



Mental Illness and Psychology

Michel Foucault, Hubert L. Dreyfus (Foreword), Alan Sheridan (Translator)

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This seminal early work of Foucault is indispensable to understanding his development as a thinker. Written in 1954 and revised in 1962, *Mental Illness and Psychology* delineates the shift that occurred in Foucault's thought during this period. The first iteration reflects the philosopher's early interest in and respect for Freud and the psychoanalytic tradition. The second part, rewritten in 1962, marks a dramatic change in Foucault's thinking. Examining the history of madness as a social and cultural construct, he moves outside of the psychoanalytic tradition into the radical critique of Freud that was to dominate his later work. *Mental Illness and Psychology* is an important document tracing the intellectual evolution of this influential thinker. A foreword by Foucault scholar Hubert Dreyfus situates the book within the framework of Foucault's entire body of work.

Mental Illness and Psychology Details

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Sam says

pretty alright. i'm sure his masterwork on the subject is much better, though

RandomAnthony says

Reading Michel Foucault's *Madness* made me feel stupid. Then smart. Then stupid again. Then smart for a little. Then okay. Then stimulated. Then relieved to finish.

I don't know much about Mr. Foucault but apparently he's written extensively about what contemporary Americans would call mental health issues but he calls (at least in translation) *Madness*. I'm not offended. Getting offended about his terminology would be stupid. A quick search indicates Foucault wrote at least one other book on the subject (*Madness and Civilization* or *The History of Madness*, depending on the edition, apparently). I'm not sure where this shorter work fits contextually but from what I can tell the first edition of *Madness* was a precursor to *Madness and Civilization* while the revised publication followed a year after the publication of *Madness and Civilization*. This book (uh, the one I'm reviewing) also was published previously as *Mental Illness and Psychology*. Got that straight? Good.

Anyway, I'm relieved answering essay questions on the first hundred pages of *Madness* was not required. Foucault writes some LONG sentences, with many clauses, and I had to re-read a few pages over to create meaning beyond the skim level. And every now and then he'd say something like, "And those three points summarize the Freudian approach to physiological organic treatment." And I'd be, like, "What the fuck? Three points? Let me go back. No, I see two. Wait, now I see four. Three? Which point do I drop?" I was quite proud when I could identify the correct three points. Were I studying *Madness* I wouldn't even bother reading before class. I'd wait until after the class's conversation to read. That's not to say the first hundred pages of *Madness* are not a worthwhile read. Wading through the text is a noble and stimulating struggle. I've not read a book in years that contained this many words I've never seen before. The first hundred pages focus primarily on the definition and origins of madness along with descriptions of both its treatment and societal context. I think. He argues against framing madness as a regression into childhood. I don't know anyone who would believe the assertion that madness is a regression into childhood. Remember, this book was last revised fifty years ago. So even someone with only a rudimentary understanding of psychology recognizes the dated nature of the analysis. I'd love to hear Foucault's take on psychiatric medication, etc, but he's dead, so I can't.

Foucault switches gears in the last forty pages to the point where I felt like I was reading a different, and much more interesting, book. He analyzes the way mad (and I should clarify that he seems to be usually talking about severe mental illness, not garden variety depression) people have been treated, included and excluded, etc. in European society over time. And he argues that only through the presence of madness can man identify the normal. I think.

"If carried back to its roots, the psychology of madness would appear to be not the mastery of mental illness and hence the possibility of its disappearance, but the destruction of psychology itself and the discovery of that essential, non-psychological because nonmoralizable relation that is the relation between Reason and

Unreason."

Yeah. What he said. There are no typos in that sentence. I double-checked. Pg. 124.

I don't regret reading *Madness*. The experience was a hell of a neurological workout. I wouldn't read more Foucault, however, unless the book was more like the last 40 pages and less like the first 100. I feel guilty for not wanting to do the hard work associated with the first hundred pages, but I'd read the last 40 pages again. So *Madness* is a cool little book with a whole lot of intellectual energy packed into its thin profile. But if I *had* to read another Foucault book I'd buckle down and face the text as a grim task that would be good for me. Sometimes I like reading books that make me feel that way. Sometimes I don't. *Madness* seems like a short introduction to Foucault's work, and that was good enough for me, for now.

Matt says

Foucault did not like this book, at least, according to the Forward in the California Edition. He "left a note categorically refusing all reprint rights of the first version and "tried unsuccessfully to prevent the translation of the radically revised 1962 version" which I read. *Foreword*, pg. viii. Foucault felt unsatisfied with the work for two reasons: "its theoretical weakness in elaborating the notion of experience, and its ambiguous link with a psychiatric practice which it simultaneously ignored and took for granted." *Foreword*, pg viii, citing *The Use of Pleasure*. Subsequently, it's difficult to read this and not be influenced by Foucault's own criticisms. However, there are some decent insights.

