

RED SHTICK MAGAZINE



IRREVERENT VIEWS & SATIRICAL NEWS

Thinking: The Mental Challenge

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Topic: Blinded by Science

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Nerds like to look at their brains and say "Hey there, sexy, that's a nice big brain you got on ya'." Admittedly, I include myself in this group. I think my brain is sexy; I know it's not the size that counts. I'm not going to say I've ever thought about the fact that my brain has cleavage, but I just did, so now you know something about me you didn't want to.

I'm not just a neural narcissist. I like all kinds of big brains. Big, sexy brains make big, sexy ideas. Smart people who figure stuff out are my heroes, them and the cyclops from *Krull*, and Sloth from *The Goonies*. My highest respect is reserved for those big, sexy brains that try to figure out how big, sexy brains work. So, out of my respect for the endeavor to unravel the human mind, I am obligated to make fun of it.

The mind became a popular thing to study when it became apparent that it had the capacity to do really cool stuff - like make sharp things to poke with. The first renaissance in our understanding of the mind began when ancient Greeks asked questions like: What is the nature of consciousness and awareness? Where lies the soul? Why the hell is Leonidus bitching about "freedom" in *300* when most of the people in Sparta were slaves?

Psychology and psychiatry are words derived from the language of those inquisitive, Greek proto-hippies. They share the root "psyche," which has an interesting variety of interpretations, including "animating spirit," "breath," "mind," and "soul." So, just from the word, you know psych-anything is going to be fun, because it lets you mess with people's souls and still get credit for being all academic. It's sort of like a televangelist getting to host the *Nova* series.

One prominent and memorable psychevangelist was Sigmund Freud, who is best known for his theories about your mama. Freud proposed that the primary motives of our lives are our survival and sexual drives. He called these Eros, which is also what he called his penis. Freud also proposed that cocaine is fantastic. Such propositions had a strong influence on other

people with interesting last names, such as Carl Jung.

Jung, who preferred the pronunciation “hung” for obvious reasons, was initially a supporter of Freud’s theories about the psyche. Later, Jung found his own theories more convincing and began to question Freud's fixation on boobies and blow. Unlike Freud's theories, Jung's are complex and fairly relevant, so they’re harder to make fun of. Jung is remembered primarily for his foundational work in analytical psychology, his synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophies, and developing the popular Swiss sport known as Freud Bashing.

Psychology has produced a wealth of logical conjecture about the mind, but studies in this field have always relied on behavioral signs and introspective, first-person reports. Other approaches to studying the mind utilize our most classic innovation: sharp things to poke with. Students of human anatomy learned very early on that the brain is located inside the head, and that, once past the skull, you're pretty much home free. Much of our fundamental understanding of the brain came from deductions based on poking and electrifying parts of the brain and seeing what twitched.

Modern technology has given us new tools to understand the mind. We have advanced to the point where we can observe the brain’s activity, live and in Technicolor, with magnetic resonance imaging, or MRI. The MRI was an initial disappointment to some neurologists, who really preferred the poking and the twitching.

With the advent of MRI, we've learned a great deal about where certain types of thoughts might come from. For instance, the thoughts you are having right now, while reading this article, come from the part of your brain where I planted a chip last night while you were asleep. I also took your last Hot Pocket[®].

Even with the combined efforts of psychology and neurology, we still struggle with our understanding of consciousness. Our mighty sciences have showed us the road to a full mastery of the brain’s basic structure and function, but they're still having trouble explaining what thinking is all about.

Consciousness itself is a mystery wrapped in an enigma wrapped in that Hot Pocket I stole and ate while I watched you sleep. The awareness of one’s awareness is a concept that few in Western science have attempted to integrate into the discussion of the mind, mostly because it sounds a little Eastern. This is due to the fact that many Eastern cultures have been practicing and honing their awareness for millennia.

Tibetan Buddhist practitioners are renowned for their powers of visualization and control of attention. MRI technology has revealed that they are not just yanking our chain, either; they really can do pretty impressive stuff. The Buddhist understanding of the mind is integrally linked to happiness and compassion. This hippie nonsense is the primary reason that China stole their country. Science is working to understand how these Tibetan mental athletes attain such a degree of skill, but nobody buys the whole happiness and compassion thing. Pills have a higher profit margin than meditation.

Our trek across the grey, convoluted landscape of the human thinker has only just begun. Even after thousands of years of thinking about thinking, we still have a lot to think about. It

is my hope that your thinker is as interested in thinking as mine is. You don't have to think like me, just think. And for God's sake, read something. Oh wait; you just did. I was talking to that person over there who's not reading anything. Go give him this article and tell him he has to read it. Don't make me use that chip I put in your head.

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