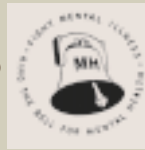


When leprosy disappeared after the Crusades (1100-1300), the remaining colonies — the leprosaria — were converted to other uses, resembling our present-day institutions. These establishments were soon filled with all types of persons considered deviant: orphans, vagabonds, madmen, incurables, prostitutes, widows, and criminals. These "cities of the damned" numbered in the thousands, and had the power of "authority, direction, administration, commerce, police, jurisdiction, correction and punishments," and had at their disposal "stakes, irons, prisons and dungeons." By 1657, France had one such facility, the Bicetre, that housed 1,615 men; it's sister institution, the Salpêtrière, housed 1,416 women and children. The United States has operated only slightly less gruesome institutions as recently as the 1970s.



SOCIETAL VALUES:
Fear and obsession with God;
belief that people with disabilities
get what they deserve.

Malnutrition, a principal cause of disabilities, is still responsible for one in five disabilities worldwide.



Having leprosy meant living a life outside of society. When traveling through a town, people with leprosy were required to ring a bell, alerting others to their presence.



Living conditions for persons with disabilities were brutal during this period. Intolerance, sickness, and disregard for persons with disabilities meant death or at most a very low quality of life. Diseases such as cholera, typhus, and the plague bacillus, along with malnutrition, accounted for a large percentage of postnatal disabilities.



The Roman Catholic Church provided refuge to those in need, establishing orphanages, hospitals, and homes for the blind and the aged. Conditions at such institutions were custodial at best, and most children did not survive. Persons with developmental disabilities (together with those with mental illness) who could not stay with their families were often placed in monasteries, charitable facilities, hospitals, prisons, almshouses, pest houses, workhouses, or leper colonies. While there are a few good examples of residential care in the middle ages, most persons with developmental disabilities received basic care and shelter or no services at all.

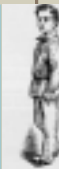


One event that had a profound effect on how people perceived disability was the Protestant Reformation, which began in 1517 as an attempt to reform the Roman Catholic Church and ended with the establishment of independent Protestant churches. During this period, we see persons with developmental disabilities treated as subhuman organisms.

Martin Luther (1483-1546) denounced children and adults with mental retardation as "filled with Satan." Luther advised that children with severe mental retardation should be drowned because they are "... a mass of flesh with no soul. For it is the Devil's power that he corrupts people who have reason and souls when he possesses them. The Devil sits in such changelings where their souls should have been."

RELIGION HAS PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN PROVIDING BASIC SERVICES AND SHAPING ATTITUDES TOWARD PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

In the United States, large, dehumanizing institutions for people with developmental disabilities reached their peak in the 1970s. This picture would not be an uncommon sight on the back wards of any large institution at this time in recent history, and this treatment would not have been acceptable without viewing those with severe disabilities as subhuman.



John Calvin (1509-1564) preached the notion of predestination, stating that God has already chosen who will and who will not be saved. Calvin's doctrine implied that people with disabilities were not among the chosen.



THE MORAL MODEL:
Disability is either a sin on the part of persons with disabilities or their families, or an act of God for some divine purpose. In the first case, people are often punished and excluded from society. In the second case, they are viewed as divine and considered holy. Perceived as sinners or saints, persons with disabilities were usually kept separate from mainstream society; their disability was thought to serve some divine purpose, and was believed to be permanent and unchanging.

Mendicants – people who survived by begging – were common during this time, as pictured below in the painting *The Beggars*, by Pieter Bruegel (1568).



As the authority of the Roman Catholic Church diminished, many of the charitable services it provided ceased to exist. The "poor and misfortunate," without the refuge of the church, became increasingly homeless in the growing cities. In the city of Paris during the early 1500s, approximately 1/3 of the population resorted to begging as a means of survival.



STEREOTYPE:
Persons with disabilities as subhuman organisms: as "animal-like" or "vegetative," not deserving of all human rights; often referred to as "so-called human beings."

RESPONSES TO DISABILITY:
Exile; refuge in leper colonies or church shelters.

787 A.D.
Datheus, archbishop of Milan, founds the first asylum for abandoned infants. "As soon as the child is exposed at the door of the church, it will be received in the hospital and confided to the care of those who will be paid to look after them."

980-1037
The physician Avicenna proposes treatments for meningitis and hydrocephalus and defines levels of intellectual functioning.

1403
St. Mary of Bethlehem (more well known as "Bedlam") begins to receive mental patients in England.

1500
Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576) is the first physician to recognize the ability of the Deaf to reason.

1452-1519
Leonardo da Vinci, Italian artistic and scientific genius, studies anatomy and the functions of the brain.

1493-1541
Paracelsus distinguishes between mental illness and mental retardation.

1547
Bedlam is declared a hospital exclusively for the insane.

1536-1614
Felix Platter studies "mental alienation," a precursor to psychiatry that includes both mental retardation and mental illness.

1601
Poor Laws are enacted in Elizabethan England.