psychiatrists have indeed been involved in a 'category fallacy', and have confused these two issues.

The questions posed for psychiatry by anthropology are paralleled in many ways by questions raised in contemporary philosophy of science. This has recently undermined the treasured notion that natural science leads to the revelation of the natural world as it is 'in itself'. In particular, post-empiricist philosophers such as Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend have seriously questioned the possibility of a neutral objective epistemological framework from which we can assess competing theories or paradigms. Applying such an analysis to psychiatry, one is led to the conclusion that researchers commit a fundamental mistake when they seek to explain all experiences of madness and distress by reference to a single western paradigm. Furthermore, one suspects, with Professor Kleinman, that there is a "tacit professional ideology" at work when attempts are made to universalise western diagnostic concepts. The American philosopher Richard Rorty says that "the notion of 'accurate representation' is simply an automatic and empty compliment which we pay to those beliefs which are successful in helping us do what we want to do" (Rorty, 1980).

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The Dopamine Hypothesis, Viral Theory of Schizophrenia, and Season of Birth

SIR: Crow (*Journal*, October 1987, **151**, 460–465) thinks that the relative lack of psychotic potency of direct dopamine agonists remains something of an embarrassment for the dopamine theory of psychosis. The differential effect of the dopamine agonists on the several central dopaminergic pathways (nigrostriatal, mesolimbic, mesocortical and tuberoinfundibular) and dopamine receptors (D1, D2, D3) may be able to explain this observation. Bromocriptine and apomorphine have a relatively weak effect on the D2 receptors, making them less psychogenic. When given in high doses they do produce hallucinations and other psychotic symptoms.

Regarding the antiviral effects of psychotropic drugs, it reminds one of amantadine, an antiviral agent as well as a dopamine agonist. Hence the antiviral property is not confined to dopamine antagonists, but is more prominent in dopamine agonists.

The excess winter births of schizophrenics has for a long time puzzled research workers who have tried to formulate a theory for the aetiology of schizophrenia. The viral theory was one way to account for such a phenomenon. An alternative view might come from the recent findings in neuroscience research, which shows that there are critical periods in the development of the brain, e.g. perinatal androgenisation of the rat nervous system. Perinatal sex hormone secretion influences the developing central nervous system by altering the pattern of nerve connection, and affects the normal development and expression of the adult function proper to the genetic sex of the animal. Steroid receptors are intracellular receptor proteins. The hormone-protein complex then enters the cell's nucleus and interacts with specific genes, thereby altering gene expression in the target cell.

The central nervous system remains plastic in adult animals, capable of substantial structural reorganisation in response to altered levels of circulating steroids and seasonal changes. Adult male canaries exhibit seasonal differences in the volume of two telencephalic song control nuclei, suggesting an annual cycle of synaptic degeneration and regeneration. In mice, the gonads grow and regress seasonally in response to changing day length. Steroid levels and reproductive behaviour covary with these gonadal changes. One consequence of these seasonal alternations in circulating steroids could be changed dendritic structure.

There are thus two actions of the gonadal steroids on the central nervous system; one is lasting and occurs in a restricted time window early in development; the other is rapid and reversible and may occur throughout the adult life according to seasonal changes. Hence the excess winter births of schizophrenics, besides a possible increased susceptibility to virus infections, could be the result of changes in steroid hormones with season and day length which in turn affect nerve connections. Obviously different quarters of the year will give rise to different patterns, but adequate information as to the outcome is still lacking, except that speculated by astrologers.

There are other phenomena that may be related to a cycle of hormonal changes. Suicides tend to be high from March to October, a pattern that is reversed in Australia but is less marked in tropical countries, where the seasonal difference is not significant. Seasonal affective disorder may be another condition that is related to these hormonal changes.

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SIR: While laying no claim to specialist knowledge in either genetics or virology, a position no doubt shared by the majority of psychiatrists, I find Dr Crow's remarks on the causes of schizophrenia rather baffling (Crow, *Journal*, October 1987, **151**, 460–465). His grounds for revising the exogenous virus theory seem plausible, although available knowledge of viral infiltrations of the CNS appears to already provide adequate grounds for dismissal. His new theory evades simple misgivings, but if the circumstantial evidence is examined the leap of faith required will be seen to be commensurate.

Dealing first with transposable elements, transposons have not been demonstrated in vertebrates, let alone man, whereas Alu inversion segments, similarly mobile, are widespread on the human genome and not so far associated with any illness. Retroviruses are known to be capable of vertical transmission, but also of horizontal transmission and in some cases neoplastic changes, two capacities that even the most ardent advocate could not credit to a schizophrenia retrovirus. Without these abilities replication and survival must be problematic, especially given the sub-fertility of the chosen host.

Perhaps there is a case for an analogy to human oncogenes, similar to viral material and incorporated on the human genome with beneficial effects, presumably on cell growth and differentiation with which their products are thought to be associated, offsetting the occasional clinical cancer. This is unlikely, for several reasons. Schizophrenia is common, and occurs at optimal reproductive age. There are no animal models, unlike the case with oncogenes. It is difficult to see any selective advantage: the relatives of schizophrenics do not have any distinctive qualities, except perhaps the traits of schizophrenia in attenuated form – hardly advantageous except under exceptional conditions such as social isolation. Dr Crow mentions the growth of certain factors that enhance hemispheric differentiation as possibly advantageous. If he means growth of the neural systems thought to mediate schizophrenia, then this theory has nothing better to offer than current polygenic theories presumably also focused on such systems.

The theory is at a disadvantage compared with polygenic theories when activation of the virus is considered. The oncogene implicated in Burkitt's lymphoma is known to be activated by two environmental stimuli: chronic antigenic stimulation from the malaria parasite and the Epstein Barr virus. The brain is well protected from viruses, immune complexes, and mutagens in general when compared with extracerebral cells in every one of which the virogene must be present if present at meiosis. The notion that the virogene is activated by other genes is not borne out by the monozygotic twin pair concordence rates unless a massive rate of mutation in significant genes (and no others) is postulated. This seems rather unlikely.

Thus Dr Crow asks of his virogene certain nonpareil capabilities, stretching the definition of the words 'virus', 'virogene', etc. much as a clever science fiction writer adapts topical scientific concepts for creative effect. True, my information comes from perusal of library textbooks (Emery, 1985; Wetherall, 1985) and is probably outdated; the parent sciences are constantly throwing up new marvels which will probably become grist to further theories. But my distrust of such theories goes beyond their inherent unlikeliness. In compressing the natural history of schizophrenia into the imperceptible transactions of genes, virogenes, and mutagens, squeezing out the role of brain tissue and the environment that it works on, there is a real danger of a *reductio ad absurdum*, symmetrical to the equally reductionist environmental theories of the 1960s.

Indeed, it is tempting to see Dr Crow's and similar theories and the Scheff/Lidz/Cooper axis as opposing keystones in the overarching false antitheses of nature and nurture. The opposition is more precise even than that; 1960s theorists strove to exclude medical concepts, Dr Crow strives to exclude everything but. To the majority who work or live with patients with schizophrenia, unfamiliar with genetics but knowing that the environment is somehow important, these theories must indicate that it is us, not their charges, who are out of our wits.

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