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Madness, Reason, and Truth: An Examination of Two Philosophical Debates

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Madness, Reason, and Truth: An Examination of Two Philosophical Debates

A thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirement for an award of honors in the
department of Religious Studies from The College of William and Mary

by

Catherine Leigh Robey

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I. Introduction

The quest for absolute truth has been at the center of philosophy since its inception. In that time, several theories set in varying contexts have emerged as a result of this quest. For Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, this absolute truth exists as an all-encompassing world mind that connects all existing things in the universe. Absolute truth is reached through objective truths that pertain to all things in the world. For Søren Kierkegaard, truth does not become truth until it is internalized. All truth is subjectively experienced. The journey for absolute truth is thus carried out through a higher subjective truth called Faith. Faith opens up a relationship with God, whom alone knows the absolute truth. Like Kierkegaardian Faith, Plato's idea of absolute truth is also reached through divine interaction. For Plato, this interaction results from Divine Madness.

Similar to Kierkegaard, Michel Foucault emphasizes the importance of subjectivity and internalization. For Foucault, all truth is experienced subjectively, and reality is just a phenomenon constructed through the societal interactions of humans. As a human construct, reality is limited to human interaction. Thus there is no absolute truth to be found for Foucault. Similar to Foucault, Jacques Derrida also denies the existence of an absolute truth. Truth and reality are formed by historical experiences. As historical constructs, reality and truth are again confined to human experiences and cannot extend beyond humanity.

These ideas of objectivity and subjectivity offer insight concerning the understanding of madness and reason for each of these philosophers. In chapter 2 I discuss Hegel, for whom reason and reality exist as an objective truth experienced by everything in the universe. Reality is objective truth, whereas the submission to pure subjectivity is madness. For Kierkegaard, madness exists in two ways. The first, “subjective lunacy”, is a distorted subjectivity in which the afflicted possesses inwardness, but this inwardness defies reason. The second, “objective lunacy”, is an absence of subjectivity altogether. There are both objective and subjective forms of madness for Kierkegaard, but when put in the context of true reality and true reason, Kierkegaard claims that the only way to access this is through Faith, which is a form of subjective lunacy. Similar to Kierkegaard, Plato’s theory of Divine Madness is experienced subjectively. Divine Madness results from inspiration from the gods, but can only be experienced by the possessed person. It is not objectively understood. Its relation to divinity makes Divine Madness the gateway to true reason and reality. Hegel’s objective understanding of reason correlates to Kierkegaard’s objective lunacy, whereas Hegel’s subjective insanity draws a parallel to the experience of Plato’s Divine Madness. Finally, Kierkegaard’s idea of Faith and subjective lunacy corresponds closely with Plato’s Divine Madness. The differing understandings of madness and reason as objective or subjective provide a medium of comparison between these three philosophers.

In chapter 3, I discuss Foucault and Derrida’s understanding of madness in the context of the existence of reason. Foucault categorizes the classical understanding of madness in four ways. The critical consciousness of madness

isolates anything outside of our reason and labels it as madness. The practical consciousness deems madness as a choice made by the “social other” to exist in a world contradictory to our social and cultural norms. The enunciatory consciousness seeks to only identify that madness exists, nothing further. Finally the analytical consciousness attempts to classify different types of madness in their varying degrees of deviation from reason. Derrida argues against Foucault stating that it is impossible to categorize madness due to the limitations of our reason in understanding unreason. All that we can assume is that madness exists. To categorize madness would indicate that we have identified a way of bridging the realm of madness with the realm of reason. I also utilize Foucault’s and Derrida’s interpretations of Descartes’ theory of madness in further demonstrating the discrepancy between Foucault’s and Derrida’s understanding of the philosophical significance of madness.

In this paper, I defend the following arguments concerning the philosophical debates on madness, reason, and truth between Hegel and Kierkegaard (chapter 2) and Foucault and Derrida (chapter 3). Regarding absolute truth and ultimate reality, Hegel and Kierkegaard diverge in their views on how absolute truth is accessible, as shown in the opposing theories of madness and reason. However, both philosophers arrive at the conclusion of the existence of an absolute truth. Similarly, Foucault and Derrida disagree regarding the conceptualization of madness, yet this disagreement brings to light their consensus on the non-existence of an absolute truth.

II. Hegel, Plato, and Kierkegaard: An analysis of the subjectivity of an objective phenomenon

Introduction

Madness has been a topic of debate for thousands of years. The differing views stem, not only from the subjectivity of the observation of madness, but also from (a) the attitude of the philosopher, (b) the era in which the philosopher studied, and (c) differing internal beliefs. However, one area of consensus is that madness does exist. As long as there is a concept of normalcy, madness will continue to exist as an issue of morality, religion, or physiology. Although their writings come from different time periods and modes of thought, the philosophers Plato (427-347 BCE), G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831 CE), and Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855 CE) were all compelled to analyze madness in the context of their own philosophical systems.

Hegel postulates three primary forms of madness, each with their own distinguishing characteristics. “Idiocy” manifests as either a “non-awareness of the immediate present” or “a weakening of the power of the rational consciousness.”¹ “Madness Proper” embodies the creation of a subjective world in order to cope with the dissatisfaction the subject experiences with the objective world. “Mania or Frenzy” personifies the conflict that arises from the awareness of the subject’s conflicting worlds. Distinct from Hegel, Plato turns madness into something

¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 132-133

beneficial in attributing it to divine inspiration. He describes ““Madness of Prophecy””, “Madness of the Mystic”, ““Madness of Poetry””, and “Madness of the Lover” as all inspired by their own distinct deities with love also inspired by the Forms. Lastly, Kierkegaard centers his two kinds of madness on the concept of inwardness. “Subjective lunacy” results from a delirium of inwardness, whereas “objective lunacy” lacks inwardness altogether. Kierkegaard includes the idea of Faith in “subjective lunacy”, although he later indicates that Faith provides access to absolute truth. I argue that these philosophers conceive of the actual phenomena of madness in the same way. I demonstrate the interconnection found in each of these philosophers through the comparability between:

- 1) Hegel’s notion of “Frenzy” and Plato’s “Divine Madness”;
- 2) Hegel’s concept of Reason and Kierkegaard’s “objective lunacy”;
- 3) Plato’s “Madness of the Lover” and Kierkegaard’s Faith.

Hegel – Three Main Forms of Madness

As stated above, Hegel formulates three main forms of insanity from which all specific types find their basis. Each form involves a deviation of the mind’s processing.

“Idiocy”

The first of these primary forms is “Idiocy”. This is not the modern idea of idiocy that we are familiar with. To think of idiocy in terms of madness, one needs to

completely erase from his or her mind the idea of idiocy solely in terms of intelligence. “Idiocy” exists in two distinct forms, the distracted mind and the rambling mind. For Hegel, Idiocy of the distracted mind “consists of non-awareness of the immediate present.”² Although a primary form of madness, “Idiocy” can also be “a lofty distractedness far romped from insanity.”³ In contrast to an issue of intelligence, this type of “Idiocy” as a form of madness is an issue of confusion. A victim of this type of “Idiocy” “confuses his true situation in a particular case with a false one, apprehends external circumstance in a one sided manner, not in the totality of their relationships.”⁴ This form of “Idiocy” has the advantage of the possibility of being temporary. In contrast, Idiocy of the rambling mind is permanent. In addition to “non-awareness of the immediate present”⁵, as in the distracted mind, the rambling mind also suffers from the “unconsciously turning (...) topsy-turvy” of the immediate present.⁶ The issue of confusion is heightened to an issue of delirium in this form of “Idiocy”. A victim of the rambling mind “interests itself in everything [as a result of] an inability to fix one’s attention on anything definite, and consists of the malady of stumbling from one object to another.”⁷ This form of “Idiocy” can be attributed to “a weakening of the power of the rational consciousness to hold together the totality of its mental representations.”⁸ This

² Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 132

³ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 132

⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 132

⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (2007) pg. 123

⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 133

⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 133

⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 133

weakening of the rational consciousness makes this form of “Idiocy” typically incurable.

“Madness Proper”

The second primary form of insanity is “Madness Proper”. This form of insanity serves as a coping mechanism for those who are dissatisfied with their lives in the actual world, and proceed to hole themselves up in their own subjective world. In contrast to the victim of “Idiocy”, who cannot “hold on to anything definite”, the victim of “Madness Proper” does the opposite and holds tight to that which it falsely believes to be true.⁹ This ability to hold on to something definite is important to note, because it “demonstrates that it (Madness Proper) is still consciousness.”¹⁰ The implication of “Madness Proper” as consciousness is that the victim has “the ability to act rationally” in areas outside of the issue of his subjective reality.¹¹ However, in this subjective reality, the mind “is absorbed in its own self, in the abyss of its indeterminateness.”¹² The utter discontent induces the generation of a more manageable, subjective world into which the mind of the victim sinks. Once in this subjective world, the mind “loses its understanding of the actual world and is at home only in its subjective ideas.”¹³ Because of this loss of understanding, the victim is not aware of “the contradiction which exists between his fixed idea and the

⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 134

¹⁰ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 134

¹¹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 134

¹² Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 133

¹³ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 133

objective world”; a key difference between “Madness Proper” and “Mania or Frenzy.”¹⁴

“Mania or Frenzy”

The third and final main form of insanity is “Mania or Frenzy”. Here, as opposed to Madness Proper, the victim is well aware of the contradiction between the real world and his subjective world and “lives with his feelings exclusively in the *past* and is thus unable to find himself in the *present* by which he feels himself alike repelled and bound.”¹⁵ The internal contradiction leads to “a rage of reason against unreason and vice versa, and thus become[s] a *frenzy*.”¹⁶ In this form of insanity, “one particular idea usurps the authority of the rational mind.”¹⁷ It is important to note here that the primary difference between the “fits of ill-will” that occur in the maniac versus the normal person is the ability of the normal person to control them via “ethic[s], or at least pruden[ce].”¹⁸ The characteristics of this form of madness strongly correlate to the subject of “Divine Madness” for Plato.

