

TAKE-HOME NOTES:

The regulation of madness in England from the 17th century to the early 20th century: Part 1

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In the first module of this two-part series, we reviewed:

- different concepts of madness
 - punishment
 - demonical possession
 - imbalance of humours
 - brain dysfunction
 - the influence of mechanical philosophical ideas, particularly on medical men who developed a psychological model of madness
- disposal of the insane up to 1800, which was based on the Poor Laws of 1601
 - the poor insane went to workhouses
 - the criminally insane went to prison
 - the vagrant insane were returned to their parish, usually the parish workhouse, up until the 1744 Vagrancy Act
- the legal and medical concepts of madness, which were at variance until well into the 19th century
- the introduction of licensing and inspectors of private madhouses through the 1774 Act.

Reflection

(1.4) The 'insane' have been feared and marginalised throughout history. Why do you think this is? Do any of your reasons still have currency in the 21st century?

(1.7) Can you think of any mental health conditions which could arise from a mother's physical health during foetal development?

(1.10) Can you think of a modern day situation where a person might believe in the 'magic' origins of mental illness?

(1.18) To what extent do you agree with Hartley's views that the association of reward or pleasure with a specific behaviour leads to encouragement of that behaviour and conversely that pain or distress discourages the antecedent behaviour?

(1.24) Does Bakewell's emphasis on the importance of the environment as a part of therapy have any relevance to contemporary practice?

(1.29) Consider the parallels between the Enlightenment and the 21st century in terms of models of insanity and treatment approaches. What discourses occur about effective interventions and who should carry them out?

(2.6) How would we quickly assess whether someone is cognitively impaired today?

(2.9) The insanity plea would have to show that the defendant was totally deprived of understanding and memory, with no knowledge of what he was doing. What kinds of mental illness would qualify for this definition today? What problems might arise with using this definition in a modern court of law?

(2.11) What do you think would have been the outcome of Ferrer's trial today?

(2.15) What do you think the reasons were for an increase in acquittal rate for personal offences such as assault and murder but not property offences such as stealing?

(2.17) What do you think would have happened to Hadfield now?

(2.21) Can you identify four deficiencies of the 1744 Vagrancy Act?

(2.22) Many homeless people suffer from mental illness. How well do we meet their needs today compared with the 18th century?

(2.25) What parallels are there between the workhouse test and current government policy to get the mentally ill back to work?

(2.27) In what circumstances and how can a relative discharge a patient from confinement in a mental hospital today?

(2.33) What do you think made confinement to a madhouse a sensitive subject? Why might the 1763 Select Committee have been reluctant to investigate other madhouses?

References

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Further reading

<p>Bynum WF, Porter R & Shepherd M (1985) <i>The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry</i> Vol I & II. Routledge (28 Nov 1985). [Amazon]</p>	<p>A fascinating collection of essays on subjects ranging from shell shock to moral treatment to Descartes and dualisms.</p>
<p>Jones K (1972) <i>A History of the Mental Health Services</i>. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London. [Amazon]</p>	<p>This gives considerable details about relevant mental health legislation. It is readable and very interesting.</p>
<p>Porter R (2002) <i>Madness, A Brief History</i>. Oxford University Press, Oxford (13 Mar 2003). [Amazon]</p>	<p>All of Roy Porter's books are well worth dipping into. The easiest is <i>Madness, A Brief History</i>.</p>
<p>SHIFT [website]</p>	<p>An organisation working to reduce and remove the stigma and discrimination directed towards people with experience of mental health problems.</p>
<p>Smith R (1981) <i>Trial by Medicine: Insanity and Responsibility in Victorian Trials</i>. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh (1st Jan 1984). [Amazon]</p>	<p>A superb read about the great anatomist Thomas Willis, his contribution to our understanding of the human brain and his remarkable contemporaries such as Harvey, Hooke and Boyle, all put in the context of the political and social changes of the time.</p>
<p>Zimmer C (2004) <i>Soul Made Flesh</i>. Arrow Books Ltd; New edition edition (3 Mar 2005). [Amazon]</p>	<p>This module has not described the important trials of the 19th century which struggled with the connections between crime, insanity and responsibility and reveal the differences of views between the judiciary and alienists. If interested, I would recommend: <i>Trials by Medicine</i> by Roger Smith. This should appeal to forensic psychiatrists.</p>