

CLASSIFICATION OF PSYCHOSIS

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Introduction

The term neurosis was introduced in 1769 by WILLIAM CULLEN in his *SYNOPSIS NOSOLOGIAE METHODICAE*¹. Originally, neurosis was an all-embracing concept, corresponding to the belief that “all the diseases with their seat in the nervous system are associated with, and/or result in, mental derangement” (Littre 1877).

To shift emphasis, in the assumed substrate (etiology) of mental derangement, from the nerves, as postulated by Cullen (1769), to the soul (psyche) – perceived as the “corporealized spirit” (Feuchtersleben 1845) -- the term “Psychiaterie” was introduced by JOHANN CHRISTIAN REIL at the University of Halle in Germany, in 1808. He used the term in the title of his paper in his journal with Johan Christian Hoffbauer that reads: *Ueber den Begriff der Medicin und ihre Verzweigungen besonders in Beziehung auf die Berichtigung der Topik der Psychiaterie.*²

The term was adopted by JOHANN CHRISTIAN HEINROTH (1818) and changed to Psychiatrie (psychiatry) in his *LEHRBUCH DER STOERUNGEN DES SEELENLEBENS*.

¹ Cullen believed that “life is a function of nervous energy, muscle a continuation of nerve, disease, mainly nervous disorder, and fever an effect of diminished cerebral power from local (external) lesions.” Accordingly, he classified diseases into four categories, i.e., fevers, neuroses, cachexias and local disorders. The broadest among these categories was the category of neuroses which included a wide variety of disorders, including gout (Garrison 1913, 1960).

² Separation of body and mind, i.e., Cartesian dualism, was introduced into psychiatry through Reil's work approximately 150 years after the publication of RENE DESCARTES' monumental treatise, *MEDITATIONES DE PRIMA PHILOSOPHIA IN QUIBUS DEI EXISTENTIA, ET ANIMAE HUMANAЕ A CORPORE DISTINCTIO, DEMONSTRANTUR* (MEDITATIONS ON FIRST PHILOSOPHY, IN WHICH THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AND THE DISTINCTIVENESS BETWEEN MIND AND BODY ARE DEMONSTRATED) in 1642. It was in *MEDITATIONS* that Descartes first postulated the absolute duality of body and mind, arguing that the two are irreducibly heterogenous and that one does not interact with the other.

In subsequent years, the term psychiatry, and with the word the conceptualization of mental disorders as disorders of the mind, profoundly affected the subject matter of the field. This is, to the extent that to-date, psychiatric opinion has remained divided as to whether psychiatry deals with Cullen's (1769) disorders of the nerves (i.e., body) or Reil's (1803) disorders of the soul (i.e., mind).³

By the 1840s, the term neurosis, referring to “all the diseases of the body which were assumed to have their seat in the nervous system,”⁴ and the term psychiatry, or psychiatric disorders, referring to all the disorders of the mind which were assumed to be caused by the “corporealized spirit,” were used interchangeably. Recognition, however, that not “every defect of the nervous system is necessarily accompanied by a mental disorder,” although “every mental disorder implies the existence of a disease of the nervous system” (Pichot 1983), led to the introduction of the concept and term psychosis by ERNST FEUCHTERSLEBEN. In his LEHRBUCH DER AERZTLICHEN SEELENKUNDE, published in 1845, Feuchtersleben declared that “every psychosis is at the same time a neurosis, because, without the nerves as intermediaries, no psychological change can be exhibited, but not every neurosis (i.e., disorder of the nerves) is a psychosis” -- using the term psychosis for the first time in the psychiatric literature.

For some time, the term psychosis and the term psychiatric disorder were used interchangeably⁵. The new concept opened the road, however, for the separation of the disorders of the nerves, which affect the mind, from the disorders of the nerves, which have no such an effect. In the ultimate analysis, it was the introduction of the concept of psychosis which, by separating neurologic disorders from psychiatric disorders, provided

³ ARTHUR KOESTLER (1967), in his book THE GHOST IN THE MACHINE, referred to the introduction of Cartesian dualism as the "Cartesian catastrophe." It was Cartesian dualism which opened the path for the belief that psychiatry deals with the disorders of a spiritual mind which is trapped in a physical body.

⁴ By the end of the 20th century, the concept of *neurosis* had lost its original meaning. In the Glossary of Technical Terms of the DSM-III, published in 1980, it was defined as a “mental disorder in which the predominant disturbance is a group of symptoms that is disturbing, unacceptable and ego-dystonic. In patients with neuroses reality testing is grossly intact; and behavior does not actively violate group social norms.” In the same glossary a neurotic process was defined as a specific etiologic process in which “unconscious conflicts cause unconscious perception of anticipated danger, leading to the use of defense mechanisms that result in symptoms and/or personality disturbance.” The term neurosis is not included any longer in the Glossary of Technical Terms of the DSM-III-R, published in 1987. It is interesting that the last definition of the concept (which appeared in the DSM-III) was more in keeping with Reil’s conceptual framework than with Cullen’s.

⁵ During the mid-19th century the three terms, psychosis, psychiatric disorder and insanity (or *insania*, the term used by Celsus in the third book of his, *De Re Medicina*), were used interchangeably.

the necessary frame of reference for the development of the discipline referred to as psychiatry today.