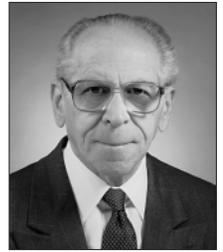


# Taxing for Therapy

BY THOMAS SZASZ



The Marxian credo, “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs,” is the moral foundation of the progressive tax policies of modern “capitalist” societies. The psychiatric credo, “From each producer according to his income, to each psychiatric parasite according to his cunning,” amplifies that creed and garbs it in the mantle of therapy.

In American medicine and the media, psychiatric lies and hypocrisy have replaced professional integrity and journalistic skepticism. Mental illnesses are like medical illnesses, but mental patients are not treated like medical patients. Psychiatrists treat patients with drugs, yet don’t examine, or even look at, their bodies. Mental illnesses are brain diseases—“chemical imbalances in the brain,” according to current psychiatric doctrine—but there is no test to determine whose brain is chemically imbalanced; nor are these allegedly brain-diseased patients treated by neurologists or infectious-disease specialists, as are patients suffering from stroke or neurosyphilis.

Diabetes, cancer, and atherosclerosis are major disease categories. No American suffering from these diseases is excused from crimes or imprisoned by his doctor for rejecting his treatment, nor are special taxes imposed on wealthy Americans to pay for treating these diseases. The only diseases for which Americans are excused from crimes and imprisoned—and now taxed as well—are mental diseases.

One of the ballot initiatives before the voters of California last November was Proposition 63, which read: “Should a 1% tax on taxable personal income above \$1 million to fund expanded health services for mentally ill children, adults, seniors be established?” The initiative passed with 54.5 percent of the vote, creating a new Mental Health Services Act. A writer for a mental-health weekly comments: “In a field hungry for its fill of resources, the passage of Proposition 63 stands as a gleaming cornucopia. The quip is that planeloads of mental health professionals, researchers and administra-

tors will be flocking to the state in the coming year in a kind of mental health ‘gold rush.’ ”

According to Harvard mental-health expert Kara Zivin Bambauer, Proposition 63 was supported by “police, teachers, representatives of labor unions, and nurses—trusted groups that embody core values of many members of society and who make excellent advocates.” How will funds be allocated? On the basis of “a county’s proportion of mental disorders in households with incomes less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level.” It will be fun to watch the competition among county mental-health administrators for the largest number of qualifying households.

As Samuel Johnson famously remarked, “Hell is paved with good intentions.” Even more to the point, the distinguished development economist Peter Bauer defined foreign aid, ironically but accurately, as “the transfer of money from poor people in rich countries to rich people in poor countries.” Why? Because money allocated for foreign aid goes to rich rulers who, instead of helping poor people, oppress them. Money generated by Proposition 63 will go to mental-health professionals who, instead of helping people, deprive them of liberty, stigmatize them as crazy, and poison them with psychoactive drugs—as the “standard of care” in psychiatry mandates.

Even the mainstream media—mouthpieces of the American Psychiatric Association and its lobbying arm, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill—acknowledge that the upshot of psychiatric miracle drugs, deinstitutionalization, and the much-touted Decade of the Brain is the creation of old snake pits with new names on the doors. Last May PBS televised one of its “Frontline”

---

*Thomas Szasz (tszasz@aol.com) is professor of psychiatry emeritus at SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse. His latest works are Words to the Wise: A Medical-Philosophical Dictionary and Faith in Freedom: Libertarian Principles and Psychiatric Practices, both published by Transaction.*

reports, titled “The New Asylums.” The program, according to the reviewer in the *New York Times*, showed that “500,000 mentally ill patients, who in earlier decades would have been treated in hospitals, are now mistreated in prisons. . . . The show never feels like the problem is being solved . . . . Just by venturing into these Stygian cellblocks . . . the bedlam is all too faithfully and nauseatingly depicted.” The program failed to show that more mental-health professionals than ever are making more money than ever managing more psychiatric prisons, torturing more inmates with coerced “medications” and punitively prolonged periods of incarceration.

Where do the denominated beneficiaries of California’s new largess stand on the Mental Health Services Act? The *New York Times*, *Time* magazine, and CNN do not report their opinions. They report only the opinions of celebrity mental patients—like Brooke Shields, Mike Wallace, and William Styron—who shill for the psychiatric Gulag, protected from its ravages by their money and influence. Poor persons stigmatized as insane have no access to the mainline media. Thanks to the Internet, however, we can now learn what many of them think of their psychiatric saviors and their “services.” Calling themselves “psychiatric survivors,” many former inmates regard themselves as psychiatric victims, not psychiatric patients: they demonstrate against psychiatrists at their professional meetings, hold an Annual Bastille Day Demonstration/Celebration on July 14, and are “fast to call attention to the coercive and oppressive nature of organized psychiatry.” Their platform states: “We speak for ourselves. We seek an end to forced treatment. . . . We demand an end to destructive psychiatric labeling.” The flyer distributed by the Mental Patients Liberation Alliance for its 25th Annual Bastille Day event stated: “Help!! Break the Silence About Psychiatric Oppression. Stop Forced Shock Treatment.”

### Media Indifference

The mainstream broadcast and print journalists are oddly incurious about the opinion of large numbers of “consumers of psychiatric services,” in scores of

countries, denouncing the mental-health profession’s most characteristic feature—its power to coerce. We may attribute this to the media’s economic dependence on advertising revenue from pharmaceutical companies manufacturing drugs given to millions of persons worldwide and its generally liberal-statist bias. It is more difficult to explain the resolute lack of interest most libertarian publications display toward our society’s premier institution of state-sanctioned fraud and force—psychiatry.

California’s Proposition 63 will provide an estimated \$1 billion per annum for supporting and arming agents of the state to “care” for mental patients in ways the patients regard as persecution and punishment. Nor is that the end of the troubling implications of Proposition 63 and the growing popularity, especially on the Left Coast, of replacing the Constitution and state and federal legislatures with people voting on ad hoc propositions. The view that mental illness is so serious a social problem that it justifies imposing a special surtax on the rich opens a Pandora’s Box of rationalizations for special taxation. I venture to guess that at least 54.5 percent of Americans, and probably many more, regard drug abuse, racism, sexism, ageism, and atheism as mental illnesses and social problems. Why not ask them to pass propositions surtaxing the rich—and then the less and less rich—to rid the nation of all these “diseases” as well, and help turn America into a mentally healthy nation?

Anyone who believes for a moment that all that money will improve the “mental health” of Californians should, as Sam Goldwyn memorably put it, have his head examined. The history of psychiatry is a story of increasing public funds creating increasing numbers of mentally ill patients, more and more of whom remain officially “underserved,” while more and more reject the sadistic practices politicians and psychiatrists call “mental health services.” California’s 2005 Mental Health Services Act surpasses the wildest dreams of communist economic and political planners: the rulers call coercion a “medical service” and provide ever more to people who exhibit a “medical” need for it. 