M. Lynn Rose on Patricia Ann Clark's 1993 PhD dissertation
The Balance of the Mind: The Experience and Perception of Mental Illness in Antiquity (University of Washington)

By way of introducing Patricia Clark's superb Balance of the Mind, I recall my own early efforts, which serve as a sort of cautionary tale. Once upon a time, having completed a preliminary investigation of physical disability in everyday life in the ancient Greek world, I prepared to take the next logical step--or so it seemed then--an investigation of mental disability in the ancient world. [1] During the 2000/2001 academic year, I dove into the bog of studying mental disability -- madness, foolishness, whatever -- hoping (naively) to get a glimpse of how real people experienced the phenomenon in their ancient daily lives.

This goal came from ignorance more than anything else. In the clarity of retrospect, I can identify four major flaws that misinformed my approach. First, I had not grasped the fallacy of imposing a modern mind/body split onto ancient perceptions, nor--second--did I have a very good idea of the modern subcategories of disorders. Cognitive, emotional, intellectual, learning, and psychiatric disability were swirled together with autism spectrum disorder, brain damage, all the flavors of depression, and more-recently-identified diagnoses such as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Without an understanding of modern categories, I was unable to determine whether or not the categories were suitable lenses for the ancient world. Third, I was wrongly confident that I would be able to navigate the quagmire of ancient literature and modern psychoanalytic interpretation, which had become anachronistically and inextricably intertwined. With frustrating circularity, a lot of scholarship set out to analyze the mental states of people in the Graeco-Roman world with the archetypes that came from Graeco-Roman world. I will always remember hearing a conference paper that purported, without irony, to analyze Electra's Electra Complex. Fourth, I was overconfident in my ability to divorce Greek and Latin words from their use in medical vocabulary, an etymological vicious circle. Any medical term, from anorexia to suicide, takes us back to the very Greek and Latin that we are examining, and it is difficult to resist the urge to "identify" cases of this or that medical condition with their retrospective taxonomy.
Beyond these four fallacies, the search for the ancient criteria for sanity and insanity, fools and wise men, and occasional (as opposed to chronic) misbehavior is fraught with peril. The issues are susceptible to being clouded with Freudian terminology and modern impositions from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (the DSM). It would be as meaningless to slap a diagnosis of post-partum depression onto Medea as it would be to label Alexander the Great with megalomania, no matter how well the criteria might seem to fit. While the study has to rest on the ancient vocabulary, furthermore, the vast majority of the ancient population (agriculturalists) was illiterate. The tour of secondary material is also dense and circuitous: the siren song of psycho-history will try to waylay the investigator. Freud's study of Atonism for example, must be read as a whole or not at all. [2] These challenges are daunting enough to leave any scholar frozen in a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure, prone to cleaning the oven or taking a nap rather than girding up laocooenically.

Several months into my preliminary investigation, I expected to make short work of Patricia Clark's 1993 PhD dissertation, which I had discovered late in my process of surveying the literature, and which was not easy to obtain. *The Balance of the Mind*, according to my master plan, would join a footnote listing other works that had tried and failed to examine ancient mental illness on its own terms. If the impressive Classicist and medical historian Lawrence Bliquez had not supervised the thesis I might not have bothered tracking it down. [3]

Time stood still as I read *Balance of the Mind*. I would have been miffed that someone had so flawlessly tamed the serpents, which I had considered my task... but I was too awestruck. Writing the dissertation in the 1990s, when the field of Disability Studies was very young and not coherent enough even to be rejected by scholarly societies, Patricia Clark based her work on the ancient vocabulary, deftly handled the Freudian conundrum, unceremoniously dispensed with retrospective diagnosis, and examined mental disorders in their ancient cultural context, taking into consideration variables of age, gender, and socio-economic standing.

"The starting point for the study," Clark understates on page five, "is language." Indeed, the importance of working with vocabulary is seen throughout *Balance of the Mind*, and Clark gives us a philological goldmine
in Appendix A. Beginning on page 440, this appendix consists of 61 groups of Greek terms describing insanity, 15 terms describing sanity, and 19 terms describing foolishness. Following the Greek terms are 26 Latin terms. Each of the terms in the 87 main entries is translated and annotated when necessary, and a reference in ancient literature is provided for each.

The seventeen-page bibliography of primary sources and secondary material is another lode for Disability Studies scholars, Classicists, ancient historians, and medical historians. The secondary material, obviously, is no longer up-to-date, and new primary source material has come to light since 1993. In the same way, some of the terminology is outmoded ("mental retardation," for example, was widely accepted as a descriptor in 1993). The core of the work, however, is solid. Patricia and I had a very rewarding time mining her work on the Galenic record and bringing it up to date in terms of current work on psychiatric disability within Disability Studies. (It is also testimony to Patricia's generosity that she allowed me to work with her on revising and updating her material for the piece that appeared in the 2013 Disability in Roman Antiquity: Disparate Bodies a Capite ad Calcem.) [7]

Clark's conclusions about mental illness in the Graeco-Roman world are simple and obvious. She was the first to state the simple and obvious, and I have found no better summary in the intervening decades. Nestled within the 463-page work is the essence of the study, captured in Chapter Ten, "Summary and Conclusion," beginning on page 390. Clark retraces her steps, and distills her conclusions on pages 418-421.