Regardless of the form it fits into, all madness for Hegel is a “psychical disease; i.e. a disease of body and mind alike.”¹⁹ All madness is seen “as a process of reversion or sinking back into nature”; nature being “the “still unconscious dullness”

¹⁴ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 135

¹⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 135

¹⁶ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 135

¹⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 135

¹⁸ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 135

¹⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 123

of spirit, which has no historical content but is only the “pre-history” of culture.”²⁰ All madness, according to Hegel, is unfavorable. This criterion poses a problem for categorizing Plato and Kierkegaard into “Mania or Frenzy”, for “Divine Madness” is a favorable form of madness.

Hegel – Reason, Universality, Objectivity, and the Doctrine of Mediation

It is important for our discussion to also introduce Hegel’s idea of Reason. This idea relies heavily on the thought of universals and universality. According to Hegel, “the universal constitutes the essence of a thing; when a thing is fully developed (Actual), the universal is concrete.”²¹ Reason relates to this idea of universality in that “Reason is the *substance* of the Universe; viz., that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence.”²² Reason is also “*the infinite complex of things*, their entire Essence and Truth.”²³ In knowing that Hegel’s universal “constitutes the essence of a thing”, as well as that Reason is the “entire Essence and Truth” of a thing, we can conclude that Hegel’s Reason is also Hegel’s Universal, it is the substance of Hegel’s universal. For Hegel, this Reason is “inherent in the world itself.”²⁴ In addition to Reason, “truly objective thought” also “expresses the essence of a thing.”²⁵ This is clarified through the idea that “true objectivity of thinking means that the thoughts, far from being merely ours, must at the same time

²⁰ Berthold-Bond, *Hegel’s Theory of Madness*, (1995), pg.28-29

²¹ *Hegel Glossary*, pg. 6

²² Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, (1902), pg. 53

²³ Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, (1902), pg. 53

²⁴ Magee, *Hegel Dictionary*, (2010), pg. 196

²⁵ Cunningham, *Thought and Reality in Hegel’s System*, (1910), pg. 9

be the real essence of things.”²⁶ Therefore, truly objective thought is also universal, and so long as Reason is the substance of the universal, Reason is also the substance of truly objective thought. Reason, according to Hegel, is also “what possesses objectivity.”²⁷ This supports our conclusion of the relation between Reason and truly objective thought. Reason must be objective in order for it to be the substance of the universal as well as truly objective thought. Without objective thought, one cannot have Reason.

Similarly important to Hegel’s concept of the universal is his doctrine of mediation. The concept of mediation is one of a process of becoming, “a development towards greater determinateness and the progressive substitution of necessary and vital, for seemingly accidental and arbitrary, connections among phenomena.”²⁸ Stated plainly, mediation demonstrates the idea that there exists a “concrete totality” in the world.²⁹ This concrete totality is the universal within which the entire world participates. Mediation is “a passage from one object to another” made possible by the connection and oneness between all objects.³⁰ A key element in this idea of mediation is the role of contradiction. Mediation appeases contradictions by detailing the role of the ‘other’. According to Hegel, “a concept is determined both by what it is and by what it is not.”³¹ For example, my existence is only true in the presence of the idea of non-existence. There would be no existence to identify in the absence of non-existence, so the idea of existence would be

²⁶ Cunningham, *Thought and Reality in Hegel’s System*, (1910), pg. 9

²⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 165

²⁸ Cunningham, *Thought and Reality in Hegel’s System*, (1910), pg. 30

²⁹ Cunningham, *Thought and Reality in Hegel’s System*, (1910), pg. 37

³⁰ Cunningham, *Thought and Reality in Hegel’s System*, (1910), pg. 33

³¹ Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relation to Hegel Reconsidered*, (2003), pg. 197

obsolete. Hegel describes the mediation between being and non-being as 'becoming'. Mediation serves as a third-party bridge between opposites. Preceding the idea of mediation is Hegel's concept of immediacy. For Hegel, an immediacy "is always an independent, seemingly self subsisting something, that does not yet have an "other"."³² Something immediate exists in the world without any consideration of its connection the universal. Seeing something as an immediacy is pre-reality. Reality, for Hegel, is the effective mediation of such immediacies, for "the real is the result of this process of mediation."³³ The mediation of immediacies "unite[s] them into the Concept" which is true reality.³⁴ Reality as a result of mediation indicates that "this mediation is reason"³⁵, for, as mentioned earlier, " Reason is the substance of the Universe; viz., that by which and in which all reality has its being and subsistence."³⁶

For Hegel, knowledge of God is a result of mediation. This knowledge is "mediated through God's creatures and other elements in the natural world."³⁷ Hegel describes God and religion as "the highest or ultimate sphere of human consciousness" and "the region of absolute truth."³⁸ In order for this to be true, "consciousness must already have elevated itself into this sphere."³⁹ The

³² Maybee, *Picturing Hegel: An Illustrated Guide to Hegel's Encyclopaedia Logic*, (2009), pg 75

³³ Cunningham, *Thought and Reality in Hegel's System*, (1910), pg. 28

³⁴ Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of Logic: Part 1 of the Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, (1991), pg. 179

³⁵ Hegel, *Science of Logic*, (2010), pg. 388

³⁶ Cunningham, *Thought and Reality in Hegel's System*, (1910), pg. 9

³⁷ Cullen, *Hegel On the Human and the Divine, In the Lights of the Criticisms of Kierkegaard*, (1989), pg. 102

³⁸ Cullen, *Hegel On the Human and the Divine, In the Lights of the Criticisms of Kierkegaard*, (1989), pg. 100

³⁹ Cullen, *Hegel On the Human and the Divine, In the Lights of the Criticisms of Kierkegaard*, (1989), pg. 101

transcendence of human consciousness from the finite to the infinite indicates that “God’s reason is our reason too,”⁴⁰ Reason is a universal; as such, it includes both man and God. Hegel’s grasp on religion relies primarily on philosophy and Reason. These concepts will all be important to keep in mind when discussing Kierkegaard’s ideas of reason, lunacy, and Faith.

Plato and “Divine Madness”

Plato utilizes the Theory of the Forms in order to illustrate the tremendous privilege it is to experience “Divine Madness.” Plato’s Theory of the Forms describes true Reality. “Reality” differs from “reality,” in that Reality is the true form of reality; that which has existed as long as the gods have. It is separate from the gods, but equally important and enduring. Everything has a Form, which is “the truly existing essence that guides the soul. It is the object of all genuine knowledge, visible only to the mind.”⁴¹ The ambition of the soul is to reach this Reality. All souls start here and over time either follow the truth or become corrupted and forget it. These souls that have strayed from the truth are subsequently implanted into humans. All humans have souls that have seen the truth at one point. Because of this, all humans have a preexisting knowledge of the Forms and are thus able to recognize any likeness to them. As humans, we live in a world of shadows. These shadows represent degrees of the Forms, but never the true Forms. For example, the sweetness I taste is a mere fraction of the true Sweetness that exists as a Form. To recognize that one lives in a

⁴⁰ Maybee, *Picturing Hegel: An Illustrated Guide to Hegel’s Encyclopaedia Logic*, (2009), pg. 8

⁴¹ Plato, *Plato’s Phaedrus*, (2009), pg. 32

world of images is to be sane. To experience the closeness of the true Forms is to experience the highest form of “Divine Madness.” However, it is not only closeness with the Forms that induces “Divine Madness.” Closeness with the gods stimulates very similar frenzies. According to Plato, these frenzies, although an extraordinary gift from the divine, sit at a lower rung on the ladder to true Knowledge.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato discusses four types of “Divine Madness”, each of which corresponds to its own god. To experience these forms of madness brings the inspired one closer to the particular god associated with it. All forms of “Divine Madness” are beneficial, for “we get the greatest goods from madness, so long as it is give as a gift from the gods.”⁴² However, as mentioned earlier, one form of “Divine Madness” surpasses the others, and that is Love. What makes Love different from the other three forms of “Divine Madness” is that Love not only initiates a type of closeness with its god, but also brings the lover closer to the Forms.

“Madness of Prophecy”

Prophecy is “Divine Madness” inspired specifically by Apollo. This inspiration is “an event occur[ing] in the form of being-beside-oneself, a *theia mania* – hence that inspiration like-wise appears to “the multitude” as madness.”⁴³ This “being-beside-oneself” is a direct result of the closeness experienced between the person and Apollo, and the following inability of the person to make sense of all that he is experiencing. The subsequent prophecies occur as a result of this proximity, “for,

⁴² Yunis, *Plato: Phaedrus*, (2011), pg. 129

⁴³ Pieper, “*Divine Madness*”: *Plato’s Case Against Secular Humanism*, (1995), pg.17

when the soul rises above its mind into this its unity, it foretells future events.”⁴⁴

This madness, incomprehensible to those who are not in direct participation, is “seen as an event in the mind of the one who experiences revelation and inspiration.”⁴⁵

“Madness of the Mystic”

“Madness of the Mystic” stems from the need to remedy “plagues and troubles that afflict certain families because of some ancient offense” and is inspired by Dionysus.⁴⁶ The only way to free oneself from these afflictions “seems to be possible only through a kind of madness.”⁴⁷ This madness manifests as a frenzied worshipping of the gods in order for the participants to “purge their guilt and protect them.”⁴⁸ The goal is a purification of the soul, “a “change effected in the soul (*psyche*)” in which the soul was purified and gained new powers appropriate to its blessed state.”⁴⁹ This type of madness is portrayed in the *Phaedrus* “as a kind of amazement or stunned recoil in which the celebrant becomes immobilized and also as a kind of madness (*mania*) by means of which misery is cured.”⁵⁰ In contrast to Prophecy, which is in the mind of the one who experiences it, “Madness of the Mystic” is experienced through rites and rituals. The frenzy can be observed by outsiders.

