

Isaac Ray's Bibliography: Some Addenda and Ray's Evidence-Based Thinking

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A few weeks before he died in 1881, Dr. Isaac Ray gave his colleague, Dr. Thomas Kirkbride, a list of his publications. In this commentary, the author adds several references, presumably overlooked by Ray and unknown to Kirkbride. Among them is an 1870 review of a book, illustrating Ray's critical thinking. Search aids for finding additional Ray publications, as well as those of his son, B. Lincoln Ray, are included.

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Isaac Ray (1807–1881), the founder of American forensic psychiatry, was a prolific writer, scholar, and tireless reformer. In conjunction with the 200th anniversary of his birth, I undertook a review of his published works after noticing a few small errors in Kirkbride's 1881 bibliography.¹ The bibliography, attached to a memorial piece read at the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, was handed by Ray to Kirkbride about a week before Ray's death.²

My search began with Kirkbride's list, which has been the gold standard. A carefully annotated 1982 doctoral dissertation by John Starrett Hughes on Ray's life and work included among its references most of Kirkbride's and some of Ray's letters from the Isaac Ray Library of the Butler Hospital in Providence, Rhode Island, and other sources.³ It appears that Hughes did not expand Kirkbride's list; nor did Stearns,⁴ Overholser⁵ and Quen,⁶ who also cited correspondence. An exception is the publication by Quen⁷ of Ray's 1827 medical school thesis. Otherwise, no other sources, to my knowledge, have expanded the list of publications.

Most of Ray's writings were easy to verify among journals such as the *American Journal of Insanity*. Others were reprints of lectures given to medical, legal, and civic groups. In the process of locating some of Ray's papers at the Historical Library of the

College of Physicians of Philadelphia, for example, in the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*, a Philadelphia-based magazine, I noticed that Ray and his son, Benjamin Lincoln Ray, were frequent contributors in the form of book reviews, especially in the 1870s (Ray, his wife, and son moved to Philadelphia in 1867). As was customary, reviews were not accompanied by the authors' full names, rather "I.R." or "B.L.R." Author indices confirmed their identities; and, indeed, in the case of Isaac Ray, the citations cross-referenced with Kirkbride's.

Because of the lack of bylines, I suspected that there were references unknown to Kirkbride and otherwise obscure to scholars. Next, I performed a search of 19th century periodicals using American Periodicals Series Online (APS Online), a product of ProQuest, which is accessible through subscribing libraries.⁸ This query, which included author search terms such as "Ray," "Isaac Ray," "I. Ray," "I.R." and "J.R." (the latter because some of the known references were cited thus), produced several reviews and newspaper articles by Ray that do not appear in Kirkbride's list or elsewhere to date. I have listed these in the Appendix, along with evidence of authenticity. For readers who are interested, in a separate search of "B.L.R." references, there were 95 book reviews published in the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences* between 1871 and 1880; B. Lincoln Ray died in 1879. Thus, we have a finding aid to Ray's additional writings as well as his son's. Of the Isaac Ray book

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reviews, I have selected one that illuminates his critical thinking.

The review in question is of *The Pathology and Therapeutics of Mental Diseases* by the Dutch physiologist van der Kolk, published in English posthumously in 1869.⁹ Ray begins by noting that little scholarly work had come out of The Netherlands since that of Leeuwenhoek, “who demonstrated many curious facts in the circulation of the blood” (Ref. 9, p 516). He disparages the author’s originality and depth; then accuses him of a “spirit of speculation. . .calculated to mislead the inexperienced student” (Ref. 9, p 516). Not until the end of the review do we learn that, after the author died in 1862, the translation—from Dutch to German and then to English—was done by the author’s protégés, whom Ray accuses of distortion. Especially critical of the English version, Ray says of the translator, “His language is often as destitute of idiomatic expression as the first exercise of a schoolboy in construing his Livy or Virgil” (Ref. 9, p 519). For readers unaccustomed to Ray’s acerbic style, this is typical.

