



Research Article

Historical Perspective of Etymology and Understanding of Psychosocial Wellbeing: From Antiquity to Modern Times

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A B S T R A C T

How old is the idea of psychiatry and how long has psychotherapy been practiced? Most likely the Greeks and Romans had inkling, even if these two words are fairly modern and given that Plato and Galen had a few things to say as well, it should not surprise us that doctors have known for thousands of years that mind and body are connected. The great scholars of ancient Greeks and Romans incorporated psychology with medicine and philosophy. In the Asklepeian custom the therapeutic sanctuaries not only addressed the body but the soul too.

The Psychiatric infirmities as Melancholia and Hysteria were identified in Egypt and Sumaria as early as 2600 BC. Unani system of the psychiatric nosology is also a component of medical categorization under the heading of "Amraz-e-Nafsani" (psychiatric disorders) where all the diseases are classified as syndromes rather than an individual disease entity on the basis of concepts and philosophies of mainly of Hippocrates followed by Plato and later Arabs.

In the 17th century, French mathematician and philosopher René Descartes gave the concept of Dualism, i.e., that the body and mind are separate entities which were disagreed by English philosophers Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. It was German scientist Wilhelm Wundt who founded the first laboratory dedicated exclusively to psychological research which led Psychology to become a self-conscious field of experimental study in 1879.

In the late 19th century, William James founded Functionalism, which offered substitute to structuralism.

Keywords: Psychiatry, Soul Healing, Philosophy, Melancholia, Syndromes



Introduction

Psychology plays a vital role in human personality. It encompasses the concept of spirit, self, heart and Wisdom.¹ Ancient man saw mental illness as possession by supernatural forces. Trepanning was practiced on Ancient human skulls; a process of making large holes in Human Skull to let evil spirits out. It indicates that human being had returned to the idea of psychological illness being caused by “evil spirits” or “Jinn”. The belief in the existence of a demon or evil spirit is shared by followers of many religions in the world.²

The Psychiatric infirmities were extensively acknowledged in the ancient world. Both melancholia and hysteria were acknowledged in Egypt and Sumerians early as 2600 BC. In the Indian System of Medicine (Ayurveda), the psychiatric nosology was confined within the classification of this system written about 1400 BC. In the Greco-Arab System of Medicine-Unani system of medicine, the psychiatric nosology is also a component of medical categorization under the heading of “*Amraze Nafsani*” (psychiatric disorders) where all the diseases are categorized as syndromes rather than an individual disease entity on the basis of concepts and philosophies mainly of Hippocrates followed by Plato and later Arabs. *Buqraat* (460-370 BC) is the person who pioneered the concept of psychiatric illness into medicine. It is obvious through his writings and explanation about acute mental disturbances with fever (delirium), acute mental disturbances without fever (probably analogous to functional psychoses but called mania), chronic disturbance without fever (called melancholia), hysteria (broader than its later use), and Scythian disease (similar to transvestism).³

Antiquity Period

The nerves were firstly distinguished from the circulatory system, and even sensory nerves from motor nerves by Herophilus and Erasistratus (300 BC); since their writings have been lost, and so their discoveries are reported in the works of others (e.g., Galen). *Herophilus: the Art of Medicine in Early Alexandria* (1989) by Heinrich von Staden is a commanding, and contains a lot of the testimonial about its subject in English translation. There is no equivalent work on Erasistratus. Galen’s *On the Natural Faculties* is the best-known of his works, but it is mainly about physiological, rather than psychological topics. Most of his annotations on the structure and function of the brain are to be found in other, s works. Book VII, Section 3 contains the squabble that the *psyche* is housed in the “body of the brain,” not in the ventricles, and describe some experiments to support this strife. It also illustrates the putative process by which “vital pneuma” in the blood is refined into “psychic pneuma” by being filtered through the “retiform network” of blood vessels in the head. *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (Book VIII, Sec. 10-14) contains an extensive discussion

of the anatomy of the cerebral ventricles. Section 14 gives a particularly good account of the pineal gland; including a repudiation of a position quite close to the one Descartes would adopt 1500 years later. It is interesting to note that, contrary to popular belief, he never locates the mental faculties (typically imagination, cognition, and memory) in the ventricles themselves, although his work clearly had a profound effect on those later philosophers who did.⁴

In Freud’s early anticipation, one of the most fascinating critical approaches and therapies, the prehistoric Greeks used to understand individual human anxiety was dream explanation. The Greek philosopher Artemidorus wrote *Oneirocritica*, the first Greek book of dream understanding after he traveled and collected people’s recollection of dreams and whether what could be considered as their outcomes harmonized their dreams by some figure of sense.

Even though other civilizations contributed to the forefront of the development of psychology, a lot of their works were gone astray owing to lack of written transmission. Plato developed insights into the human brains. He developed the Theory of Forms in which it was stated that the psyche defined the mind and the soul. With the Theory of Forms, Plato then developed a framework of human behavior as he attempted to learn and study how humans reason and how impulses are developed.

Plato’s *Republic* Book 4 theorized what Plato developed as three interrelated parts of the tripartite soul (*psyche*):

- First, *logistikon* was the intelligence or part of the mind as the seat of reasoning and logic.
- Second, *epithumetikon* was the appetitive part of the soul focusing on base desires.
- Third, *thumoiedes* was the emotional part of the soul or mind that dictated feelings.

According to Plato, the strong brain maintained a sense of balance among the three parts. For example, for Plato, the appetitive part of the soul looking for base desires for foodstuff and drink should nevertheless be governed by the other two parts, intellect or *logistikon* and emotions or *thumoiedes*.⁵

Plato’s focus on examining human behavior to gauge what internally “drives” it also parallels *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* (CBT), currently used as one goal-oriented treatment model in mental health aimed at changing how thought impacts behavior in dysfunctional emotions and maladaptive behaviors such as anxiety or mood disorder, among others.