⁴⁴ Ficino and Allen, *Commentaries on Plato: Phaedrus and Ion*, (2008), pg. 199

⁴⁵ Pieper, “*Divine Madness*”: *Plato’s Case Against Secular Humanism*, (1995), pg. 19

⁴⁶ Plato, *Plato’s Phaedrus*, (2009), pg. 29

⁴⁷ Guven, *Madness and Death in Philosophy*, (2005), pg. 25

⁴⁸ Plato, *Plato’s Phaedrus*, (2009), pg. 29

⁴⁹ Kraut, *Cambridge Companion to Plato*, (1992), pg. 235

⁵⁰ Kraut, *Cambridge Companion to Plato*, (1992), pg. 235

“Madness of Poetry”

The third type of Madness inspired by the gods is that of Poetry. The Muses inspire this particular madness through possession. This possession “gets hold of a “tender” soul and “educates” later generations.”⁵¹ In order for someone to be possessed by the muses, the soul must meet certain criteria - “to achieve poetic frenzy (the frenzy by which men may be instructed in divine ways and the divine mysteries chanted), the rational soul of the future poet must be so affected as to be almost tender and soft and moreover untouched.”⁵²

“Madness of the Lover”

The fourth and final version of “Divine Madness” is that of the Lover. The gods that inspire this form of madness are Eros and Aphrodite. In the *Phaedrus*, Plato emphasizes this madness as a result from encountering semblances of beauty. The Form of Beauty “is the most attractive of all we can see” because it “shines through the clearest of our senses”, eyesight.⁵³ When we encounter someone who is truly beautiful, we are reminded of the Forms, specifically that of Beauty. This causes frenzy in which we “have a difficult time trying to control [our] passions, because [we] cannot fully understand what [we] are seeing.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Kraut, *Cambridge Companion to Plato*, (1992), pg. 358

⁵² Ficino and Allen, *Commentaries on Plato: Phaedrus and Ion*, (2008), pg. 51

⁵³ Plato, *Plato's Phaedrus*, (2009), pg. 36-36

⁵⁴ Plato, *Plato's Phaedrus*, (2009), pg. 36

For Plato, love experienced by mankind is “the human desire to bring understanding, truth, and virtue to the young.”⁵⁵ Thus, not only does love apply to the erotic, but it also pertains to the desire for truth. Love is the “human aspiration for the divine (...) and seeks to complete life in the contemplation of the Good as the Truth of Beauty.”⁵⁶ By the very definitions of the Forms, coming close to them brings one closer to Truth. Therefore, it is not only divinely inspired, but also an avenue to true knowledge and understanding.

Plato indicates that philosophers themselves are prone to experience “Madness of the Lover.” Wisdom is the source of his fervor and frenzy and when he comes close to something that resembles the true Form of Wisdom, he succumbs to the same madness that the lover of Beauty does. It is exceptionally rare for someone to experience this kind of madness as “only with great difficulty can a few fortunate people detect the forms behind the faint images that appear to our feeble organs of sense.”⁵⁷

Plato and “Mania or Frenzy”

The frenzy that Hegel describes strongly corresponds to the frenzy that Plato described about 2000 years earlier. Plato describes the frenzy resulting from “Divine Madness” as “have[ing] a difficult time trying to control [our] passions, because [we] cannot fully understand what [we] are seeing.”⁵⁸ Anything pertaining

⁵⁵ Piscitelli, *Lecture on the Symposium*, pg. 13

⁵⁶ Piscitelli, *Lecture on the Symposium*, pg. 13

⁵⁷ Plato, *Plato's Phaedrus*, (2009), pg. 36

⁵⁸ Plato, *Plato's Phaedrus*, (2009), pg. 36

to the divine has an extraordinary impact on mankind due to the fact that divinity by definition is a foreign, awe-inspiring phenomenon that humans cannot effectively understand, by virtue of them being human. The frenzy is a result of the contradiction between what we know and what we are experiencing and the resulting inability to make sense of it. The idea of frenzy induced by internal contradiction mirrors Hegel's own definition of frenzy. For Hegel, the inner conflict is also one of failure to connect what one knows with what one feels. This knowing and feeling is defined by Hegel as the objective and subjective worlds, respectively. The inability to make sense of the inner contradiction results in "a rage of reason against unreason and vice versa, and thus become[s] a *frenzy*."⁵⁹ Both frenzies result from a failure to understand the contradiction one is experiencing.

Additionally, both Plato's and Hegel's frenzies are characterized as a reversion to a prior state. For Plato, frenzy results from the soul recognizing semblances to the Forms. This recognition reminds the soul of its prior life among the gods and the Forms. During the frenzy, the soul aspires to again be among the gods and Forms. For Hegel, all madness, not just frenzy, is a reversion to "'nature' itself, the domain of instinct, passion, and unconscious drives, the life of the 'feeling soul'."⁶⁰ The "feeling soul" for Hegel is "its original shape."⁶¹

One key contrast nearly destroys the idea that Hegel's frenzy could be a later depiction of Plato's frenzy. Frenzy for Hegel is a purely unfavorable affliction, whereas it is a blessing for Plato. This is irrelevant, because Hegel and Plato are

⁵⁹ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, (1971) pg. 135

⁶⁰ Berthold-Bond, *Hegel's Theory of Madness*, (1995), pg. 168

⁶¹ Berthold-Bond, *Hegel's Theory of Madness*, (1995), pg. 40

indeed describing the same thing. The issue is the attitude of the philosopher. Hegel attributed the unexplained to the inner workings of the human mind, while Plato attributed it to the divine. Plato's ideas came about in a time where psychology involved study of the soul rather than the mind. For Plato, the soul was the access to the divine; thus, any characteristics of the soul (flaws or strengths) directly related to divine proximity. Conversely, Hegel's ideas emerged in a time when psychology began to develop as a medical discipline. In modern psychological terms, Hegel's idea of frenzy "would include the current classifications of manic-depressive or bipolar disorder, dementia, paranoia, and schizophrenia."⁶² As for Plato, ancient divine possessions have been "recognized as evidence of mental illness (...) such as schizophrenia."⁶³ That is not to say that the correct interpretation is one of a medicinal psychology. It merely indicates that both interpretations show evidence of the same phenomenon. Likewise, divine madness is madness in as much as it is not fully comprehended by humanity. This incomplete comprehension would be amended by Hegel's idea of mediation in positing that there is a universal reality in which Plato's madness would in fact be comprehensible; again indicating similar phenomena with differing attitudes.

An important difference to highlight, however is the directionality of the experience. For Plato, the truth is subjectively understood, while the contradiction arises with the objective knowledge of humanity. For Hegel, the truth is objectively understood, while the conflict occurs as a result of human over subjectification.

⁶² Berthold-Bond, *Hegel's Theory of Madness*, (1995), pg. 20

⁶³ Jeeves, *Human Nature: Reflections on the Integration of Psychology and Christianity*, (1997), pg. 50

Kierkegaard – “Objective” and “Subjective” Lunacy

Kierkegaard’s theory of madness rests primarily upon what he calls ‘inwardness’. Through inwardness “man comes to understand himself thoroughly.”⁶⁴ After looking into Kierkegaard’s ideas of reality and madness it is apparent that his works contain a recurring religious theme. Kierkegaard describes two forms of what he calls ‘lunacy’.

Insanity as a Delirium of Inwardness – “Subjective Lunacy”

In insanity as a delirium of inwardness, “the passion of inwardness grasps a particular fixed finite idea.”⁶⁵ This lunacy is subjective and occurs when “someone has an inordinate emotional concern for something finite that does not warrant this.”⁶⁶ The idea to which the subject is fixed “infinitely pertains to the unfortunate person (...) and pertains to no one else.”⁶⁷ Kierkegaard gives the example of Don Quixote being the “prototype” of this lunacy.⁶⁸ Don Quixote is fixed on the idea that he is a medieval knight, although he is not. This fixation pertains to him and only him. No one else sees Don Quixote as a knight. They see him for what he truly is. This fixation and passion indeed indicates that Don Quixote has a mind, but his mind has been warped. Therefore, the subject of this type of lunacy has a mind, albeit a

⁶⁴ Gabriel, *Subjectivity and Religious Truth in the Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard*, (2010), pg. 79

⁶⁵ Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (2000), pg. 203

⁶⁶ C Stephen Evans (personal communication January 12, 2012)

⁶⁷ Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (2000), pg. 203

⁶⁸ Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (2000), pg. 203

delusional one. The passion of inwardness characteristic in this type of lunacy indicates that the person afflicted by this lunacy experiences a subjective truth, a relationship with this truth, even though it is a warped truth. This type of lunacy is more favorable than the next solely due to the existence of the mind in this “subjective lunacy” and its absence in “objective lunacy.”

Insanity as the Absence of Inwardness - “Objective Lunacy”

In contrast, in insanity as the absence of inwardness, the subject has no individual mind. How can this be if “the something known by the blissful person is the truth, truth that pertains to the whole human race?”⁶⁹ The truth that is known by this person “does not in the least pertain” to him, meaning that what he speaks of are objective truths that he fails to internalize.⁷⁰ These truths are empty because they only “become (...) existentially viable truth[s] when [the subject] really internalize[s]” these truths, which the subject has failed to do.⁷¹ Truth, for Kierkegaard, is “that which he (the subject) relates himself to.”⁷² Without this appropriation, the truth has no meaning for the one who speaks it. The subject of objective lunacy lacks any relationship with truth. The failure of this subject to internalize these objective truths suggests that the subject himself lacks inwardness, and therefore lacks a mind.⁷³

⁶⁹ Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (2000), pg. 203

⁷⁰ Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (2000), pg. 203

⁷¹ Ed Mooney (personal communication January 12, 2012)

⁷² Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (2000), pg. 206

⁷³ C Stephen Evans (personal communication January 12, 2012)

Kierkegaard- Faith

Kierkegaard's idea of subjective lunacy deeply corresponds to his idea of Faith. For Kierkegaard, Faith is a powerful phenomenon not understood by human reason. Christian Faith is the belief in the incarnation, the Absolute Paradox according to Kierkegaard. When Jesus Christ becomes man, the ultimate contradiction has occurred; God, an eternal, perfect, immortal phenomenon, has become man, a finite, flawed, mortal being. Kierkegaard formulates three arguments against reason being the basis of Faith. In his work, *Kierkegaard's Argument Against Objective Reasoning in Religion*, Robert Adams explains and gives a name to each of Kierkegaard's three arguments:

- 1) The Approximation Argument
- 2) The Postponement Argument
- 3) The Passion Argument

Approximation Argument

According to Kierkegaard, "Faith demands a kind of certainty that cannot be provided by reason."⁷⁴ This argument is centered on evidence for historical events. It is Kierkegaard's claim that "rational evidence for historical events (and Christian Faith includes such beliefs) can never be more than approximate", for histories are past occurrences; ones that we as present beings can only speculate the accuracy of.⁷⁵ This inability to establish belief or infinite passion "beyond any possibility for

