

# Hegel and Foucault on *Rameau's Nephew* The Discrimen between Madness and Mental Illness as Biopolitical Threshold

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**Abstract:** In dealing with the Hegelian conception of folly, Michel Foucault does not focus primarily on the anthropology of the *Encyclopedia* that praised Philippe Pinel's therapeutic revolution. Foucault is more interested in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in its interpretation of Diderot's satire *Rameau's Nephew*. Accordingly, he investigates madness not on the basis of the *soul* as the still natural state of consciousness, but rather in the heart of the spirit itself when it is already articulated as social praxis, language and institutions. Madness, thus, no longer represents simply a fall back to nature, but rather the truth of reason beyond reason; not merely *mental illness* but *folly*, as well. At the same time, modern psychopathology finds itself challenged by its good right to judge madness. The *science of man* which it claims to be based on turns out to be an anthropological reductionism inspired bio-medically, an *anthropoiatry* which can be defined precisely with reference to the distinction between *mental illness* and *madness* that it constitutively ignores. This paper investigates the possibility of treating the discrimen between *mental illness* and *madness* as a threshold to biopolitics. It considers not only Foucault's reading of Hegel's Diderot interpretation, but also a broader constellation of thinkers and figures, all of whom have interpreted and experienced madness as the most intimate *ratio* of reason and not just as its *object*: from Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* to Hölderlin's *Empedocles*, from Maurice Blanchot to Karl Jaspers and Ludwig Binswanger.

**Keywords:** Madness; Mental Illness; Biopolitics; Hegel; Foucault.

MANES

*Dir hat der Schmerz den Geist entzündet, Armer.*

EMPEDOKLES

*Was heilst du denn, Unmächtiger, ihn nicht?*  
(F. Hölderlin, *Der Tod des Empedokles*)

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## 1. *Doktor Faustus*: the demoniac as condition and overcoming of health

One must always have been sick and mad, so the others no longer have to be. And no one can establish quite easily when madness starts to get sick: “Einer muß immer krank und toll gewesen sein, damit die anderen es nicht mehr zu sein brauchen. Und wo die Tollheit anfängt, krank zu sein, macht niemand so leicht nicht aus”<sup>1</sup>. Madness for Heraclitus was a private fact, the retreat (*apotrèphesthai*) into the sleep of a world of its own (*idios kosmos*) as opposed to the common world (*koinos kosmos*) of those who are vigilant<sup>2</sup>. The demoniac that in Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus* invades the private world of Adrian Leverkühn is, on the contrary, not only about his personal thirst for power and domination. The sense of triumph and divinization, the enthusiastic health effect, represent just the subjective side of the pact proposed by Samael. That would never be enough for the composer Leverkühn. In fact, he seeks not merely an enhancement of his life feeling and force; he aspires not only to private but also to public glory. Accordingly, Satan promises him that he will come to lead his time and to set the tone of his cultural era. The boys will swear by his name since, thanks to his madness, they themselves would no longer need to be mad. They will find in his folly the source of their own health, while he, in turn, will be healthy thanks to them<sup>3</sup>.

As Georges Canguilhem recalls, it is the very distinction between illness and health that is thus redefined<sup>4</sup>. Madness’ excess is no longer a disease. The *normality* of the common citizen is merely illness compared with the *geniality* of the artist. The latter is always, as Mann put it, the brother of the criminal and the madman, to the extent that he breaks the rules of normal life<sup>5</sup>. It is, however, not just *extravagance*; the artist’s *ex-cedere* always answers the need to overrun which is intrinsic to the finite discourse of normal people. The *Pfahlbürger* are thus at least as ill as is modern art once the *schöner Schein* that characterizes classical art has vanished. Only the Devil’s necromancy can restore the internal harmony of classical works. This is now barred to the Moderns since they lost the naturalness and authenticity of the Ancients, because of their satanic, even Jewish artificiality. Similarly, the syphilis which – on the model of Nietzsche – affects

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1 Mann (1967a, 319).

2 Heraclito (2007, fr. 24, B 95, DK 89).

3 See Mann (1967a, 328 f.).

4 Canguilhem (1951, 168).

5 See Mann (1967a, 333).

Leverkühn cannot simply remain a *mere illness*. On the contrary, it had to come to a metastasis in the *metaphysical, metavenereal, metainfectious*<sup>6</sup>.

