

# Mental illness prior to the renaissance period essay sample

[Psychology](#)



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What are some methods that were used to treat individuals who were presumably suffering from some form of mental illness prior to the Renaissance period? What are the rationales behind these methods?

Prior to the Renaissance period, Enlightenment thinkers urged the reformation of treating mental illnesses, which many treatments were used that today would be looked at as appalling or astounding in treating the mentally ill. German doctor Johann Weyer (1515-1588), the first physician to specialize in mental illness, believed that the mind was as susceptible to sickness as the body was (Comer, 2011). According to Goodwin (2008), Phillipe Pinel (1745-1826) introduced humane reforms in Paris, which established the asylum (type of institution that first became popular in the 16th century to provide care for those with mental disorders, which became virtual prisons) for both men and women known as Bircêtre asylum (1793) and Salpêtrière asylum (1795). Pinel also introduced “moral treatment” to improve institutional living conditions, reduction of physical restraint of patients, and improvement of patient’s behavior.

At the same time, Benjamin Rush introduced a medical model explaining mental illness and also developed an approach to treat and emphasize “improving” the condition of patients’ blood and circulatory system, which advocated the “bloodletting” as a cure. He believed that in order to reduce the hypertension in the brain’s blood vessels, blood should be removed through the opening of the veins until a person reaches a tranquil state. Rush also created two devices to calm the blood, which included the gyrator and the tranquilizer to redistribute blood toward the head and reduce pulse rate (Goodwin, 2008).

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Another example of treatment is the supernatural view of abnormality that began as far back as the Stone Age. Some skulls from that period recovered in Europe and South America show evidence of an operation called trephination (a stone instrument, or trephine) was used to cut away a circular section of the skull, which was used to treat severe abnormal behavior—either hallucinations or melancholia. For historians, the purpose of opening the skull was to release the evil spirits that were supposedly causing problems of hallucinations or melancholia. Not only trephination took place, but also treatments for abnormality within the early societies were often exorcism.

The idea to coax evil spirits to leave or make the person's body an uncomfortable place in which to live, a shaman or a priest may recite prayers, plead with evil spirits, insult the evil spirits, perform magic, make loud noises, or have the person ingest bitter drinks. However, if this technique fails, the shaman performs more extreme form of exorcism, such as whipping or starving the person. Other forms of treatment that were also used in asylums were shock treatments, the crib (which a person is completely strapped in the crib), the rush chair or restraining chair (to limit motion and reduce sensory stimulation by covering the head and blocking vision), and rotating chair (to induce a state of shock) (Comer, 2011).

#### References:

oComer, R. J. (2011). *Fundamentals of abnormal psychology* (6th ed.). New York, NY: Worth.  
oGoodwin, C. J. (2008). *A history of modern psychology* (3rd ed.). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

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