⁷⁴ Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, (1998), pg. 11

⁷⁵ Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, (1998), pg. 11

error” makes it impossible for Christian Faith to be based on this kind of reasoning.⁷⁶ The infinite nature of Faith makes certainty imperative, for “in relation to an infinite passionate interest no possibility of error is too small to be worth worrying about.”⁷⁷ For Kierkegaard “It is not possible to base eternal happiness on objective reasoning about historical facts”, because the possibility of historical error or inaccuracies undermine the strength of the objective reasoning.⁷⁸

Postponement Argument

Thought and reflection are both characteristics of reason. For reason and rationality to be based on evidence, one must acknowledge that “rational deliberation is in principle open-ended.”⁷⁹ This means that “it is always possible that new evidence will appear, or that one would gain new insight from considering the available evidence again.”⁸⁰ The implication of such a statement suggests that anything based on this sort of rational process can never come to a definitive decision for fear of misunderstanding the evidence at hand or not having enough evidence available at the time. To base the decision to have Faith on this rational process would insinuate that “the decision cannot be made decisively” which is contradictory to the “kind of decisive commitment” that Faith calls for.⁸¹ Faith

⁷⁶ Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, (1998), pg. 11

⁷⁷ Adams, *Kierkegaard's Argument Against Objective Reasoning in Religion*, (1977), pg 230

⁷⁸ Adams, *Kierkegaard's Argument Against Objective Reasoning in Religion*, (1977), pg 228

⁷⁹ Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, (1998), pg. 12

⁸⁰ Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, (1998), pg. 12

⁸¹ Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, (1998), pg. 13

requires an unwavering passion and commitment to that infinite inwardness. In order to base Faith on reason and rationality, reason and rationality must have a solid and unchanging foundation due to the unchanging nature of Faith. However, the ability to be reasonable and rational requires the understanding that we are always learning and discovering, and therefore must be open to these new insights. Faith cannot be founded in reason due to the unwavering commitment required of Faith.

Passion Argument

For Kierkegaard, “religious belief ought to be based on a strenuous exertion of the will – a passionate striving.”⁸² Risk is a requirement for one to have Faith; “without risk, no Faith.”⁸³ The risk, to which Kierkegaard is referring, is that of “hold[ing] fast to the (...) absolute paradox.”⁸⁴ The paradox to which Kierkegaard refers is The Incarnation. The risk that Faith requires is to possess a whole-hearted passionate inwardness of the seemingly impossible phenomenon of God becoming man. Faith for Kierkegaard is “the contradiction between the infinite passion of inwardness and the objective uncertainty”, that is, Faith is the contradiction between subjectively, or inwardly holding fast to what is objectively uncertain. One must hold fast to the idea of God becoming man without succumbing to the doubt that the objective uncertainty that this event’s paradoxical nature demands. This

⁸² Adams, *Kierkegaard’s Arguments Against Objective Reasoning in Religion*, (1977), pg 235

⁸³ Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (2000), pg. 207

⁸⁴ Hannay. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript: Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*, (2009), pg. 470

uncertainty stems from man's inability to "apprehend God objectively."⁸⁵ Objective certainty of God is impossible. If man were to objectively understand God, man would have power equivalent to God, and thus there would be no reason for God. In order to maintain Faith one "must continually (...) hold fast the objective uncertainty."⁸⁶ Faith is holding fast to the absolute paradox when all reasoning goes against it. Reason has no place here. Reason relies on evidence and proof; whereas Faith requires one to be committed to the infinite inwardness of an objectively non-understandable God.

Faith versus Reason

In the previous sections, we have suggested that Faith and human reason are incompatible. But is Faith completely against reason, or above it? There exists plenty of evidence for both arguments.

Faith Against Reason

Kierkegaard frequently alludes to "human finitude and temporality" as well as "God as unchanging and eternal."⁸⁷ The very definition of man and God makes the incarnation a contradiction. How can something that is by definition "unchanging and eternal" become something that is finite and temporary? Faith requires "the respondent to abandon the laws of logic and to embrace something which he knows

⁸⁵ Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (2000), pg. 207

⁸⁶ Climacus, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, (2000), pg. 207

⁸⁷ Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, (2006), pg. 119

is false.”⁸⁸ According to Kierkegaard, God becomes man “by going against its own nature.”⁸⁹ For these reasons Faith is in opposition to reason.

Faith Above Reason

Other arguments suggest that what Kierkegaard means by contradiction, is not a direct opposition, but instead “an “incongruity”.”⁹⁰ Kierkegaard often “defends the law of noncontradiction” indicating that the contradiction of which he speaks is not a contradiction in the Socratic sense.⁹¹ In order for a statement to avoid true contradiction, it must meet the requirement of either being “A” or “Not A”, but it cannot be both. However, for the Incarnation, the contradiction is not one that completely nullifies the hypothesis by the opposing definitions of man and God. The strongest argument for incongruity as opposed to contradiction is that “in order to know that the incarnation is a formal, logical contradiction, we would have to have the kind of knowledge of God that it is the point of the incarnation to deny we possess.”⁹² We, as humans cannot definitively state that man and God are in opposition. To know so much about God that we are able to prove a logical contradiction would remove the need for Faith. According to Kierkegaard, “the resolution of the paradox cannot be “known” speculatively.”⁹³ To understand the Incarnation in this way would indicate that “the divine is comprehensible to human

⁸⁸ Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, (2006), pg. 118

⁸⁹ Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, (2006), pg. 120

⁹⁰ Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, (2006), pg. 120

⁹¹ Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, (2006), pg. 121

⁹² Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self*, (2006), pg. 123

⁹³ Cullen, *Hegel on the Human and the Divine, in the Lights of the Criticisms of Kierkegaard*, (1989), pg. 102

reason” when in actuality divinity “cannot be grasped by reason precisely because it is absolutely other” to humanity.⁹⁴ Instead of against reason, Faith is above reason. The reason that does not understand Faith is “fallen reason that pridefully insists that whatever it does not understand must be absurd.”⁹⁵ This reason “is radically defective”, and thus not true Reason.⁹⁶ We are unable to grasp this true Reason by nature of our humanity. Therefore, Faith is above the fallen reason, which is characteristic to humanity.

Faith as Madness

Whether against, or above it, Faith is irreconcilable with human reason. Anything that does not fit into the realm of human reason is deemed insanity. Therefore, Faith is a type of insanity. As shown above, Kierkegaard proposes two forms of insanity: subjective and objective.

Faith as Objective Lunacy

For Faith to fit into the category of objective lunacy, it would be necessary for the person that has Faith to lack the application and inwardness of Faith. This opposes the idea that Faith is the passion of inwardness, for in this type of lunacy inwardness is completely absent. The subject in this type of lunacy would not have true Faith if Faith were this type of madness. For Faith to be true, it must be a truth

⁹⁴ Stewart, *Kierkegaard's Relation to Hegel Reconsidered*, (2003), pg. 352

⁹⁵ Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self: Collected Essays*, (1998), pg. 123

⁹⁶ Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, (1998), pg. 96

that applies to the person who has Faith. Therefore, Faith does not fit into the category of objective lunacy.

Faith as Subjective Lunacy

For Faith to correspond to subjective lunacy it must be true that Faith is inwardly experienced, and this inward experience conflicts with human reason. For Kierkegaard, “religious truths (...) can only be held by the strength of inwardness.”⁹⁷ This means that Faith is a solely subjective and inward experience – “it always entails inwardness.”⁹⁸

As mentioned above, Faith can either be seen as going against or above reason. With regards to the Incarnation, all reason is defied in the idea of an infinite perfect god becoming the temporal and flawed being that is man. Faith can similarly be viewed as above reason. We as humans do not have access to the absolute truth that is God. To make the judgment that the Incarnation is against reason is to assume that we know more than we actually are capable of knowing. Faith requires belief in this seemingly paradoxical phenomenon as well as the acceptance that we as humans cannot fully understand the reasoning of the Incarnation.

Flawed, human reason does not possess the capacity to understand the Incarnation. As a result of this inability, Faith is seen as a delusion. The possessor of Faith believes in something completely inaccessible to human understanding. For

⁹⁷ Gabriel, *Subjectivity and Religious Truth in the Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard*, (2010), pg. 79

⁹⁸ Gabriel, *Subjectivity and Religious Truth in the Philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard*, (2010), pg. 79

this reason in addition to the inward nature of Faith, Faith can be seen as a form of subjective lunacy.

Faith as Means to Absolute Reality

An important note to make regarding Faith as madness is that it is the human understanding of Faith that is this madness for Kierkegaard. The limit of human reason and understanding makes it so “religion begins (...) with the awareness of a reality that discredits our wisdom, that shatters our concepts.”⁹⁹ For Kierkegaard, “there is absolute, objective truth about the actual world.”¹⁰⁰ However, this absolute truth can only be found “in God’s view of that world.”¹⁰¹ This absolute truth is inaccessible to human reason and understanding. But absolute truth is accessible. It is through Faith that “we arrive at the external world.”¹⁰² Although this truth is in fact accessible to the possessor of Faith, the “knowledge of the external world is never objectively certain” and “involves a risk, the possibility of error.”¹⁰³ How can it be that absolute truth is accessible but never certain? For Kierkegaard, the accessibility of this truth lies in the “decision not to take the skeptical attitude” and commit fully to Faith.¹⁰⁴ As mentioned earlier, Faith is inwardness, and as inwardness, it is subjectively understood. Faith as subjectivity “does not bring God

⁹⁹ Perkins, *International Kierkegaard Commentary: the Point of View*, (2010), pg. 428

¹⁰⁰ Hannay, *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, (1998), pg. 170

¹⁰¹ Hannay, *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, (1998), pg. 170

¹⁰² Hannay, *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, (1998), pg. 167

¹⁰³ Hannay, *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, (1998), pg. 165-166

¹⁰⁴ Hannay, *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, (1998), pg. 166

into existence (...) but awakens inwardness to a God-relationship.”¹⁰⁵ It is through this inward subjective relationship and phenomenon seen as madness by human understanding, which objective truth and absolute reality is found for Kierkegaard.