With the completion of Balance of the Mind, Clark earned her PhD in 1993, and went on to hold a faculty position in Greek and Roman Studies at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. She continued to focus her research on the subaltern [4], and more recently, turned her attention to healing practices on Crete and their continuity with Byzantine and ancient texts. [5] Balance of the Mind went dormant.

Why has this fundamental work been all but impossible to find until now? Its invisibility is a casualty of its author's vision combined with the history of the very field it enriches. The interdisciplinary, minority-model field of Disability Studies was gaining momentum in the 1990s, though it would be
another decade before it made its way into the Academy. The tenets of disability studies were simple enough: disability is a human condition that changes over time, not a monolithic affliction that brings tragedy to individuals' lives. The meaning of disability changes from one culture to another as well as over time, and viewing disability as a medical condition alone is inappropriate: people with disabilities have cultures, histories, and identities, and reducing disability to its scientific terms alone is dehumanizing. The "medical model" came to be associated, broadly, with a perspective in which disabled people were broken in body, inferior in mind, and in the best of all worlds would be cured (thus not exist). Disability Studies scholars viewed the medical model and other reductionist views with great suspicion, rightfully, as they carried the potential to reduce human beings to "cases" of dysfunction.

I was astounded when *Balance of the Mind* was rejected, in the mid-2000s, for being "too scientific" for publication in a disability history series. The editors of the series were excellent scholars who had a wide vision of the field. I see now that the context of the decision to reject the manuscript must have been a rejection of the "medical model" that they perceived to be in operation. Disability Studies scholars, in general, walk a tightrope of conviction and activism: in undertaking the study of disability, one shapes the communal and even global understanding of disability, and one cannot pretend to have a neutral stance. Robert Garland, the author of the first substantial study of disability in the ancient Graeco-Roman world, understands this tension between scholarship and activism. [8] In his review of *Disparate Bodies*, he pulled an example from the essay that Patricia and I co-wrote, in which we position ourselves (on page 47) as "activists and advocates, as well as allies of people with disabilities." I was equally pleased that the essay that Chris Goodey and I co-wrote for the volume was deemed "especially polemical" by Garland. [9]

Disability Studies has taken firm root in the Academy: the field is, for example, recognized by the MLA (Modern Language Association). The Disability History Association is now officially integrated into the AHA (the American Historical Association). Perhaps because Disability is finally accepted as a legitimate category through which to investigate any number of issues, scholars in Disability Studies have been less hesitant to consider the "medical model." No longer a threat to the field's survival, the study of
medicine and medical taxonomies is merely a complementary line of investigation. The Disability Rights movement has reached a point at which it can be moved forward by including scientific frameworks and other related matrices formerly perceived as tools of oppression. The helping professions, principles of standardization, and scientific medical inquiry need no longer be eschewed en masse.

*Balance of the Mind*, like any definitive work, is not the last word; rather, it provides the structure for additional investigation. This task is easier now than it would have been a decade ago, because invisible and non-physical disabilities have become accepted, if not yet mainstream, areas of inquiry. One good example of this trend: William Harris served as the editor for a seven-part, 512-page collection of essays, *Mental Disorders in the Classical World* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). More investigation is needed into intellectual or learning disability (or however these phenomena might have appeared—if at all—over time). *Balance of the Mind* touches on intellectual disability, but Chris Goodey demonstrated that much more needed to be said, and his work paves the way for further scholarly conversation. [8] One of the many strong points of *Balance of the Mind* is its consideration of socio-economic station and gender on mental balance, and this, too, provides a sound basis for additional research. I would like to see, for example, Patrick McDonagh's observations about the nineteenth-century literary theme of the "idiot girl in the attic" (a parallel to the better-known "madwoman in the attic" trope) tested for relevance in Hellenistic and early Roman literature. [9]

In an ideal world, *Balance of the Mind* would have been widely available in 1993, but its author was too far ahead of her time. We thank Patricia Clark for her generosity in sharing this impeccable study and we are delighted to present it here, a little over two decades after its completion.

[2]. Sigmund Freud, Der Mann Moses und die monotheistische Religion, 1939 [and translated into English in 1939 by Katherine Jones].

[3]. Dr. Bliquez is Professor Emeritus of Classics and Art History at the University of Washington in Seattle.


