INPP 2026 Abstract

Diagnostic Genealogy and the Kraepelinian Shadow: Epistemological Origins of the Autism-Catatonia Interface

Psychiatric diagnoses are not discovered; they are constructed through historically situated assumptions that persist, often undetected, in clinical practice. This presentation undertakes a philosophical genealogy of two intersecting frameworks: autism spectrum disorder criteria and the Bush-Francis Catatonia Rating Scale (BFCRS). We argue that their divergent epistemological lineages - the BFCRS rooted in neo-Kraepelinian behavioural empiricism, & autism criteria shaped by successive revisions to theories of mind and neurodevelopment - have produced a diagnostic boundary that reflects categorical history more than clinical reality. Drawing on Hacking's dynamic nominalism and Zachar's psychopathological realism, we challenge the residual influence of the Kraepelinian psychotic/non-psychotic dichotomy on the autism-catatonia interface. Beyond established practice, this analysis holds particular stakes for psychiatric trainees: engaging with diagnostic history cultivates the interpretive agility that resisting “checkbox medicine” requires, and reveals that categories once treated as self-evident are sites of ongoing philosophical contestation.