Hegel’s Reason as Kierkegaard’s Insanity

Looking closely at Kierkegaard’s “objective lunacy” we are reminded of Hegel’s foundation of Reason – objectivity. It appears that for Kierkegaard, Hegel’s Reason is actually a form of madness. As previously stated, the subject who suffers from Kierkegaard’s “objective lunacy” speaks objective truths. These truths apply to everyone and as such are universal. However, the universal for Hegel is tightly bound to Reason. It is the lack of mind in objective lunacy, the lack of individuality, which makes this speaker of objective truths mad.

For Hegel, thought is purely objective, and therefore cannot “refer to unique individuals.”¹⁰⁶ This indicates an existing (M)ind which contains all knowledge and thought as opposed to individual (m)inds with individual thoughts. As a participant in this (M)ind, all of my thought is shared and comes directly from this objective pool. I participate in it and it participates in me. There is no individuality, no inwardness. The process of mediation leading to this objective reason, “annihilates the subject.”¹⁰⁷ According to Kierkegaard, Hegel’s process of mediation “dissolves (...) subjectivity into objectivity” removing all possibility of an individual

¹⁰⁵ Hannay, *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, (1998), pg. 159

¹⁰⁶ *Hegel Glossary*, pg 6

¹⁰⁷ Cullen, *Hegel on the Human and the Divine, in the Lights of the Criticisms of Kierkegaard*, (1989), pg. 102

relationship to the truth.¹⁰⁸ This lack of inwardness and subjectivity is a key characteristic of Kierkegaard's lunatic. The subject suffering from "objective lunacy" does not himself individualize the truth he speaks. He is aware of the objective truth but "does not deeply commit to anything in light of them."¹⁰⁹ He lacks the inwardness of relating this truth to his self, and only participates in the truth by virtue of knowing it is truth. Both Kierkegaard's lunatic and Hegel's Reason lack an individual mind. The individual mind as well as inwardness of thought is needed to distinguish person from person. Without it, every person is guilty of merely mimicking the objective truth that exists outside ourselves instead of understanding and interpreting this truth in the context of our individual being. Following this, we can go further to say that Kierkegaard's "subjective lunacy," by virtue of it possessing a mind, is in actuality superior to Hegel's Reason which lacks one.

Faith Above Hegelian Reason

In the preceding section we demonstrated the idea of Hegelian Reason as objective lunacy. Hegelian Reason lacks inwardness and individuality, both indicative of objective lunacy. As discussed in the section on Kierkegaardian lunacy, subjective lunacy proves more favorable than objective lunacy due to the presence of an individual mind and subjectivity. In relation to human reason, Faith possesses all of the characteristics of subjective lunacy. Subjective lunacy, by virtue of the presence of subjectivity, has the possibility of discovering truth. Therefore, Faith as

¹⁰⁸ Cullen, *Hegel on the Human and the Divine, in the Lights of the Criticisms of Kierkegaard*, (1989), pg. 96

¹⁰⁹ Ed Mooney (personal communication January 12, 2012)

a participant in subjective lunacy still possesses the possibility of truth, whereas Hegelian Reason as objective lunacy does not.

In addition to discussing Faith as madness, we also discussed Faith in the context of a means to absolute truth. Human reason is fallen reason, and as such cannot comprehend absolute reason and truth. This comprehension rests with God and God alone. However, access to this absolute truth is provided through the subjectivity of Faith, so long as the possessor of Faith commits himself fully. Through the subjectivity involved in Faith, “a God-relationship” is made possible¹¹⁰, and through this relationship “only God himself can reveal” the absolute truth.¹¹¹ Ignoring for a moment the idea that Hegelian Reason is Kierkegaardian lunacy, this form of reason still fails to access truth due to the lack of subjectivity within it. This again demonstrates a scenario in which Faith gains access to truth, whereas Hegelian Reason does not. By virtue of the possibility of access to truth, Faith sits at a position superior to Hegelian Reason.

Faith as “Madness of the Lover”

In Plato’s theory of divine madness, one form exhibits the most promise as an avenue to absolute truth. “Madness of the Lover” brings the possessed closer to the Forms, specifically that of beauty. Although the other forms of divine madness are in fact divinely inspired, it is only the “Madness of the Lover” that provides a connection between humanity and the Forms. For Plato, the Forms are “the object of

¹¹⁰ Hannay, *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, (1998), pg 159

¹¹¹ Stewart, *Kierkegaard’s Relation to Hegel Reconsidered*, (2003), pg. 340

all genuine knowledge.¹¹² In bringing the possessed closer to the Forms, “Madness of the Lover” subsequently provides access to genuine knowledge and truth. In a similar fashion, Faith also provides access to absolute truth. Like “Madness of the Lover,” Faith conflicts with reason. Limited human reason is unable to understand the unwavering belief in the Incarnation, and as a result labels Faith as the absurd. Kierkegaard himself relates Faith to what he calls ‘subjective lunacy’. However, as a purely subjective phenomenon, Faith enables the possessor of Faith to “arrive at the external world” or absolute truth known only through God.¹¹³ The inwardness associated with subjectivity is awakened “to a God-relationship” through which God reveals the absolute truth.¹¹⁴ Both Faith and “Madness of the Lover” provide avenues to absolute truth.

Conclusion

The abstract nature of the perception of madness generates differing views on its processes. Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Plato put forth seemingly unconnected theories pertaining to the inner workings of madness. Hegel concludes that all madness is unfavorable, while giving it the freedom to fit into three distinct forms. On the other hand, Plato reveres madness as a form of divine inspiration bestowed upon man as a gift from the gods. Finally, Kierkegaard neither praises nor condemns madness, only illustrates it as either a confusion or complete absence of inwardness. With regards to Faith, Kierkegaard admits that in relation to the limits of human

¹¹² Plato, *Plato's Phaedrus*, (2009), pg. 32

¹¹³ Hannay, *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, (1998), pg 167

¹¹⁴ Hannay, *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, (1998), pg 159

understanding it is in fact absurd. However, as a purely subjective phenomenon, it provides access to absolute truth. Upon further investigation, it is clear that these apparently independent theories do in fact intertwine on key connections. For Hegel and Plato, both description of “Frenzy” arise from the inability of the subject to bridge the existence of his subjective world (divine experience) with the objective world (human reality). Similarly, Hegel and Kierkegaard merge on a key aspect: the characteristic of absent inwardness. The surprise here is that Hegel’s absence of inwardness occurs in his notion of Reason, as opposed to his theory of madness. The implication of Reason as lacking inwardness suggests that Hegel’s Reason is actually a form Kierkegaard’s madness. This lack of inwardness characteristic in Hegelian Reason also puts it in a position subordinate to Faith. Furthermore, Kierkegaard and Plato unite on the idea of madness as an avenue to absolute truth. The concept of madness, for both Faith and “Madness of the Lover,” results from the human inability to comprehend the divine.

III. Descartes and Derrida: Fitting into Foucault's

Consciousnesses of Madness

Introduction

Madness is almost impossible to define in its own context. Throughout history insanity has been treated as a phenomenon opposing socially accepted norms, reason, rationality, and language. In the introduction to part two of his book, *The History of Madness*, Michel Foucault names four consciousnesses of madness in order to explain the differing modes of thought in relation to reason and insanity throughout the Classical Age. Foucault's description of these four consciousnesses can be applied to various historical periods, in addition to the Classical Age, to successfully describe the theories of madness present. The consciousnesses explain madness in terms of opposition, society, identification, and knowledge; however, all four fail to effectively know and define madness. Paul North summarizes these forms of consciousness in terms of "thinking 'mad' (critical consciousness), saying 'mad' (enunciatory consciousness), practicing the social exclusion of the mad (practical consciousness), and decomposing and organizing madness into a myriad of genres and sub-genres with their telltale signs and symptoms (analytic consciousness)."¹¹⁵

In an attempt to demonstrate the exclusion of madness from the realm of reason, Foucault introduces Rene Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

¹¹⁵ North, *Problem of Distraction*, (2011), ch. 2

According to Foucault, Descartes completely excludes madness from the realm of reason. Descartes famously states “Cogito ergo sum” – I think therefore I am – and extends it to “I think therefore I am not mad.”¹¹⁶ For Descartes, to think is to exist. In another extension, Descartes expands thought to reason. Thought is reason. As stated before, thought is also being. Without reason (thought), there is no being. By this reasoning, Foucault points out that Descartes’ idea of madness is the ultimate exclusion of madness. Madness is non-existence. Unreason is “excluded by the doubting subject” and “is no longer his concern.”¹¹⁷ Instead of addressing what madness is Descartes simply dismisses it as a phenomenon that concerns neither him nor anyone else who thinks.

The interpretation of the Cartesian idea of madness sparked a debate between Foucault and Jacques Derrida, who interpreted the idea of madness in a completely different way. In *Cogito and the History of Madness*, Derrida argues against Foucault’s reading of Descartes and offers his own interpretation. For Derrida, Descartes’ does not dismiss the idea of madness, but instead uses it as a pedagogical exercise in order to reach clarity. Descartes’ methodological doubting of everything is a form of philosophical madness that enables the doubter to reach clear and distinct ideas.

Derrida not only disagrees with Foucault’s interpretation of Descartes, but also argues against Foucault’s attempt to give madness a voice. According to Derrida, madness can never be understood by anything or anyone except for those who experience it, who are themselves insane. For this reason, it is impossible for

¹¹⁶ Daniel, *Descartes’ Meditations on First Philosophy*, (2006), pg. 2

¹¹⁷ Foucault, *History of Madness*, (2006), pg. 45-46

Foucault, as a man of reason, to do anything more than recognize that madness exists. The language of madness, by virtue of being unreason, prevents anyone living according to the language of reason from understanding it. For Derrida, Foucault's entire project is futile.

In this essay, I will show that both Foucault's and Derrida's interpretations of Descartes and Derrida's own theory on madness each fit into one of Foucault's consciousnesses of madness; furthermore, I demonstrate that the rationality of these theories are subsequently discredited by the nature of the consciousness they fit into.

