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Main content

Article Preview :

The Creation of Psychopharmacology by David Healy

Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2002. 479 pp. \$39.95, 27.50 [pounds sterling], 39.95 [euro], ISBN 0-674-00619-4

In the last century, psychopharmacology produced the first effective drug treatments for schizophrenia and other mental illnesses and contributed greatly to the development of hypotheses about the biological basis of mood and anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, and other psychoses. David Healy, a distinguished but controversial psychiatrist and historian (1) at the University of Wales College of Medicine, describes these developments, especially those concerning antipsychotic drugs, in *The Creation of Psychopharmacology*. Furthermore, he prophesies that current research linking psychopharmacology to pharmacogenomics and brain imaging will lead to control of the major mental illnesses, so that psychopharmacology and psychiatry can and will turn their attention to the treatment of personality disorders and self-improvement in normal individuals. What many will find most provocative about this book and its predecessor, *The Antidepressant Era* (2), is the recommendation that powerful psychotropic drugs, including neuroleptics such as chlorpromazine, could or should be available without prescription.

The Creation of Psychopharmacology begins with an accurate and lively history of the treatment of psychosis and other deviant behaviors in the 18th and 19th centuries. After discussing the 1952 discovery of chlorpromazine (the first antipsychotic drug, which arguably launched the modern era of psychopharmacology), Healy offers a less detailed account of the remarkable advances which followed from its discovery and initial clinical trials. The author pays special homage to the 18th-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who was an exhibitionist in his youth and died in the throes of a psychotic disorder with paranoid features. He argued for the perfectibility of mankind, for trust in instinctual knowledge of what is in one's best interest, and against the corrupt and corrupting social order. His blend of Enlightenment and Romantic ideas exerts a powerful influence on Healy's conceptions and conclusions about psychopharmacology and on his prescription for the future. In the author's interpretation, "the antipsychotic story shows very clearly that the clash of a rationalist psychiatry with a romantic antipsychiatry [by which Healy refers to the writings of R. D. Laing, Thomas Szasz, and Michel Foucault, among others] did not lead to the triumph of...

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