
History of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology: With an Epilogue on Psychiatry and the Mind-Body Relation

edited by Edwin R. Wallace, IV, MA, MD, and John Gach. Springer, New York, NY, 2008, 862 pages, \$219.00.

Wallace and Gach display extraordinary knowledge of and passion for history, and the history of psychiatry in particular, in their *History of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology*. In the course of about 900 pages, they and an all-star cast of contributors take readers on an extremely informative, thought-provoking journey that is divided into 4 major sections.

The volume's first section—the Prolegomenon—explores not only the history of psychiatry, but also the discipline of history as a whole. The first lengthy essay in this section tackles, among other things, historicism, positivism, the nature of historical causation, the question of whether or not it is possible to reach truth through historical investigation, and the tension between internalist and externalist approaches to the history of science. Each of these topics alone could fill an entire library, but Wallace does an admirable job boiling down some very complex concepts into a single essay. For readers with the perseverance to make it through this piece, the section provides a solid methodological grounding that serves as a good theoretical backdrop to the historical essays that make up the majority of the book. Next, Wallace provides an exhaustive annotated bibliography that aims to contextualize the history of psychiatry, psychology, and psychoanalysis. The Prolegomenon, while informative, is at some times dense and at others tangential, but nonetheless worth a look for readers who are interested in learning more about history as a discipline.

The meat of the book lies in the next 2 sections. The volume's second section—“Periods”—provides a chronological look at psychiatry through the centuries, from antiquity to the age of antidepressants. The first 4 chapters in this section cover the period of so-called “proto-psychiatry,” spanning from Ancient Greece to the late 18th century. The following set of 7 chapters describes the growth of psychiatry as a medical specialty. In the next section,

“Concepts and Topics,” contributors expand on the histories of certain mental illnesses as well as the history of psychiatry as a discipline. The essays in these 2 sections are notable not only because they are outstanding pieces of historical writing, but also because many of them shed interesting light on many assumptions that underlie the practice of mental health care today. German Berrios’ chapter underscores that psychiatry has both biologic and socio-cultural elements, and, as he eloquently explains, it is a “complex medico-social activity whose historical success depends upon the progressive goodness of fit between man-made descriptions and mental symptoms resulting from neurobiological lesions” (p 368). David Healy’s provocative essay suggests that forces other than the advancement of scientific knowledge affect both what interventions psychiatrists use and the understanding of what conditions need to be treated. Both of these essays, while eschewing the ideological excesses of antipsychiatric writing, frame mental illness and mental health treatment within the broader social, economic, cultural, and intellectual worlds that surround them. Gerald Grob’s essay on the shift toward community-based treatment and Nancy Tomes’ piece describing the development of the “team” approach in mental health care are also fascinating, both exemplary pieces of research that illustrate how a good understanding of the past can illuminate what is happening in the present.

In the book’s final section on the “mind-body relation,” Gach, Wallace, and Herbert Weiner meditate on the subject over the course of 5 essays. Overall, Wallace and Gach’s volume is an impressive piece of work. While certainly not an easy read, it is a tremendous resource and is highly recommended for anyone interested in gaining a thorough understanding of the history of psychiatry from some of the leading lights of the field.

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