Foucault's Four Consciousnesses of Madness

Instead of defining madness, Foucault examines the ways in which man has tried to explain unreason in the context of reason. For Foucault, "all madness has its own reason by which it is judged and mastered, and all reason has its madness in which it finds its own derisory truth."¹¹⁸ Each relies on the other and therefore each must be explained in terms of the other. He develops four consciousnesses of madness that man has used in order to explain the phenomenon that is madness.

Critical Consciousness of Madness

The first is the critical consciousness of madness, which "identifies madness and designates it against a backdrop of all that is reasonable, ordered and morally

¹¹⁸ Foucault, *History of Madness*, (2006), pg. 29

wise.”¹¹⁹ Instead of understanding madness in its own context, this consciousness seeks to categorize anything as mad that does not fit into what we call reason. In addition, any concepts outside of reason are condemned by this consciousness rather than defined. Anything existing outside of reason is not only different, but also wrong. Within this consciousness, we find science, which, in the certainty of its own reason, attempts to condemn madness “bound now by the chains of its objectification, still forbidden the possibility of appearing in its own right.”¹²⁰ Here, we also find Foucault’s interpretation of Descartes, which will be discussed later in this essay.

In this consciousness one cannot definitively define madness, but can only say what is not reason, and anything that opposes reason is termed madness. This, however, is problematic for Foucault. The critical consciousness of madness makes the mistake of asserting that it is not mad. This consciousness has an “ungrounded confidence in its own reason”¹²¹ and therefore makes the mistake of “claim[ing] that our own brains have the privilege of knowing the bounds and limits of God’s will.”¹²² This mistake not only discredits the reasonableness of this consciousness, but it also enhances the power of madness. This power manifests as wisdom; because “madness does not possess the certainty that it is not mad”, it “assimilates to madness the most obstinate wisdom.”¹²³ For madness to exhibit the humble stance of not declaring itself as anything for certain, it has an advantage over this particular

¹¹⁹ Foucault, *History of Madness*, (2006), pg. 164

¹²⁰ Felman, *Writing on Madness*, (2003), pg. 40

¹²¹ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 27-28

¹²² Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 44

¹²³ Foucault, *History of Madness*, (2006), pg. 164

consciousness, which makes the mistake of grounding itself in the certainty of its own sanity. For Foucault, nothing is definite, so this certainty discredits the rationality of this entire consciousness because anything that makes itself “the measure of all things, would be guilty of unreasonableness.”¹²⁴

Practical Consciousness of Madness

The second consciousness is the practical consciousness of madness. This consciousness differs from the first primarily in that it is a social construct. Here madness is seen as the “various forms taken by the social Other.”¹²⁵ Instead of asserting the certainty of its own sanity, this consciousness bases its authority on the assumption that those operating within it are the “bearers of the norms of reason.”¹²⁶ This is a consciousness of convenience in which the socially unacceptable are disposed of instead of dealt with. This consciousness goes a step further and not only outcasts that which does not fit the norm, but also forbids and silences it. It is within this consciousness that we find the confinement and isolation of madness prevalent throughout history resulting from “Reason’s progressive conquest and consequent repression of that which it calls madness.”¹²⁷ The practical consciousness of madness finds its credibility in the idea that those outside the norm have chosen to be there. For this consciousness, madness is a choice. In order to justify the exclusion of the mad from the realm of social normalcy, this

¹²⁴ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 44

¹²⁵ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 9

¹²⁶ Foucault, *History of Madness*, (2006), pg. 165

¹²⁷ Felman, *Writing on Madness*, (2003), pg. 38

consciousness sees the madman “in terms of a set of moral relations and culpability for having transgressed the code governing such relations.”¹²⁸

Again, this consciousness cannot definitively define what madness is, but illustrates it only as that which does not fit the norm. The idea of madness as a choice is problematic for Foucault. This theory only exists to promote the “homogeneity of the rules of reason and the norms of the social group.”¹²⁹ This theory is false, “as only those who are inside the group have the right to decide who is to be considered an outsider, accusing them of having made the choice to be there.”¹³⁰ Again this consciousness makes a mistake that inadvertently assigns power to madness. A divide is created by those within the group designating themselves as fitting into the norms of reason and order and designating those outside the group as failing to fit into these norms. This division unintentionally assigns power to the outcasts. By designating them as disorderly and by declaring their madness to be willful, the outcasts have now become a threat to the order of the consciousness. These outsiders choose to be so and thus “by an act of will, by the individual’s evil intention, madness complies with evil, multiplies it, and makes it more dangerous.”¹³¹ The rationality of this consciousness is again compromised due to the designation of power to madness and the unverifiable claim that those within it are “bearers of the norms of reason.”¹³²

¹²⁸ Mahon, *Foucault’s Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power, and the Subject*, (1992), pg. 41

¹²⁹ Foucault, *History of Madness*, (2006), pg. 28

¹³⁰ Foucault, *History of Madness*, (2006), pg. 165

¹³¹ Mahon, *Foucault’s Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power, and the Subject*, (1992), pg. 39

¹³² Foucault, *History of Madness*, (2006), pg. 165

Enunciatory Consciousness of Madness

The third consciousness is the enunciatory consciousness of madness. This is the simplest form of consciousness for Foucault. This consciousness again makes the mistake of assuming its own sanity, but does not serve to exclude or condemn madness. This consciousness only identifies it. Here madness “has a simple, obstinate and immobile existence, and no identification of its quality or judgment on its nature is required.”¹³³ This consciousness recognizes madness as both “a deviation from the norms of reason and (...) an object available for reason’s scientific knowledge.”¹³⁴ Although, this consciousness does not condemn madness, it still portrays madness in a negatively as the misuse of reason.¹³⁵ For Foucault, the main problem arises due to the loss of “distinction between “the powers of reason” and the “powers of the insane”.”¹³⁶ This occurs as a result of basing “all the objective content of any scientific knowledge of madness” on what is known and experienced by the sane (i.e. the negative connotation and recognition of madness).¹³⁷ By the very definition of being sane, one cannot understand what it is to be insane. The realm of insanity is one from which there is no bridge connecting to the world of reason. For this consciousness to base all objective knowledge of insanity on the observations made by the sane is to makes the mistake of too closely weaving sanity

¹³³ Foucault, *History of Madness*, (2006), pg. 166

¹³⁴ Gutting, *Michel Foucault’s Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, (1989), pg. 77

¹³⁵ Gutting, *Michel Foucault’s Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, (1989), pg. 77

¹³⁶ Gutting, *Michel Foucault’s Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, (1989), pg. 77

¹³⁷ Gutting, *Michel Foucault’s Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, (1989), pg. 77

and insanity. Insanity is now identified in terms of reason, which is impossible by virtue of insanity being unreason.

This third consciousness has again failed to define exactly what madness is. Those who operate within this consciousness merely acknowledge that madness exists. This identification is the extent to which we, as beings of reason, can understand madness. As beings of reason, we have no tools or means to further understand unreason. It is here that we find the ideas of Derrida, which will be explained later on in this essay. Again the rationality of this consciousness is discredited by the assumption that those who identify madness are themselves sane. This assumption puts the participant at the disadvantage of having the burden of proof for their sanity. The omission of this assumption by true madness is extremely important to Foucault, as nothing can ever be certain. To acknowledge this places madness at an advantage over reason. The concept of madness within this consciousness provides another advantage to true madness. The survival of this consciousness relies on the existence of madness. This consciousness does not operate until “someone is declared mad.”¹³⁸ Without the identification of madness, reason would not exist in this consciousness.

Analytical Consciousness of Madness

The fourth and final consciousness is the analytical consciousness of madness. This consciousness “classifies the forms, phenomena and appearances of

¹³⁸ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 28

madness.”¹³⁹ It is within this consciousness that Foucault finds promise of a truly objective knowledge of unreason. In this consciousness, “madness becomes an object of knowledge” instead of an opposition or outcast.¹⁴⁰ In the context of the previous three consciousnesses, “madness disguises most of its powers and truths in the unfamiliar.”¹⁴¹ However, in the analytic consciousness, madness has the ability to “rejoin the tranquility of the familiar.”¹⁴² The analytic consciousness seeks to categorize the “varieties of madness” in order to understand madness not as an umbrella term for unreason, but as the varying degrees of deviation from reason.¹⁴³ The analytic consciousness is the only one that treats madness as a tool itself in understanding the divergence of unreason from reason. We find Derrida’s interpretation of Descartes in this consciousness.

The problem for this consciousness arises in the conflict between madness as a predominantly negative phenomenon, and the positive nature of its use as a tool in understanding objective knowledge.¹⁴⁴ The analytic consciousness assigns a positive role for madness, which disrupts the notion that reason and unreason are opposites in their favorability. This consciousness, like the previous three, assigns an advantage to madness as a positive phenomenon. The difference, however, resides in the source of this benefit. The analytic consciousness directly and purposefully assigns this advantage to madness, whereas the previous three end up handing power to madness indirectly as a result of their own miscalculations. For the

¹³⁹ Dodd, *Foucault’s Void*, (2007), pg. 478

¹⁴⁰ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 28

¹⁴¹ Foucault, *History of Madness*, (2006), pg. 167

¹⁴² Foucault, *History of Madness*, (2006), pg. 167

¹⁴³ Gutting, *Michel Foucault’s Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, (1989), pg. 78

¹⁴⁴ Gutting, *Michel Foucault’s Archaeology of Scientific Reason*, (1989), pg. 78

analytic consciousness to be successful in knowing and defining madness, there must first be a successful dissipation of the notion of goodness separating reason and unreason. Because the perception of madness as bad prevails, the analytic consciousness of madness fails, just like the previous three, in truly knowing and defining madness.

All four consciousnesses of madness fail to truly know madness. Additionally, the four consciousnesses each assign a certain amount of power to madness. The critical consciousness makes the mistake of assuming its own sanity, an assumption that cannot be made according to Foucault. Because madness does not make this mistake, this consciousness inadvertently assigns a certain wisdom and power to madness. The practical consciousness assigns power to madness in the form of threat. The division that this consciousness forms between reason and madness not only separates the two, but also designates madness as a threat to order and reason by virtue of madness being a choice. Like the critical consciousness, the enunciatory consciousness also makes the mistake of asserting its own sanity. This claim places the burden of proof of its sanity on this consciousness. Additionally, this consciousness has no reason without madness. For reason to exist, madness must be acknowledged. For these reasons, the enunciatory consciousness provides madness with power in the forms of both wisdom and reason's survival. Finally, the analytical consciousness also gives madness a certain amount of power. The analytical consciousness describes madness as a tool for objective knowledge and

understanding. This consciousness assigns madness a positive role, and thus power as a means to true knowledge.

