychology/psychiatry has not been met by an equally strong consistent defense by organized psychiatry. The reasons for this have not been made explicit, but there are several plausible theories. First, organized mental health groups may believe that Scientology's voice is still too small, or that the arguments of Scientology don't require rebuttal. Second, organized mental health may not want to put itself in the position of counter-attacking a religion, especially given the older anti-religious writings of psychoanalysis and the attempts to build bridges between mental health and religion/spirituality. Third, if the mental health field defended itself in a manner that was construed as an actual attack on Scientology, then Scientology would feel legitimized to use any means to undermine the source of the attack. Ultimately, a person that attacks Scientology may be labeled a “suppressive person”. Hubbard and the Church of Scientology state a suppressive person “seeks to suppress, or squash, any betterment activity or group..... [Suppressives have] antisocial personality disorder..... The suppressive person seeks to upset, continuously undermine, spread bad news and denigrate Scientology.....For the good of the church.....such a person is officially labeled a suppressive person so that others will know not to associate with him” (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 552). Legal actions are among the most

common routes that the Church of Scientology will take to shut down a suppressive, and the Church of Scientology acknowledges the importance of litigation among the Church's defenses (Church of Scientology, 1992, p. 569).

Conclusions

The introduction of Dianetics and the subsequent rise of the Church of Scientology were primed by world events at that time. To reiterate, Hubbard stated "Scientology.....was born in the same crucible as the atomic bomb"(Hubbard, 1988, p. 133). Dianetics and Scientology can be viewed as reaction to a world that seemed to be drifting from one form of civil oppression to another, in the backdrop of the possibility of total annihilation. Both Dianetics and Scientology have maximization of personal freedom and realization of personal potential at the top of their priorities, in stark contrast to developments elsewhere in the middle of the 20th century.

Hubbard portrayed psychology and psychiatry in the mid 1950s as anti-religious and anti-personal freedom. Psychiatry and psychology have changed since 1950, with an acknowledgement that spiritual concerns are the legitimate province of mental health (Shuman and Meador, 2003), and an abandonment of treatments that produced brain damage such as leucotomy. Recent data has shown that during the 5-year period between 1971 and 1975 only 776 published articles studied or discussed religion/spirituality and mental health, while in the 5-year period 2001–2005, over 5,000 articles have appeared (Koenig, in press). Thus, mental health has shown a growing appreciation of the relevance of spiritual and religious concerns. In parallel, psychiatric treatment, including psychiatric medications and ECT, have been shown to be followed by improved function and better quality of life for the majority of patients (McCall, 2001, 2006). Furthermore, there is no evidence of anatomic brain damage with ECT, at least within the resolution of magnetic resonance imaging (Devanand, 1994). Hubbard's objections to psychiatry and psychology as anti-religious and limiting personal freedom are not consistent with the modern practice of mental health.

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