In a more radical sense, however, the distinction between health and illness does not only undergo a relativization. The antipodal terms *sane* and *ill* are not just inverted. They are rather brought to their very limits as to a sphere that in principle escapes their jurisdiction. Thus, as regards Leverkühn's epochal geniality, every distinction between illness and health is *nullified*. The difference between sane and ill is simply not *pertinent* for spiritual works. These, in fact, always transcend the mere functional level of the organization of a finite whole.

This does not mean, however, on the other hand, that medical knowledge could claim complete autonomy in the field of its legitimate authority. On the contrary, due to its dealing with organic shapes and connections, medical knowledge is compelled to integrate its views by means of a knowledge that always exceeds any positive cognition. Having referred to Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, Georges Canguilhem stresses the constitutive dependence of biology and medicine, science and technique, on anthropology and, finally, on philosophy, the latter providing the necessary coordination of the system of values on which the former are based. To this extent, the concept of "normal", as far as it belongs to the human sphere, always remains a *normative* concept with a strictly philosophical scope: "toujours le concept du 'normal', dans l'ordre humain, reste un concept normatif et de portée proprement philosophique"<sup>8</sup>.

Nietzsche also seems to suggest that the *jurisdiction* over the distinction between healthy and sick is subjected to specific limits. In fact, it is not satisfied with distinguishing between normality and great health. In *The Gay Science*, the "große Gesundheit" itself does not always represent an end *per se*. Instead, it is also a *new means* for a *new goal*, the *ideal* of a *human-superhuman* good being and good will<sup>9</sup>. This ideal may often enough appear plainly *inhuman*, since it pretends to go beyond the present human being. Nietzsche understands, however, the seriousness with which this ideal *reinterprets* and drives to *parody* the *all too human* values of its contemporaneity, not merely as the denial but rather as the *truth* and *accomplishment* of human seriousness<sup>10</sup>.

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6 See Mann (1967a, 315).

7 See Mann (1967a, 328).

8 Canguilhem (1952, 169).

9 See Nietzsche (1988, § 382, 635 ff.).

10 See Nietzsche (1988, § 382, 258 f.).

Therefore, the devil's claim in *Doktor Faustus*, namely, that the folly by which Leverkühn may restore health to his sick contemporaries represents a form of *barbarism* to the second order – a barbarism not before but after civilization –, has to be seen as plainly tendentious<sup>11</sup>. It is equivocal as it belongs to the very nature of the devil. Leverkühn's folly cannot represent solely a relapse to the natural state of bestiality by a humanity that in the extreme refinement of its culture had lost any contact with its mythical roots. It must break with the *dialectic of Enlightenment* that Adorno und Horkheimer found at the core of European culture in the hour of its collapse. If it really wishes to heal its time, the folly of the genial German composer cannot simply operate on the same ground of the sick health of his contemporaries. If it really wants to represent the fulfillment of the imperfect humanity of normal citizens and offer a response to a requirement and a necessity that truly come from within this humanity and that are not simply imposed upon it arbitrarily, it cannot just return to nature a civilization that is collapsing due to its own incapacity to raise itself above its natural state. Leverkühn's madness cannot merely mean a falling back to nature after civilization's failing; it cannot merely represent another form of mental illness or health. It needs to be *other*, genuine *folly* in its pretention to overcome any natural bond, rather than consigning itself to the captivity of nature.

The lamentation cry issued by Leverkühn at the moment of his final collapse, instead of the song of which he is no longer capable, is certainly the sign of a fall back to nature. It is then understandable that the public of humanists and bourgeois immediately feel incompetent in the matter and invokes the *science of doctors of fools* ("die irrenärztliche Wissenschaft"<sup>12</sup>).

What a mocking joke on the part of nature, however, which offers an image of the highest spirituality when the spirit has vanished. Thus, the devoted Zeitblom can discover in the expression of the mad Leverkühn – an *Ecce homo look* is also noted elsewhere – the portrait of a noble gentleman of El Greco<sup>13</sup>. A last hope – a hope beyond the lack of hope – that transcends despair without betraying it, can only reside in a beyond of reason: an extreme reversal of meaning that would be superior to reason to the extent that it alone could achieve the rational striving to idealize nature's violence. This hope which would be more a *miracle* than a *faith*,

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11 See Mann (1967a, 328). About the one-sidedness in the modern understanding of the demoniac that can conceive the negative only in terms of finitude, lack, inertia, see also Tillich (1926, 32).

