

# Neurosis vs. Psychosis

And Other  
Psychoanalytic Vignettes

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[Neurosis vs. Psychosis](#)

[What determines whether one is happy?](#)

[Compulsive Work](#)

[Stuttering](#)

[How men and women are different](#)

[One learns from adversity, not from failure](#)

[Does everybody want money?](#)

[The #1 Rule of Writing](#)

[Lack of Coordination](#)

[Mental Illness: The Ultimate Litmus Test](#)

[The #1 Rule of Business](#)

Neurosis vs. Psychosis

Psychosis is a mental impairment that is precipitated and sustained by a break with external reality. Neurosis is a mental impairment that is precipitated and sustained by a break with one's emotional condition.

The neurotic flees from his emotions; the psychotic flees from reality. Neurosis may lead to a blunting of one's awareness of certain aspects of external reality, but any such loss of awareness is subordinate to loss of awareness of one's emotional condition.

Similarly, psychosis may lead to a disruption of one's understanding of one's emotional condition, but any such disturbance is subordinate to the psychotic's loss of awareness of external reality.

Though symmetrical in the just-described respects, neurosis and psychosis are ultimately not mirror images of each other. This is a

consequence of the fact that psychosis involves a *partial* regression to a condition of psychological infancy, the operative term being “partial.” An infant is not psychotic. The reason is that the infant’s psychological integration is not simultaneously that of an adult and an infant; it is simply that of an infant. For this reason, the infant’s psychological condition is integrated and healthy, even though the infant’s understanding of reality is even more subjective, and therefore more *projective*, than that of the adult psychotic.

The adult psychotic, on the other hand, has the psychological architecture of an adult as well as that of an infant. Therefore, the psychotic has two entirely distinct and incompatible ways of processing information. He does not have a unified value system; he does not have a unified understanding of how to implement such values as he has; and his psychological condition is therefore therefore one of utter disarray. And therein lies the peculiarly damaging nature of psychosis.

Nothing comparable holds of the neurotic. Neurosis is about containing threats to one’s integration by repressing them. To repress a conceit is not to bury one’s knowledge of it in the unconscious; it is rather to bury one’s knowledge of its emotional valence in the unconscious. As a result, the neurotic’s condition is one of relatively unimpaired intellectual awareness.

In fact, in some circumscribed ways, it may be even be a condition heightened intellectual awareness, owing to the fact that the neurotic is likely to compensate for his impoverished emotional state by hypercathecting his intellect. Moreover, by stripping the contents of consciousness of their emotional valences, the neurotic guarantees that he has a hyper-stable, though also an ossified psyche.

The essence of psychosis is an inability to organize consciously experienced emotion; the essence of neurosis is an inability to *have*

consciously experienced emotion. The former is paralyzed by a superabundance of emotion, the latter by lack of it.

### What determines whether one is happy?

For men, happiness is about forging one's own identity. For women, happiness is about being loved. Men are happy if they triumphed over their own fathers, and women are happy if their fathers loved them. For a man to triumph over his father is for him *not* to submit to his father. It is for him to establish his own identity.

For a man, there are three possibilities:

(1) He can establish his own identity by doing the opposite of what his father does. For example, if his father was a merchant, he is a philosopher, who spurns what his father does as being narrow and philistine; and if his father is a philosopher, he is a merchant, who spurns what his father does as being soft-headed and escapist.

This was Schopenhauer's situation. Schopenhauer's father was a wealthy merchant. Schopenhauer was a great philosopher who spoke with contempt of merchants.

(2) He can establish his identity by doing what his father does but doing it better. This was Mozart's situation. Mozart's father was a good composer; Mozart was a great composer. This is also Donald Trump's situation. Trump's father was a moderately successful business man; Trump is an extremely successful businessman.

(3) He can fail.

There are three ways a man can fail.

(a) He can try to fill his father's shoes but fail.

(b) He can submit to his father without even going so far as to try to fill his shoes.

(c) He can have no father at all and thus have no father to triumph over or to fail to triumph over.

### Compulsive Work

Compulsive Work is about avoidance. Here one must distinguish between two kinds of workaholics. There is the workaholic who loves what he is doing: this person works because he wants to work. Then there is the workaholic who hates what he is doing: this person works because he doesn't want to work. The workaholic who loves his work is not working compulsively, and this form of workaholism is not about avoidance. But the workaholic who hates his work *is* working compulsively, and this form of workaholism *is* about avoidance. This type of workaholic is avoiding doing what he wants to do, and because he hates what he is doing, he has to do it compulsively.

### Stuttering

Stuttering is about not speaking with a single voice. Two distinct currents of thought are attempting to control one's speech. To the extent that

these two thought-currents are evenly matched, one stutters. To the extent that one of these thought currents dominates the other, speech is normal.

### How men and women are different

Men are self-contained and woman are not. That is the difference between men and women. Obviously there are men who are not self-contained and there are women who are self-contained. But such men are not really men, and such women are not really women.

### One learns from adversity, not from failure

It is often said that one learns more from failure than from success. This is not true.

I have succeeded many times and failed many times. Each success opened up new and completely unforeseen vistas. Each failure was nothing but a dead end, from which I learned nothing, except that what I was doing led to a dead end.

One learns nothing from failure. One learns from adversity. Failure is not adversity. Failure is the end-result of adversity that was not triumphed over.

### Does everybody want money?

Yes. Everybody. But what about monks? What about people who spurn money? What about scholars, writers, 'starving artists' who seem to take pride in NOT having money? That is itself a way of wanting money.

That is to say, it is a reaction to the desire for money. Consider the brilliant scholar who lives in his squalid basement flat and who actually seems to take pride in his miserable circumstance. His attitude towards money is that of a jilted and petulant lover. His feelings about money are far too ‘busy’ to be what he alleges them to be. Overblown feelings are the opposite of what they are supposed to be. Overblown happiness about one’s new husband is unhappiness about one’s new husband. Emotions that are what they seem to be are not the objects of intense scrutiny on the part of those who have them. Attitudes that are pressed into the service of tendentious narratives about oneself are the opposite of what they seem to be.

### The #1 Rule of Writing

The Number #1 Rule of Writing is that one must *immediately write down every thought that occurs to one*. If one waits, the moment will pass, never to be recovered. It is irrelevant that one should ‘memorize’ what it is that one wanted to say, since the idea that originally came to mind was merely a foil for a constellation of unconscious ideas.

Elsewhere I have said that the Number #1 rule of writing is complete honesty. This is compatible with what I just said, since, if one follows the above-stated injunction, one is *ipso facto* an honest writer.

### Lack of Coordination

Lack of coordination has to do with a failure to be centered, which in turn has to do with a failure to have an objective that one truly believes in. Lack of physical coordination is accompanied by, since it is a manifestation

of, a lack of psychological coordination.

### Mental Illness: The Ultimate Litmus Test

A given psychological condition is pathological if it restricts freedom and non-pathological if it does not. A given condition is positively counter-pathological if it augments freedom, even if it is unusual or even unique.

### The #1 Rule of Business

The #1 Rule rule of business is that you must do what comes naturally to you. You must not go against your own grain. You must work hard, but you must not work hard fighting your own nature.

Just as writer's block only afflicts those who are not writing from the heart, so 'entrepreneur's block' only afflicts those who are not working from the heart. When people choose a given path because it is who they are, they succeed. When they do so because they have an agenda, they do not. This is true of writers and also of entrepreneurs.