The methods with which power is assigned vary enormously between consciousnesses. The critical consciousness excludes and condemns madness, and in so doing overlooks its own assumptions. The practical consciousness designates madness as a voluntary existence outside of cultural norms, which inadvertently makes its threat of disorder more powerful. The enunciatory consciousness does nothing but acknowledge madness's existence, and as a result rests the survival of its reason on the existence of madness. The last consciousness discussed differs the most in the methodology of assigning power to madness. The analytic consciousness purposefully assigns power to madness, whereas the other three do so purely by mistake. The failures of the first three consciousnesses arise from the accidental designation of power to madness. These powers contradict the rationality of the consciousnesses and subsequently lead to their failures. However, as opposed to leading to its failure, the power assigned in the analytical consciousness makes it the most promising consciousness for Foucault. This consciousness only fails because of the unwavering concept of madness as negative and reason as positive.

Foucault's Descartes – The Critical Consciousness of Madness

For Foucault, Descartes' understanding of reason and unreason relies heavily on Faith in the power of the human mind. In "Meditations on First Philosophy" Descartes states, "cogito ergo sum" – "I think therefore I am". Descartes implies that one's entire existence rests on the fact that he is one who thinks. Thought

guarantees existence. The fact that one thinks is the only thing that is known for sure. For Descartes, thought is the foundation of existence. It is from here that we can determine what reason is. According to Descartes', good sense is distributed equally among men. The discrepancies in reason lie within how man conducts his thoughts. The only way to discover what is real is through meditation. Reason is the way in which one comes to know what is real. Thus the only way to participate in reason is through meditation. It is here that we come to know for sure that we exist; through the famous "I think therefore I am". Madness is not willed for Descartes. By the very definition of it being methodological, the doubt within which Descartes' operates establishes the fact that Descartes is acting out of a will to do so.¹⁴⁵ Descartes' will therefore removes the possibility of him being mad.

Descartes comes to the conclusion that thought is reason; "I think therefore I am not mad."¹⁴⁶ What is madness for Descartes? If thought is existence, and reason is thought, then it follows that madness is non-existence, non-being. For Foucault, this is the ultimate exclusion. It is possible for man to be mad, but it is not possible for the thought to be mad, so as long as one is thinking, he is not mad. Thought conducted incorrectly is madness. Therefore, for Descartes, the madman does not think. The madman is non-being. It is for this reason that madness has "no relevance for the rational mind."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ Mahon, *Foucault's Nietzschean Genealogy: Truth, Power, and the Subject*, (1992), pg. 39

¹⁴⁶ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 46

¹⁴⁷ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 43

After reviewing Descartes' argument, it is clear into which of Foucault's approaches his theory on madness fits, as well as the reasons for its prohibition from the other consciousnesses.

Foucault's interpretation of Descartes fails to coincide with Foucault's analytic consciousness – According to Foucault, there is a distinct division between reason and unreason for Descartes. Madness is the opposite of thought and therefore cannot be an object of knowledge. Madness is not analyzed or categorized, and no signs or symptoms are explored aside from the absence of thought. For these reasons, Foucault's interpretation of Descartes is eliminated from Foucault's analytic consciousness of madness.

Foucault's interpretation of Descartes does not successfully apply to Foucault's enunciatory consciousness – For Foucault, Descartes' madness is more than just identified. It is reduced to a concept of non-existence following the argument that thinking is the foundation of existence, reason is thought, and madness is unreason. In order for Descartes' theory to be enunciatory, madness must not be anything more than acknowledged. As a consequence of these features Foucault's interpretation of Descartes' conceptualization of madness does not fit into Foucault's enunciatory consciousness of madness.

Foucault's interpretation of Descartes possesses inadequate criteria for Foucault's practical consciousness – For Foucault, Descartes' concept of madness is not seen as a social other. Madness is only defined in the absence of thought. Additionally, madness is not an act of will for Descartes. It is an essential aspect of Descartes' argument that madness is involuntary, or else it would be impossible to

confirm his own sanity (the assumption of which we will ultimately discredit). Therefore, Foucault's interpretation of Descartes' idea of madness cannot be described in terms of Foucault's practical consciousness of madness.

Foucault's interpretation of Descartes strongly corresponds to Foucault's critical consciousness – For Foucault, Descartes' madness only exists as a contradiction to thought. As thought is the foundation of existence, and madness is non-being, it is here that we have found the fundamental contradiction. Non-existence is the ultimate opposition to existence; therefore, madness is the ultimate opposition to reason. For these reasons, Foucault's interpretation of Descartes' successfully fits into Foucault's critical consciousness of reason.

The consequences of Foucault's interpretation of Descartes' conforming to Foucault's critical consciousness are as follows. Descartes makes the mistake of assuming the certainty his own sanity through thought and will. For Foucault however, nothing is certain. Therefore, Descartes' mistake puts madness at an advantage. Descartes' madness possesses wisdom superior to Descartes' reason, this wisdom being the result of humility. The unverifiable assumption of sanity along with the contradiction of madness possessing wisdom threatens the credibility of Descartes' idea of madness.

Derrida's Descartes – The Analytic Consciousness of Madness

In a similar manner to Foucault's interpretation of Descartes, Derrida's analysis also comes to the same conclusion that the one meditating is sane. However, the difference lies in the use of madness. For Foucault, madness is

completely excluded from the realm of thought. For Derrida, Descartes uses madness as a pedagogical exercise in order to come to his conclusion of sanity. For Derrida, Descartes' doubting of everything is itself a form of madness for there are some things that "cannot be reasonably doubted."¹⁴⁸ Derrida justifies this interpretation by pointing to the specific passage where Descartes explains that to doubt that "these hands and this body are [his]", he would not "be any less insane" than those madmen who think they are made of glass.¹⁴⁹ Descartes admits that doubting these things is madness, yet he still utilizes this doubt (madness) "for juridical and methodological ends, in order to ask questions of principle regarding only the truth of ideas."¹⁵⁰ For Derrida, Descartes does not exclude madness, but uses it as means to clarity and truth. According to Derrida, Descartes sheds a positive light on madness.

Derrida's interpretation of Descartes takes on a very different point of view than that of Foucault's. Having demonstrated this, it is not surprising that Derrida's interpretation fits into a different consciousness than Foucault's analysis.

Derrida's interpretation of Descartes possesses none of the characteristics of Foucault's critical consciousness – The critical consciousness of madness condemns and excludes madness. For Derrida, Descartes does the exact opposite of this. Instead of completely casting madness aside, Descartes utilizes madness as an aid in order to come to know his own sanity. Within the critical consciousness, anything that is not reason is madness; and as a result, madness is seen as an opposition to

¹⁴⁸ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, (1978), pg. 54

¹⁴⁹ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, (1978), pg. 54

¹⁵⁰ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, (1978), pg. 59

reason. For Derrida however, madness is not only a positive phenomenon, but also a means to understanding reason. Madness does not oppose reason, but aids in its understanding. Therefore, Derrida's interpretation of Descartes does not successfully fit into Foucault's critical consciousness of madness.

Derrida's interpretation of Descartes does not successfully apply to Foucault's practical consciousness – For Derrida, it seems as though one may be able to say that Descartes' madness is in fact an act of will. Descartes' chooses to participate in this madness in order to come to truths and understanding. Although this aligns with the practical consciousness, Descartes' madness still fails to fit here. According to Derrida, Descartes' madness is not considered an "other" of any kind. It is not separated from reason, but instead used for better understanding of reason. Because of this, Derrida's interpretation of Descartes fails to apply to Foucault's practical consciousness of madness.

Derrida's interpretation of Descartes fails to align with Foucault's enunciatory consciousness – In order to fit into Foucault's enunciatory mode, the extent to which madness is understood must not pass its identification. For Derrida however, Descartes' madness plays a much larger role. The identification of madness is surpassed. Madness is not just acknowledged, but also used to understand reason. The understanding of madness is closely tied to the understanding of reason. Because it is much more than merely identified, madness does not fit into Foucault's enunciatory consciousness of madness.

Derrida's interpretation of Descartes fits successfully into Foucault's analytical consciousness – The main ideas of Foucault's analytical consciousness are that

madness is a means to objective knowledge, and that madness is also a positive phenomenon. Derrida's interpretation of Descartes adheres to both of these notions. According to Derrida, Descartes uses madness in such a way that madness becomes a tool for objective knowledge and understanding of reason. This utility of madness leads to a positive notion of madness.

Although the most promising of Foucault's four consciousnesses, this consciousness still fails to know madness. Because Derrida's interpretation of Descartes fits into this consciousness, it too fails to know madness. This failure results from an incompatibility of a positive notion of madness with the predominately negative idea that prevails in society. Because culture and society fail to see past the black and white, goodness and badness, of reason and madness, this consciousness, and thus Derrida's interpretation of Descartes, cannot succeed. This consciousness also assigns power to madness. This is the only consciousness that purposefully assigns power to madness as means to true knowledge and understanding.

Derrida –The Enunciatory Consciousness of Madness

For Derrida, "language is the medium of reason."¹⁵¹ According to Derrida, "to say madness without expelling it into objectivity is to let it say itself."¹⁵² But madness is, by definition, unreason. Therefore, madness cannot clearly and coherently give its own account. The only thing that we can know regarding reason

¹⁵¹ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 57

¹⁵² Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 57

and unreason is what reason is and what is reasonable. Madness can never be understood by anything or anyone except by the insane because “the best spokesmen are those who betray them best (...) when one attempts to convey their silence itself, one has already passed over to (...) the side of order.”¹⁵³ The absence of reason within the realm of madness makes it fundamentally impossible for any reasonable being to explain it. The very idea of madness “is by essence what cannot be said.”¹⁵⁴ For Derrida it is IMPOSSIBLE to write about, talk about, define, explain, or anything exceeding simple recognition of madness because any and all of these things are “a form of its repression, a form of violence against it.”¹⁵⁵ The very definition of man as a rational being completely prohibits any reasonable man from ever understanding, much less definitively defining madness.