Ray’s principal critique of van der Kolk’s book resides in his objection to the author’s separating mental disorders into *idiopathic* and *sympathetic*, which Ray attributes to:

. . . some fancied analogy or plausible conjecture, rather than any positive evidence. . . . Our author’s doctrine is, that idiopathic insanity is characterized by excitement, exaltation, turbulence, self-satisfaction, a quick pulse, and sparkling eyes, while the sympathetic is marked by more quiet, depression, unhappiness, seclusion, sadness, and despair [Ref. 9, p 516].

Ray was disturbed by the author’s approach, because the dichotomy proposed was not identifiable in nature—that is, it was not evidence-based; rather, it was metaphysical. In a startlingly modern approach to the relationship between mind and brain, Ray comments:

We have no reason to believe that insanity does not imply the same structural change, whether caused, in the ordinary use of the term, by a blow to the head, a disappointment in love, suppressed menstruation, or torpor of the liver [Ref. 9, p 517].

Irrespective of our views on the validity of the last two items, it is important to point out that Ray was a leading exponent of the concept that all mental disorders reside in the brain. As I have noted elsewhere in a discussion of Ray’s interest in phrenology,¹⁰ he was a firm believer in the principle of locating the causes of illness within the offending organs, perhaps

an obvious point today but not universally accepted in his time.

Ray then touches on a forensic topic—that it is difficult to explain mental illness in a legal setting. Van der Kolk appears bewildered by how it is possible that, in the prodromal phase of illness, the mind is excited and often more acute, whereas in the later phase the intellect is vitiated. Yet, mental disorders often run that course, as Ray notes:

This is strikingly true very frequently in what is called circular insanity, much to the bewilderment of courts and juries, and all those worthy people who live and die in the belief that it is wrong and deserving of condign punishment to treat any person as insane who answers a question acutely and converses coherently and correctly [Ref. 9, p 517].

Van der Kolk is misguided, Ray says, in his overreliance on the physiology that imputes organ pathology as the cause of insanity. For example, whereas van der Kolk “observes” that in both idiopathic and sympathetic insanity there is often “a spasmodic contraction of the descending colon,” Ray considers the application of intestinal remedies to be “childlike.” Similarly, Ray is critical of the author’s recommendations for somatic therapies in conditions such as mania, dementia, cachexia, paralysis and amenorrhea:

We confess it almost took our breath away to witness the furious onslaught thus made on the whole tribe of mental disorders. It certainly was no rose-water affair [Ref. 9, p 518].

Finally, Ray discusses what might happen to a scientist, such as van der Kolk, who becomes so preoccupied with somatic therapies for conditions he assumes are linked to physical ailments that he loses sight of the patient’s status. He speculates about his late Dutch colleague:

Once a day perhaps he passed through the wards, his attention being given to those chiefly who seemed to require medication, and when the requisite amount of blood had been drawn, and a *quantum sufficit* of pills and powders and drafts were ordered, his work was done. Practically the mental condition was almost entirely ignored [Ref. 9, p 519].

Worst of all, Ray says, moral treatment is not even mentioned in the book.

Thus, we have Isaac Ray, late in his career, taking the time and energy to critique a work by a late author from a foreign country. His rhetoric had lost none of the fire we saw in his intellectual battles over care of the insane, moral insanity, civil commitment, and expert testimony.⁶ Standards of quality in clinical and forensic practice were equally important to

Ray as the humane treatment of the mentally ill. For this reminder alone, we can be grateful that he took any opportunity to state his case—even in an obscure corner of the literature.

Appendix: Addenda to Kirkbride's¹ Bibliography of Isaac Ray

1. Ray I: Review of Paley's *Natural Theology*, with Selections from the Dissertations and Notes of Lord Brougham and Sir Charles Bell, &c., the whole being newly arranged and adapted for the School Library. By E. Bartlett, MD, 2 vols. 12 mo. Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon, & Webb. *Christian Examiner and General Review* 30:273–89, 1841 (July). Authenticity supported by: signed "I.R."; Ray had previously published here (referenced by Kirkbride).

