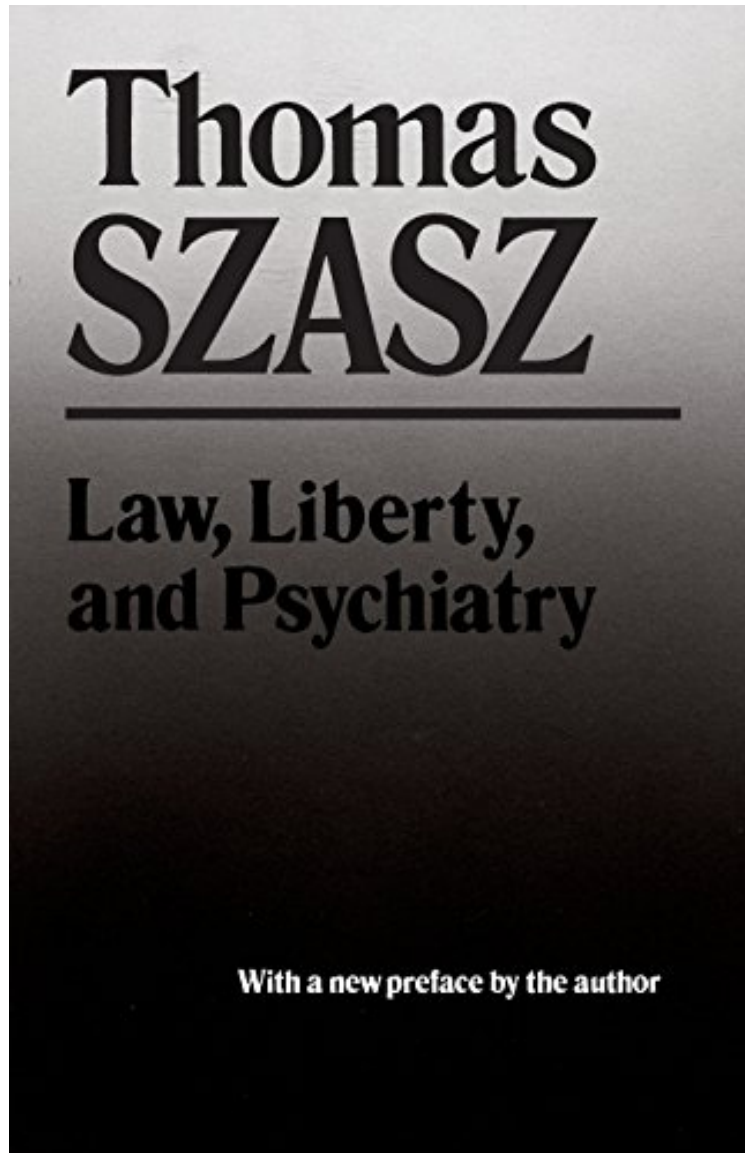


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Law, Liberty, and Psychiatry: An Inquiry Into the Social Uses of Mental Health Practices

Thomas Szasz

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7 of 8 people found the following review helpful. ONE OF THE EARLIER CRITIQUES BY A PROMINENT CRITIC OF PSYCHIATRY
By Steven H Propp
Thomas Szasz (born 1920) is Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry at the State University of New York Health Science Center. He is a well-known critic of psychiatry, of the social role of medicine in modern society, and is a social libertarian. In the Preface to this 1963 book, Szasz writes, "Psychiatric activity is medical in name only. For the most part, psychiatrists are engaged in attempts to change the behavior and values of individuals, groups, institutions, and sometimes even of nations. Hence, psychiatry is a form of social engineering. It should be recognized as such... The present book has two major aims: first, to present a critical inquiry into the current social, and especially legal, uses of psychiatry; second, to offer a reasoned dissent from what I consider the theory and practice of false psychiatric liberalism. Most of the legal and social applications of psychiatry, undertaken in the name of psychiatric liberalism, are actually instances of despotism." (Interestingly, he states in the 1989 Preface to the Second Edition of the book, "why---I am often asked---did I enter psychiatric and psychoanalytical training? I did so for two reasons: because I wanted to practice psychotherapy, and because I wanted to see if I could mount a successful critique of the fundamental principles and practices of psychiatry.") Here are some representative quotations from the book: "(T)he relationship between the mental hospital and its inmates is suffused with dishonesty and deceit. Usually, the patient is not told the true reason for his detainment. Nor is he given explicit directions about the way he must behave. Finally, his discharge is not predicated upon objective criteria, such as confinement for a given period of time. It depends instead upon the judgment by the staff of a transformation of his personality." "Let us recall that Freud, Jung and Adler treated only consenting patients. They refused to inflict therapy on people who did not want it. This is true also for most of the best known contemporary psychotherapists." "My objections to many current practices ... rest on a fundamental proposition: We should value liberty more highly than mental health, no matter how defined."

Dr. Thomas Szasz on the shortcomings of commitment procedures, and the inadequacies of protections afforded patients in psychiatric institutions. He alerts us to the existing and potential abuses of human rights in mental health programs and procedures.