

Anatomy of a Suffering Soul: Between Healing and Disciplining

The Formation of Psychiatry in Europe from the 18th until Early 20th Century (app. 1750–1920)

Call for contributions for a workshop conference in Prague, organized in collaboration between Charles University in Prague and the Prague Branch of the German Historical Institute in Warsaw

that will take place from May 29th to 31st, 2024.

Interest in the history of psychiatry became especially notable since 1970s, a time when numerous influential social scientists and historians started to critically reflect upon the ‘antipsychiatry’ movement. Until about 1960s, what tended to prevail in canonical presentations of the history of psychiatry was an optimistic, almost hagiographic, view of the ‘birth of psychiatry’ as the beginning of humane treatment of the mentally ill, usually associated with activities of Philippe Pinel, Vincenzo Chiarugi, or William Tuke.

In late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, one can observe increasing criticism of some contemporary psychiatric practices, especially misuse of internment and psychoactive medication, as well as other forms of interference in human freedom and integrity. This critique was influenced not only by Michel Foucault’s provocative claims but also for instance by Kesey’s drama *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (on which the Czech emigrant Miloš Forman based his famous film). Works of critical psychiatrists, most notably Thomas Scheff and Thomas Szasz, questioned not only contemporary psychiatric methods but even the concept of ‘mental illness’ as such, noting its constructivist foundation and potential for misuse. All this led to the following broad claims:

‘Mental illness’ is a ‘catchall’ category denoting undesirable forms of behaviour that cannot be expressly criminalised and the purpose of a ‘psychiatric hospital’/ ‘lunatic asylum’ is confine undesirable social elements who cannot be legally imprisoned (the border between the two categories has always been very precarious).

In Eastern Europe, such criticism started to appear only in the 1990s in connection with publicization of brutal practices used in psychiatric wards in the former USSR and the politically and ideologically driven misuse of psychiatric institutions, which were used to detain and degrade persons deemed undesirable by the regime.

The shared motif of all these discourses was their effort to highlight the social and political dimension of this apparently ‘purely’ medical field.

The goal of the planned conference is a supra-regional comparison of the conditions and strategies associated with the development of psychiatry as a separate medical discipline and a specific corpus of therapeutic approaches in various European countries and regions. We want to trace this development from the enlightened beginnings of the ‘humanist discourse’

on mental disease in late 18th century until the spread of psychoanalysis but also psychiatric medication in early 20th century.

Although we welcome researchers from all over Europe, we would like to focus on the so far less thoroughly researched parts of Central and Eastern Europe.

Possible broad subjects:

- 1) From ‘madness’ to ‘mental illness’: What is a ‘mental illness’? How did selected authors (eras, regions, linguistic areas ...) define it? To what extent is it actually ‘mental’? Can it also be physical? What is the relation between disease of the mind and of the body?
- 2) ‘The order of madness’: How were such diseases classified, ordered in categories? Which disorders were viewed as ‘mental disease’ and which were subject to debates as to whether they are mental or physical (epilepsy, hysteria, etc.)?
- 3) The establishment of a psychiatric discourse: How was the specific discourse of ‘medicine of the soul/mind’ as separate from ‘medicine of the body’ established? How did it define its separateness, exclusivity, research subject – and relevant treatments? How did physicians who focused on this hitherto overlooked area of medicine communicate, how did they network?
- 4) Psychiatry as an academic field: The establishment of alienistics/psychiatry as a specific medical field and its institutional base at universities. Who, when, and in what ways achieved this institutionalisation? How was the field and its existence legitimised?
- 5) Treatment: What do we know about the ‘new’ methods used to treat mentally ill patients since late 18th century, methods hailed as ‘humane’ and ‘effective’? How were ‘work therapy’, ‘occupational therapy’, and ‘music therapy’ supposed to work in theory and how were they implemented in practice? What do we know about the more drastic (and actually purely physical) ‘new’ approaches to treatment such as the Cox chair, Autenrieth mask, ‘Haarschnurziehen’ (drawing a thread through the nape), etc.?
- 6) From ‘madhouse’ to a ‘psychiatric hospital’: How did selected institutions intended for mentally ill patients function? Who established and operated them? What was their purpose? What types of ‘mentally ill’ patients did they accept? What, if any, treatment did they offer and how did it work?
- 7) The state, legislation, and mental health: How did the state relate to mental health or madness (eventually later mental disease)? How did the state integrate a ‘medicalisation of madness’ into legislation? When does forensic psychology or psychiatry enter the scene? What was the role of madness/mental disease in police investigation/prosecution in case the mentally ill person was either the accused or a witness?
- 8) What other supportive forms of care and treatment do we encounter quite aside from the medical field? What was the role of churches/clergy? Did they in some way reflect new medical approaches eventually the very notion of a ‘mental disease’?

Please send the title and abstract of your contribution by December 31, 2023 to leidende.seelen.prag2024@gmail.com in English and simultaneously in German or Polish/Czech. To clarify the topic, you can also attach the title and a short note of the paper in your native language.

The conference languages for presentations and discussions are English and German

Dr. Eva Hajdinová, Faculty of Philosophy, Charles University, Prague

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