

THE 'SCIENCE OF MORALS' OF A PSYCHIATRIC EMERGENCY SERVICE

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1) This article analyzes a prototypical case that elucidates the complex social moral space inhabited by a psychiatric emergency service. The case confronts the micro and macro-social tensions that move beyond diagnostic paradigms.

2) Our prototypical case allows us to examine the tensions that intersect moral norms, ethico-legal actions, and the moral pedagogy of the psychiatric rituals, all of which culminate in treatment decisions and patient disposition.

3) We utilize the concept of a 'moral economy' by Didier Fassin to study the "moral making" embedded in the space of our psychiatric emergency. In doing so, we deny a prescriptive use of 'morals' and posit an inductive approach in moral anthropology to investigate the production and circulation shaping the hierarchies and compromises made by psychiatrists and psychiatry residents in this social space. We start at a reflexive point to ask what shaped the decisions that were made.

4) Our case presents a scenario of a patient escalating a risk narrative, enacting paradoxical strategies of deceit and hope. We analyze this enactment, the selling of a narrative and embodied capital for the political economic forces that motivate risk stratification and diagnosis. We reveal the tensions of risk assessment, diagnosis, and ultimately, disposition that cultivates a 'moral economy'. We also demonstrate how our local space broadly adheres to the dialectic of repression and compassion commonly reflected in contemporary social problems such as addiction, poverty, and immigration.

5) In demonstrating the political and 'moral economy' of a psychiatric encounter in our emergency setting, we pose the question of an analytical approach of morals to the cases confronted by contemporary psychiatry. We discuss the heuristic process of a 'science of morals', much akin to moral anthropology, and how it may provide a frame to the circumstances of everyday moral distress.

Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation, participants will be able to:

1. Analyze and reflect on the importance of a 'science of morals' for psychiatry
2. Integrate and theorize methods to cultivate a moral pedagogy in their respective environment

References

1. Fassin, Didier, ed. 2012 *Moral Anthropology: A Critical Reader*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
2. Brodwin, Paul. 2014 The Ethics of Ambivalence and the Practice of Constraint in US Psychiatry. *Culture, Medicine, Psychiatry* 38: 527-549.