At the completion of this analysis of Derrida’s argument, it is obvious to which of Foucault’s consciousnesses his theory on madness applies, as well as the rationale for its exclusion from the others.

Derrida’s theory does not successfully correlate to Foucault’s critical mode – In order for Derrida’s theory to apply, madness must be understood as an opposition and subsequently condemned. Madness for Derrida is not understood at all. Madness is that which can never be understood by virtue of understanding being governed by reason. As it is not understood, madness is not taken to be an opposition to anything. Therefore, Derrida’s theory on madness cannot fit into Foucault’s critical consciousness of madness.

¹⁵³ Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, (2003), pg.36

¹⁵⁴ Felman, *Writing on Madness*, (2003), pg. 43

¹⁵⁵ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 57

Derrida's theory does not effectively correspond with Foucault's practical mode

– Madness, for Derrida, is alien. Madness is neither a social construct, nor a violation of any particular set of norms. Thoughts on the nature of insanity can only be entertained through speculation. For Derrida, “any speaking subject (...), who is trying to evoke madness *inside of* thought (...), can only do so in the dimension of *possibility* and in the language of fiction.”¹⁵⁶ Therefore, any attempted characterization of madness as a social concept can never be anything more than fantasy. Due to these features of Derrida's argument, his theory does not correspond to Foucault's practical consciousness.

Derrida's theory fails to represent Foucault's analytic mode - Foucault's analytic consciousness of madness comes the closest to, albeit still far from, understanding madness in its pure form. It is in this consciousness that the possibility of an objective knowledge of reason arises. For Derrida, we can never have a true *understanding* or any true *knowledge* of madness. The only way in which madness can be truly understood is if the one attempting to bridge the partition is himself native to the realm of insanity; “to say madness without expelling it into objectivity is to let it say itself.”¹⁵⁷ Even so, it would be impossible for the intermediary to relay any findings, as he would be outside the sphere of reason. For these reasons, it is impossible for Derrida's theory to liken to Foucault's analytic consciousness of madness.

Derrida's theory on madness firmly adheres to Foucault's enunciatory mode –

Per Derrida's argument, the threshold of understanding is encountered at the

¹⁵⁶ Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, (1978), pg. 84

¹⁵⁷ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 57

identification of madness. All we know, all that we as rational beings are capable of knowing, is that madness exists. More often than not, in trying to understand unreason, we fall into “a simple trap, which is to think that one can reach out and into madness by the use of the very instrument that had preciously banished it, that instrument being the language of reason.”¹⁵⁸ Derrida attempts to avoid this mistake by stopping the analysis of madness at its acknowledgement.

It is important to note the significance of Derrida’s argument paralleling Foucault’s enunciatory consciousness. In so doing, Derrida, like Descartes, makes the mistake claiming that he is sane. As discussed earlier, nothing is definite for Foucault. An additional mistake positions madness at an advantage. Derrida’s theory relies on the survival of madness. This reliance puts reason at a disadvantage; thereby, promoting madness to the advantageous position of reason’s superior. The indemonstrable assumption of his own sanity, combined with the incongruity of the idea that unreason is superior to reason compromises the credibility of Derrida’s theory on madness.

Conclusion

Both Foucault and Derrida put forth strong arguments for their differing interpretations of Descartes. For Foucault, Descartes argues: thought is reason, thought is existence, and thus reason is existence. Along the same lines: madness is unreason, unreason is non-existence, and therefore madness is non-existence. Non-existence is the ultimate opposition to existence; therefore, Descartes’ argument fits

¹⁵⁸ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 56

nicely into Foucault's first consciousness of madness, the critical consciousness. For Derrida, Descartes presents madness as a pedagogical exercise in order to come to objective knowledge and understanding. This utilization of madness as a means to objective knowledge, along with its positive connotation, places Derrida's interpretation of Descartes into Foucault's fourth consciousness, the analytical consciousness. After arguing for his interpretation of Descartes, Derrida puts forth his own theory of madness. Derrida argues that madness can never be anything more than acknowledged due to the fact that we, as reasonable beings, have no way of bridging the realm of madness with our sphere of reason. Subsequently, his theory fits nicely into Foucault's third consciousness of madness. Both Foucault's interpretation of Descartes, and Derrida's own theory make the unverifiable claim that those operating within these theories are themselves sane. Both also allot madness an advantage over reason. The critical consciousness of madness designates power to madness in the form of wisdom. Madness does not assert itself as anything for certain, and in so doing, declares its insight over reason by acknowledging that nothing is certain. The enunciatory consciousness of reason only functions as a result of the declaration of insanity. Therefore, its very existence relies on the continuation of madness. This in conjunction with the obscure nature of sanity, the surety of which is a critical component of both arguments, brings into question the integrity of both Descartes' theory, as Foucault understands it, and Derrida's theory. In contrast, Derrida's interpretation of Descartes puts forth the most promising idea of truly understanding madness. It too assigns power to madness, but purposefully. The positivity assigned to madness rests in its ability to

aid in understanding reason. However, due to cultural and societal stigma of clear-cut goodness and badness associated with reason and madness, Derrida's interpretation of Descartes fails to know madness, just as the analytical consciousness does.

IV. Concluding Remarks

Madness in the context of reason, reality, and absolute truth has been the subject of debate throughout the philosophical tradition. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel presents madness as a reversion to the natural, subjective self. For Hegel, madness represents the manifestation of the conflict between subjective and objective reality. For Hegel, true reality exists as a “concrete totality”, a mediation between all existing things in the universe. All thought, all knowledge, everything exists as an objective universal phenomenon experienced by all existing things. Hegel claims that the way to true reality, and absolute truth is through objectivity.

In stark contrast to Hegel, stand the views of both Plato and Søren Kierkegaard. Plato attributes madness, specifically “Madness of the Lover,” to divine inspiration as well as human reaction to the presence of the Forms. According to Plato, the Forms are the “truly existing essence that guides the soul ..., the object[s] of all genuine knowledge.”¹⁵⁹ The experience of this madness is purely subjective, as it is experienced solely by the inspired person. By virtue of the source of this madness being of divine nature, madness for Plato is the avenue to true reality. True reality rests with the Forms, and is accessible to humans only through “Madness of the Lover.” For Plato, access to absolute truth is available through subjective experiences of madness. Similarly, Kierkegaard’s notion of Faith is seen by human reason as an absurdity. Faith requires an unwavering commitment to the improbable – the transition from God (perfect and infinite) to man (flawed and temporary) through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Kierkegaard admits that Faith is

¹⁵⁹ Plato, *Plato’s Phaedrus*, (2009), pg. 32

viewed by human reason as a type of “subjective lunacy.” Faith is a purely subjective experience and “awakens inwardness to a God-relationship.”¹⁶⁰ It is through this relationship with God that we as humans have access to absolute reality. For Plato, access to absolute truth is only accessible through Faith, as a form of “subjective lunacy”.

Taking a different approach, Michel Foucault analyzes the Classical Age’s position on madness in the context of a socially constructed reality. He formulates three consciousnesses of madness. The critical consciousness of madness isolates anything outside of our reason and labels it as madness. The practical consciousness deems madness as a choice made by the “social other” to exist in a world contradictory to our social and cultural norms. The enunciatory consciousness seeks to only identify that madness exists, nothing further. Finally the analytical consciousness attempts to classify different types of madness in their varying degrees of deviation from reason. All four of these consciousnesses objectify madness. Foucault finds this problematic, as the objectification of madness only isolates it and pushes it further from our understanding. There is no objective reality under which madness is distinguished from reason. Reality is a social construct developed over time as a way of explaining the differing subjective truths experienced by people. Subjectivity and personal experience is what creates this socially constructed reality.

In opposition to Foucault, Jacques Derrida argues that a discourse on madness is fundamentally impossible due to the barrier of language. For Derrida,

¹⁶⁰ Hannay, *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (1998), pg. 159

“language is the medium of reason.”¹⁶¹ All reasonable attempts at understanding and discussing madness are doomed to failure due to the restricting nature of language as reason. There is no translation between the language of madness and the language of reason. Therefore there can be no accurate understanding between the two. All that is possible to know is what exists within our realm of thinking and experience. It is the structure of our thinking and our experiences that have created this division between madness and reason. Reason is a construct of history for Derrida. To find true reason, or absolute truth, would be “fundamentally impossible, and is based on the acceptance of a myth – the myth of true origin.”¹⁶² For Derrida, there is no absolute truth. Both objective and subjective truths result from human experience.

In the second chapter, I introduced Kierkegaard’s and Hegel’s philosophies as demonstrations of the disparity between their avenues to absolute truth in the context of the objectivity subjectivity dichotomy. Hegel’s stance of a universal objective truth experienced by all existing things in the universe is seemingly irreconcilable with Kierkegaard’s view of a purely subjective experience of truth through Faith in God. In the third chapter, I established the inconsistency between Foucault’s attempt to categorize madness in the context of reason and Derrida’s view that madness is untouchable by those men of reason, including Foucault, trying to comprehend it.

Concerning the notions of absolute truth and ultimate reality, my study results in the following observations. Kierkegaard and Hegel diverge in their views

¹⁶¹ Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 57

¹⁶² Boyne, *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason*, (1990), pg. 72

on how absolute truth is accessible. As mentioned earlier, Hegel believes it is a purely objective phenomenon, whereas Kierkegaard believes it is accessed subjectively through Faith. However, both Hegel and Kierkegaard agree that there is in fact an absolute truth. For Foucault and Derrida, all reality is a social or historical construct shaped and molded to become what we now refer to as madness and reason. As a human construct, reality exists only as it is presented within human interactions. Therefore, there is no absolute truth outside of this human experience. In this way, one of the more subtle conclusions that we can draw from this study relates to recognizing that while they fundamentally differ in their methods of reasoning, Kierkegaard and Hegel still arrive at the same conclusion regarding the existence of an absolute truth. The case is similar with Foucault and Derrida: they differ in their approach to the relationship between madness and reason but arrive at the same conclusion regarding the non-existence of absolute truth.

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