Galen (129-210 CE) was another Greek doctor, in fact, the imperial physician to the Emperors Marcus Aurelius, Commodus and Septimius Severus. Among over 600 medical treatises, Galen wrote much on psychological maladies (along with dream diagnosis) and also thought of himself

as a philosopher-he wrote “the best physician is also a philosopher”-because of his experience as one who dealt with mental as well as physical malady, strongly believing in some psychosomatic connections from empirical experience. Once he described an anxious patient who tossed all night, dreaming and worrying whether Atlas the Titan could hold up the sky (And the world in it) if this Titan got sick. Galen called this a case of *dysthymia*-a severe case of depression as a dysfunctional expression of maladjusted desire and will-and he believed that mental and emotional stress could cause physical sickness, especially as he followed Plato in his own “anatomy of the soul.”⁵

Medieval Period

In Unani system of medicine, the psychiatric nosology is also a part of medical classification under the title of “*Amraze Nafsani*” (psychiatric disorders) where all the diseases are classified as syndromes rather than an individual disease entity on the basis of theories and philosophies of primarily of Hippocrates followed by Plato and later Arabs. The other celebrated Arabic Physician, *Rabban Tabri* in his book “*Firdausul Hikmah*” classified psychological disorders into 13 types such as *sa’ra*, *waswas*, *hizyan*, *fasad-e-khayal*, *fasad-e-aq’l*, *nisyan*, *bedaari*, *kasrat-e-naum*, *duwar* etc. *Razi* has also described the same number of psychological illnesses in his book “*Kitabul Fakhir*”.

In Arabic and Unani texts the term “*Izterab*” is used for anxiety and the word “*Nafsani*” is further added to *Izterab* to denote its psychosomatic condition. Accurately *Izterab-e-nafsani* stands for worry, fear and excessive thinking. In the sense of hindrance in routine work it is also used. Anxiety disorders as such, are not mentioned in Unani classical text but their symptoms either separate or with others in dissimilar diseases are described under a variety of headings like “*malenholia*”, “*waswas*” “*mania*”, “*sahar*”, “*tawahhush*”, “*hizyan*”, “*ishque*” and “*khafqan*” etc.⁶

Modern Period

- In 1774 AD, Franz Mesmer detailed his cure for some mental illness, originally called mesmerism and now known as hypnosis.
- Ernst Heinrich Weber In 1834 published his insight theory of ‘just conspicuous diversity,’ now known as Weber’s Law.
- In 1859, Charles Darwin published the *On the Origin of Species*, detailing his view of evolution and expanding on the theory of ‘survival of the fittest.’ Sir Francis Galton (1869), influenced by Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, published *Hereditary Genius*, and argued that intellectual abilities are biological in nature.
- In 1878, G. Stanley Hall received the first American Ph.D. in psychology. He later founded the American Psychological Association. The first laboratory of

psychology in America is established at Johns Hopkins University in 1883.

- In 1886, Sigmund Freud marked the beginning of personality theory by performing therapy in Vienna. Later on in 1900, Sigmund Freud published *Interpretation of Dreams* marking the beginning of psychoanalytic thought.
- In 1925, Wolfgang Kohler published *The Mentality of Apes* which became a major component of Gestalt psychology.
- 1927, Anna Freud, daughter of Sigmund Freud, published her first book expanding her father’s ideas in the treatment of children.
- 1929, Wolfgang Kohler criticized behaviorism in his publication on Gestalt psychology, 1932; Jean Piaget published *The Moral Judgment of Children* beginning his reputation as the chief philosopher in cognitive progress.
- 1932, Walter B. Cannon coined the term homeostasis and began research on the fight or flight phenomenon.
- Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) 1935 was published by Henry Murray.
- Ega Moniz 1936 published his work on frontal lobotomies as a treatment for mental illness. In 1938, electroshock therapy was first used on a human patient.
- Wechsler-Bellevue Intelligence Test (1939) was published which ultimately became the most extensively used intellectual assessment. The Canadian Psychological Association was founded in 1939.
- In 1950, Erik Erikson published *Childhood and Society*, where he expands Freud’s Theory to include social aspects of personality development across the lifespan.
- In 1967, Aaron Beck published a psychological model of depression suggesting that thoughts play a significant role in the development and maintenance of depression.
- 1968, DSM II was published by the American Psychiatric Association and in 1980 DSM III published by the American Psychiatric Association; while in 1983, Howard Gardner (professor at Harvard University) introduced his theory of multiple intelligence, arguing that intelligence is something to be used to improve lives not to measure and quantify human beings.
- In 1988, American Psychological Society was established. In 1999, Psychologists in Guam gained prescription privileges for psychotropic medication. In 2002, New Mexico became the first state to pass legislation allowing licensed psychologists to prescribe psychotropic medication.
- In 2002, the push for mental health parity received the attention of the White House as President George W. Bush promoted legislation that would guarantee comprehensive mental health coverage.⁷

Conclusion

Knowledge of human behavior or mental disorders can be traced back to Greek and Roman sources. Psychological illness was often considered directly due to connection of gods in early Greece as it is obvious from mythology and the Homeric and other epics. Hippocrates was the person who firstly postulated the theory of disease is due to the inequality of humors and hence emphasized on natural knowledge and hence untied medicine from the dominion of false notion and magic, and gave it the rank of science, and classified psychological disorders into three categories as *mania, melancholia and hysteria*.

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