2. Ray I: Fine arts among the insane. *Christian Inquirer* March 20, 1852 p 1 (newspaper published in New York). Authenticity supported by byline "Isaac Ray, MD."

3. Ray I: Review of *Studies in the Field and Forest*. By Wilson Flagg. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1857. 12 mo. 330 pp. *The North American Review* 84:267–68, 1857 (January). Authenticity supported by cross-reference in an index published in 1878, in which the names of the authors were revealed.

4. Ray I: Treatment of mental diseases. *Christian Inquirer*, June 20, 1863 p 1. Authenticity supported by byline "Dr. Isaac Ray."

5. Ray I: Review of *New South Wales. Report on Lunatic Asylums*. By Fred Norton Manning, MD, By Authority. Sydney: Thomas Richards, Government Printer, 1868. *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 58:223–5, 1869. Authenticity supported by: signed "I.R." and that he was a frequent contributor to the journal.

6. Ray I: Misquotations and Blunders. *Medical News* (New York) 27:178–9, 1869. Authenticity supported by: signed "I.R." and self-referential comments.

7. Ray I: Review of *The Pathology and Therapeutics of Mental Diseases*. By J.L.C. Schröder Van Der Kolk, Professor of Physiology in the University of Utrecht, The Netherlands. Translated from the German by James T. Rudall. 8 vol. 158 pp. London: John Churchill & Sons, 1869. *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 59:515–19, 1870. Authenticity supported by: signed "I.R." and that he was a frequent contributor to the journal.

8. Ray I: Review of *A Physician's Problems*. By Charles Elam, MD, 12 mo. 400 pp. Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1869. *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 60:238, 1870. Authenticity supported by: signed "I.R." and that he was a frequent contributor to the journal.

References

1. Kirkbride TS: *Memoir of Isaac Ray, MD, LLD* (read July 6, 1881). *Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia* 3rd series, 5:clvii–clxxiii, 1881. An interesting erratum occurs in the list for 1875, in which Kirkbride lists the paper "Brain Disease and Modern Living" as published in *Penn Monthly*. Though there is good documentation that Ray delivered the lecture by the same name to the Philadelphia Social Science Association on January 12, 1875, it was not published in *Penn Monthly* (or possibly anywhere). Ray had not listed the paper in the document he gave to Kirkbride (see Ref. 2).
2. Ray I: Unpublished notebook inscribed on the cover "List of published writings of Dr. Isaac Ray made by himself and handed to Dr. Kirkbride about a week before his death which took place March 31, 1881." Copy of handwritten pamphlet (transcriber unknown) from the Pennsylvania Hospital Historic Collections, Section 2, The Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital, Series 2, Superintendent/Physician Papers, Subseries A, Dr. Thomas Story Kirkbride Material. Some additions were made between the time the list was transmitted and Dr. Kirkbride's memorial address before the College of Physicians of Philadelphia about three months later.
3. Hughes JS: *In the law's darkness: insanity and the medical-legal career of Isaac Ray, 1807–1881*. PhD dissertation, Rice University, Houston, TX, 1982
4. Stearns WA: Isaac Ray, psychiatrist and pioneer in forensic psychiatry. *Am J Psychiatry* 101:573–84, 1945
5. Overholser W: Pioneers in criminology. III. Isaac Ray (1807–1881). *J Crim Law Criminol Police Sci* 45:249–63, 1954
6. Quen JM: Isaac Ray: have we learned his lessons? *Bull Am Acad Psychiatry Law* 2:137–47, 1974
7. Quen JM: Isaac Ray and his "Remarks on Pathological Anatomy." *Bull Hist Med* 38:113–26, 1964
8. General information about APS Online. Available at www.proquest.com. The database contains over 1000 sources ranging in date from colonial times to the early 20th century.
9. Ray I: Review of Van Der Kolk, *Pathology and Therapeutics of Mental Diseases*. *Am J Med Sci* 59:515–19, 1870
10. Weiss KJ: Isaac Ray's affair with phrenology. *J Psychiatry Law* 34:455–94, 2006