

20 - Anti psychiatry movement

Anti-psychiatry movement

© SPMM Course 12. Philosophy in psychiatry Philosophy concerns the framework of ideas within which we consider facts presented to us rather than the facts themselves. William James asserted “philosophy is an unusually stubborn effort to think clearly”. Several streams of philosophical enquiries are often invoked to provide clarity and enquire the concept psychiatric disorders. These include the issues of

1. Illness status of mental symptoms: Consider hypomania and its relationship with a cheerful disposition. Various mental symptoms have questionable illness status that blurs the clinical distinction of disease from normality.
 2. Influence of morality, legality and mental health: In general psychiatric disorders are more value-laden than physical disorders e.g. psychopathy and its relationship with delinquency, alcoholism and its relationship with drunken behaviour, etc. Societal norms regarding expected functions and roles profoundly influence the identification and treatment of psychiatric disorders.
 3. The issue of ownership or agency: This is especially relevant for symptoms of psychosis.
 4. Variation of symptoms: The signs and symptoms of mental disorders are diverse with the variation spanning across different dimensions e.g. organic-functional, mind-body, state-trait, etc.
 5. Similarities and differences with physical disorders: This has been a crucial issue in the debate between pro-psychiatry and anti-psychiatry groups. Anti-psychiatry movement David Cooper coined the term ‘anti-psychiatry’ in 1960s. The term refers to a confederation of psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, social and welfare workers, lay people and patients who oppose the traditional mental health practice and treatment. The central contentions of the antipsychiatry movement are about the diagnostic labels used, lack of agreement and measurability among practitioners with regard to diagnosis, stigma carried by labeling and the problems with current treatments which are seen as more damaging than being useful. Invoking various streams of philosophical enquiries (see the list above) to study the concept of psychiatric disorders, we can identify five major themes of arguments in the pro- vs. antipsychiatry debate. □ The psychological model: Mental disorders are learned abnormalities of behaviour; hence the disease model is inappropriate (Eysenck, 1968).
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Revision #1

Created 2026-01-04 20:02:12 UTC by Omar Ayman

Updated 2026-01-04 20:02:13 UTC by Omar Ayman