

FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENCE

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Psychiatry in Spain



Spain has been called "the cradle of psychiatry" because the world's first psychiatric hospital, the Hospital de los Inocentes, was founded in Valencia in 1404. This foundation initiated a trend, as it was soon followed by other psychiatric hospitals in Zaragoza (1425), Sevilla and Valladolid (both in 1436), Mallorca (1457), and Toledo (1480). Most of these hospitals were in operation for centuries, forming an early nucleus of humanitarian psychiatric care. The French psychiatric reformer Philippe Pinel visited the mental hospital in Zaragoza and reportedly incorporated some of his observations into his revolutionary program in France.

However, we cannot properly speak of Spanish psychiatry as such until the second half of the 19th century, when several physicians took the care of mental disorders as their main practice and started to develop standards for research and teaching. By the beginning of the 20th century, psychiatry was highly developed in Spain, with its biological center in the brain studies of Nobel Laureate Santiago Ramon y Cajal. Psychological psychiatry was not lagging behind, as illustrated by the local fame Ramon y Cajal achieved as a gifted psychotherapist in his early medical years. As the story goes, before he was a world-renowned professor, he used to complement his meager university salary with a promising private practice in which he made extensive use of hypnosis – a technique that he had casually learned during his military service as an army physician in Cuba.

As a mark of the medical professions interest in and receptivity to psychiatry, Freud's first paper on hysteria was translated and published by a Spanish journal the same year it was originally published in German. Many other translations followed, and psychoanalysis was soon well-known and discussed – not only by psychiatrists but also by intellectuals at large – as

were other forms of psychological intervention.

In the late 1920s, Berlin-trained Angel Garma founded Spain's first psychoanalytic institute, and José Ortega y Gasset, Spain's most celebrated philosopher, devoted a long study to psychoanalysis. This was not unusual, as psychological matters were the dominant theme of his philosophy. Ortega y Gasset observed that, given the Spanish interest and sensibility to psychological matters, it is not surprising that the central character in the first great novel of the western world, *Don Quijote de la Mancha*, was a mental patient.

The rapid and promising pace of Spanish psychiatry was abruptly interrupted by the Spanish Civil War, despite some interesting developments forced by the war itself. The first university chair of psychiatry was created in 1934 in Barcelona and bestowed on Emilio Mira y Lopez, a gifted man most noted for his work on psychometrics. As the war started two years later, Mira was put in charge of the psychiatric services in the republican army. Mira put into operation a well thought plan for facilitating psychological ventilation, as well as an excellent program for early detection and treatment of psychiatric disorders. Unfortunately, his effort was lacerated by the psychiatrists of General Francisco Franco's victorious army, who claimed that they did not have psychiatric casualties on their own side during the war. As an explanation, they advanced the theory that being a republican was, in itself, a psychiatric disorder. Heavily influenced by fascist theorizations, Spanish psychiatry came to a halt. Most of its prominent practitioners were forced into exile, and Spain's loss became the world's gain.

Angel Garma went to Argentina, where he soon became the president of the Argentine Psychoanalytic Association; Miguel Prados went to Canada, where he co-founded the McGill University psychiatry department; François Tosquelles went to France,

where he was soon the director of a progressive psychiatric hospital; and Juan de Ajuriaguerra became university professor and chair of the University of Geneva's Psychiatric Services.

Meanwhile, Spanish psychiatry was dominated by Vallejo Najera, army commander and first chair of psychiatry at Madrid University, and Juan Jose Lopez-Ibor, for whom a chair of medical psychology was created. After the death of Vallejo Najera, Lopez-Ibor assumed both chairs and kept Spanish academic psychiatry under close rein. In the early 1970s, the psychiatric establishment was upset by new, young professionals trained in North America or Switzerland, interested in community psychiatry and psychoanalysis, who repulsed both authoritarian institutions and the outdated Spanish version of German psychiatry. The split was formalized by the creation of a new psychiatric association, the Sociedad Española de Psiquiatría, with the traditional Asociación Española de Neuropsiquiatría now in the hands of the new doctors. Under their influence, soon after Franco's death, the Psychiatric Reformation Act was promulgated, creating mental health care centers and general hospital departments of psychiatry, thus initiating the development of an integrated network of psychiatric care. Organized postgraduate training in psychiatry, as in other medical specialties, was implemented in the mid-1970s, with residency programs regulated on a national basis. Now fully absorbed by the National Health Program, modern Spanish psychiatry is becoming more effective and community-centered. Nevertheless, three issues of the recent past wait to be resolved: unfair cronyism in university appointments, dependency on the pharmaceutical industry and the intellectual laziness of otherwise gifted official leaders.

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