In the last few chapters, we see the Foucault who emerges in his later works. We see a skepticism rooted in a broad view, historical vantage point. His historical view of mental illness questions the "illness" of it all.

Generally speaking, madness was allowed free reign; it circulated throughout society, it formed part of the background and language of everyday life, it was for everyone an everyday experience that one sought neither to exalt nor to control [...] Up to about 1650, Western culture was strangely hospitable to these forms of experience. About the middle of the seventeenth century, a sudden change took place: the world of madness was to become the world of exclusion." Pg. 67.

The advent of experts and dedicated professionals changed our views as to the role of madness in our society. The "ill" patient was expected to submit to the knowledge of health practitioners so one could be "cured". But Foucault takes issue with a traditional doctor-patient relationship in dealing with psychological issues:

The consciousness that the patient has of his illness is, strictly speaking, original. Nothing could be more false than the myth of madness as illness that is unaware of itself as such; the distance between the consciousness of the doctor and the consciousness of the patient is not commensurate with that between the knowledge and ignorance of the illness. The doctor is not on the side of health, possessing all the knowledge about the illness; and the patient is not on the side of illness, ignorant of everything about it, including its very existence. The patient recognizes his anomaly and it gives him, at least, the sense of an irreducible difference separating him from the world and the consciousness of others. But, however lucid the patient may be, he does not view his illness in the same way the doctor does: he never adopts that speculative distance that would enable him to grasp the illness as an objective process unfolding within him, without his participation; his consciousness of the illness arises from within the illness; it is anchored in it, and at the moment the consciousness perceives the

illness, it expresses it. pg. 47

Thus, the understanding of a patient's madness is a dynamic process requiring the insights of those experiencing it. He ultimately concludes that current shift in societal attitudes toward mental health has lead to a lower threshold of sensitivity to madness evidenced by psychoanalysis "in that it is an effect as well as a cause of it." Pg. 78.

Not being a psychologist or a psychiatrist, it's difficult to critically evaluate Foucault's assessments. However, his sense of historical perspective provides an understandable and noteworthy basis to appreciate his criticisms.

Ayça Baran says

Kitap iki bolumden olusmakta ve bu bolumlere gecmeden once psikolojik bazi terimlerin birbirine karismamasi icin gerekli aciklamalar yapilmis, ornekler verilmis.

Ozellikle psikolojiyle ilgilenmeye yeni baslayan bireyler icin de uygun bir kaynak olmus.

Kitabin birinci kisminda hastaligin psikolojik boyutlari ele alınmis ve hastaliklari yasayan insanların icinde bulunduklari durumlar aciklanmis.

Ikinci kisimda ise delilik ve kultur adi altında tarihsel olarak toplumun delilige bakisi incelenmis.

Ornekler biraz daha fazla olabilmis ancak yine de aciklayici ve guzel bir eser.

Adriana Scarpin says

Provavelmente o livro mais acessível de Foucault, gostaria de ter lido a versão de 1954 para comparar com a reescrita em 62 já com toda a pesquisa do História da Loucura. O que importa é que ele parou de endossar as bobagens do Freud.

Asl? Can says

Di?er psikoloji kitaplar?ndan farkl? olarak Foucault delili?in-ak?l hastal?klar?n?n toplumsal boyutu hakk?nda dü?ünmek için bi kap? açm?? kitab?n? okuyanlara. Ben de kendimce o kap?dan içeri buyur edeyim sizi;

...

-Çal??! ?stedi?in ?eylere (ki onlar? gerçekten istiyor musun?) sahip olabilmek için, en basitinden karn?n? doyurmak için çal??.

-Yoruldum, b?kt?m. Hem ne kadar çal??sam da hiçbir zaman hayalimdeki cennetimsi eve sahip olmayaca??m. Yorgun arg?n eve gelip aynaya bakt???mda, kendinden emin ve ne istedi?ini bilen ifadem yüzüme oturmayacak, dü?ecek yava?ça. K?yafetlere, makyaj malzemelerine, arabalara, telefonlara ne kadar para harcasam da o ideal kad?na-erke?e dönü?emeyece?im. Yedi?im dondurma hiçbir zaman reklamlardaki gibi k?r?damayacak. Y?lda 20 gün tatil, yeterli mi bir insana? ?nsan her sabah saat 6-7-8'de kalkmaya ne kadar dayanabilir ki? 10 y?l? 20 y?l? 30? 40? Yok hay?r yapamayaca??m. Para harcamak da kazanmak da istemiyorum. Gelmiyor içimden. Ama mecburum. Mecbur muyum?

