

**Course ID:** CMEC11

## **Philosophy and psychiatry: Vulnerability and values**

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**Teaching faculty:** K.W.M. Fulford

**Educational Objectives:** The aim of the course is to improve the clinician's and the researcher's knowledge about epistemological and ethical issues in this field and to give the clinician and the researcher new instruments derived from philosophical anthropology and ethics in order to understand the condition of the schizophrenic person and prevent acute phenomena and chronicity.

**Course description:** There a strong need for bringing together philosophy and psychiatry. The psychiatrist is confronted, because he is called upon by his patients and by the role attributed to him by society, with questions always tackled by philosophy – questions for which psychiatrists could be completely unprepared.

One main example is the diagnosis of schizophrenia. In these last years, many researchers have challenged the schizophrenia concept and the reliability and validity of its diagnostic criteria. What clinical psychiatry calls 'schizophrenia' is not a unitary illness, but a syndrome. Schizophrenic symptoms, like schneiderian first-rank symptoms (delusions, hallucinations, experiences of passivity) are nothing but a rather uniform type of reaction, the epiphenomena of very complex interactions between sensory disorders (aberrations in the perception of self, body and world), conceptualisation disorders (impairments in the constitution of meanings and intentions) and attitudinal disorders (eccentric structure of values and beliefs). Since the schizophrenic syndrome, as defined by current diagnostic manuals, lacks any authentic core-phenomena, and so-called schizophrenic symptoms are not specific, the clinical diagnosis of schizophrenia finally becomes a diagnosis by exclusion. This situation of conceptual weakness is obviously unacceptable and is kindling a velvet revolution in nosological studies and a renaissance of philosophy-oriented psychopathological research. Minkowski's (a forerunner in the field of philosophical psychopathology) conceptualisation of autism as the core- and primary phenomenon of schizophrenia, in the light of Bergson's and Husserl's ideas, is an ideal example of the link between philosophical perspectives and psychopathological research.

The Course will revise, in the light of phenomenological psychopathology and ethical theory, the concept of schizophrenic vulnerability. In the Introduction, the main shortcomings of the vulnerability-stress model, i.e. an insufficient assessment of basic (primary) phenomena and a blurred theory of subjectivity, are pointed out. A clarification of the core-property of schizophrenic basic-phenomena – i.e. the loss of 'natural common sense' – is achieved by means of the phenomenological methods of cognition. The First Section focuses on the phenomenon of common sense in a philosophical and psychopathological perspective. This phenomenon consists of two parts: social knowledge (the background of knowledge useful for organising everyday experiences) and intuitive attunement (the capacity to understand the others based on the capacity to be directly involved in their mental lives). An analysis of the characteristics of schizophrenic vulnerability as a basic relational deficit that consists in an excessive proneness to the loss of common sense is carried out. The hypothesis that the social dysfunction in schizophrenia is not a consequence of acute symptoms and course, but

a fundamental aspect of schizophrenic vulnerability is explored. The common sense deficit appears to involve a damaged social knowledge network and a disorder of intuitive attunement. The Second Section will focus on the ethical aspects of considering social dysfunction as a core-phenomenon of schizophrenic vulnerability. In this perspective, which involves disorders of adjustment as an antecedent of schizophrenic symptomatology, diagnosing schizophrenic vulnerability necessarily implies a value judgement and not only a neutral assessment of psychopathological phenomena. The Third Section will analyse a rather neglected issue, i.e. the value profile of schizophrenia-spectrum persons. Their eccentric structure of values will be pointed out. It will be shown that their distrust toward intuitive attunement, hypo-identification with social norms and roles, tendency toward isolation and differentiation, and idiocentric attitude form a meaningful and coherent Gestalt with other, commonly acknowledged phenomena of schizophrenic vulnerability.

**Educational methods:** Teachers will supply the Audience with printed materials: (i) a 10/15-page original outline of the Course main topics, (ii) a handlist of references for further readings, and (iii) reprints of the major articles related to the Course.

**Target audience:** Psychiatrists, neuroscientists and psychologists involved in clinical practice (especially prevention, rehabilitation and psychotherapy) and research (especially assessment).

**Course level:** Basic. Some knowledge of clinical psychopathology is required.