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The Epidemic of Mental Illness: Why?

In der aktuellen Ausgabe der New York Review of Books ist der sehr lesenswerte erste Teil einer Besprechung dreier Psychopharmaka-kritischer Bücher von Marcia Angell erschienen. Darin heißt es: "Nowadays treatment by medical doctors nearly always means psychoactive drugs, that is, drugs that affect the mental state. In fact, most psychiatrists treat only with drugs, and refer patients to psychologists or social workers if they believe psychotherapy is also warranted. The shift from "talk therapy" to drugs as the dominant mode of treatment coincides with the emergence over the past four decades of the theory that mental illness is caused primarily by chemical imbalances in the brain that can be corrected by specific drugs. That theory became broadly accepted, by the media and the public as well as by the medical profession, after Prozac came to market in 1987 and was intensively promoted as a corrective for a deficiency of serotonin in the brain. The number of people treated for depression tripled in the following ten years, and about 10 percent of Americans over age six now take antidepressants. The increased use of drugs to treat psychosis is even more dramatic. The new generation of antipsychotics, such as Risperdal, Zyprexa, and Seroquel, has replaced cholesterol-lowering agents as the top-selling class of drugs in the US. What is going on here? Is the prevalence of mental illness really that high and still climbing? Particularly if these disorders are biologically determined and not a result of environmental influences, is it plausible to suppose that such an increase is real? Or are we learning to recognize and diagnose mental disorders that were always there? On the other hand, are we simply expanding the criteria for mental illness so that nearly everyone has one? And what about the drugs that are now the mainstay of treatment? Do they work? If they do, shouldn't we expect the prevalence of mental illness to be declining, not rising?"Zum vollständigen Text...

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