-Evet mecbursun.

-Hakl?s?n mecburum.... Hay?r de?ilim!

-Mecbursun.

-De?ilim. Para kazanmadan da harcamadan da ya?ayabilirim. Bi süre hiçbir ?ey yapmadan ya?amak istiyorum.

-Sen delirmi?sin tat?m. :) Al ?u antideprasan? doooo?ru i?e, haydi bakal?m.

sadako says

One of my favorite thinkers.

sologdin says

One of the learned professor's earliest known writings, and very obviously a graduate student's work.

The introduction is actually the best part, wherein the editor explains how the first draft (which is precisely not this text) was a more or less straightforward Marxist account of the issues at stake, and that the second draft substituted in heideggerian terminology for the Marxist arguments. Throughout, "the phrases are conveniently ambiguous. They could refer to his early Marxist analysis or to his later Heideggerian cultural account" (xxiv). Foucault revised it because of the "unstable relation of philosophical anthropology and social history" (xxvii), but after revision he "was not happy with the second version"—"and for good reasons," as it became "an unstable synthesis [!] of early Heidegger's existential account of *Dasein* as motivated by the attempt to cover up its nothingness and later Heidegger's historical interpretation of our culture as constituted by its lack of understanding of the role of the clearing in both making possible and limited a rational account of reality" (id.).

Text proper states its purpose as "to show that mental pathology requires methods of analysis different from those of organic pathology and that it is only by an artifice of language that the same meaning can be attributed to 'illnesses of the body' and 'illnesses of the mind.' A unitary pathology using the same methods and concepts in the psychological and physiological domains is now purely mythical" (10). One kickass way this plays out is that "if this subjectivity of the insane is both a call to an abandonment of the world, is it not of the world itself that we should ask the secret of its enigmatic status?" (56).

Nice summary of Freudian theory follows, with the notion that there is a myth of a psychological substance, such as Freud's *libido* or some other cat's *psychic force* (24).

It has been said that the final chapters (64 ff) are essentially capsules of his later writings in *Madness & Civilization* and elsewhere; it is quite correct that these brief final chapters anticipate the later developments.

Probably not the best place to start with Foucault; maybe best left for Foucault maniacs.

Barbara Justiniano says

This book isn't what I would call easy reading, but I thought it was good and informative, especially for the time in which it was originally written and published. I have a family member who suffers from schizophrenia and I highlighted many passages in the book that reminded me of him. I thought it was a

decent read overall.

Selçuk K?l?nç says

Zor bir kitapt?. Ruhsal hastal?klar? ikiye ay?rm?? nevroz ve psikoz diye. Ve ruhsal hastal?klar?n tam olarak anla??lamayaca??n? öne sürmü?.

Greg says

First of all, it pains me to no end that some of these amazing and beautiful minds -- Freud, Jung, Foucault -- all practiced psychiatry in the pre-neurology age, an age in which psychiatric pathology was believed to be due to silly notions like repressed sexual urges from a traumatic childhood event, rather than manifestations of neurological abnormalities.

But the real neat thing about this essay is that essentially you can find the nugget in his thought here which led to a lot of his later work. There is this little 3 page ditty which is a kernel of important thought upon which Madness and Civilization was based, The Order of Things was based, Discipline and Punish was based. This thought has to do with the ways in which a society's definition of "madness" is number one: a reflection of the sociologic pathologies of that society, and number two: the ways in which a society decides which "social traits" it finds undesirable and creates a method in which to discipline (and punish!) those individuals.

Will be interesting to finally read some of his later works and watch the evolution of this singular thought.

Josafat Ituarte says

A beautiful introduction and analysis to the history of madness.

Canan says

Ak?l hastal??n?n yap?s?, bireyselli?i, var olu?u, kültürel etkileri üzerine klasik psikoanaliz örnekleri de sunan kolay okunur bir metin..

Vasja Volin says

I wish I could rate this, but to do so I would first have to understand it. This is a book I'll definitely come back to, but only after some serious reading in both psychology and 1950's writing.

Muhammed Batuhan says

?lerledikçe aç?lan ancak yine de ba?lang?ç için sigmund/anna freud temelli birtak?m bilgiler isteyen eser.her post yap?salç? gibi e?elenmesi gereken :)