12 Mann (1967a, 665).

13 See Mann (1967a, 673).

would represent not a *denial of religion* but rather the *negativity of the religious* – “eine Negativität des Religiösen” –, by which every positivity in the world, every “falsche und matte Gottesbürgerlichkeit”, would be rejected. Beyond *any dialectic*, it could only reside in the *religious paradox*, according to which hope could first arise amidst the deepest lack of salvation, albeit merely as a question<sup>14</sup>.

Like the *religious paradox* and its radical negativity, the *paradox of art* unites the extremes beyond reason: in the total artificiality of dodecaphonic music, the *construction* becomes *expression*; in the end of Leverkühn's extreme work, the symphonic cantata “Dr. Fausti Weheklag”, it is from the final silence conquered by the progressive extinction of all the instrumental groups that echoes – in the moment of its disappearance – the sound capable of transmuting sense and lingering like a *light in the night*<sup>15</sup>. No science of madness can account for this silence to which Leverkühn devoted himself while losing the light of his own reason.

## 2. Jaspers and Blanchot: how Hölderlin lost himself saving language

Maurice Blanchot's interpretation of Hölderlin's folly is also marked by a radical rejection of a merely Promethean understanding of madness<sup>16</sup>. Blanchot's “La folie par excellence”, the introduction to the French translation of Karl Jaspers' *Strindberg und van Gogh*, largely influenced Michel Foucault. Blanchot's reflections on madness and the demoniac owe much, on the other hand, to his interpretation of Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, which he reviewed in 1950 as soon as the French translation appeared and to which he dedicated a long essay on “Critique”, that he reprinted slightly reworked in 1955<sup>17</sup>. Through Blanchot a sort of hidden chain emerges that leads to Foucault and that is also suggestive of Adorno's influence. According to Blanchot, madness is in some way deliberately sought by Adrian Leverkühn, who condemns himself to inhumanity in order to accomplish

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14 See Mann (1967a, 648 f.). According to Thomas Mann, these pages result from a redrafting inspired by Theodor W. Adorno (see Mann, 1967b, 821 f.). For his part, Adorno speaks of a *questioning negative* that stands as an *allegory of hope* and of a kind of *negative Last Supper* (see Adorno, 2003, 161). For the necessity, to escape nature, of fooling the devil in the end, see also Adorno (1959, 137), where the order of nature disappearing in another sphere is spoken of (“das Verschwinden der Ordnung des Natürlichen in einer anderen”).

15 See Mann (1967a, 650).

16 See Blanchot (1953).

17 See Blanchot (1950a; 1950b and 1955).

a human work and perpetuate reason: “il s’est lui-même élevé à la destinée imaginaire du Faust, recherchant en quelque sorte la folie, se condamnant à l’inhumain pour faire œuvre humaine et perpétuer la raison”<sup>18</sup>.

Blanchot follows Jaspers in denying the medical language of psychiatry any legitimacy to speak about the folly of artistic genius in its spiritual signification. The spirit cannot fall ill. It stands – according to Jaspers’ formulation – “outside the opposition healthy – sick”<sup>19</sup>. Similarly, Blanchot rejects any attempt to speak about the spirit, even in its *demonic* manifestations, in terms of health or illness<sup>20</sup>. Unlike Karl Jaspers, however, Blanchot does not see in Hölderlin’s folly merely the *occasion* or even the *condition* – if one wants to speak the causal language of a *scientific* and not merely *hermeneutic* psychiatry – for the emerging of the metaphysical depth of the soul<sup>21</sup>. In this way, the *last foundation of existence*<sup>22</sup>, that which in its genuine spiritual meaning always exceeds any attempt to grasp it by means of a medical discourse, can finally emerge and become an objective expression through Hölderlin’s poetical language. Hölderlin’s madness is not simply the external circumstance that enables the poet to appear as the radiance and figure of the extremely deep and invisible<sup>23</sup>. In particular, the extreme tension between an overwhelming experience of depth and the sovereign will to give it shape, in which Jaspers recognizes a typical sign of illness that Hölderlin shares with many other schizophrenics, does not simply correspond to the moment when schizophrenia manifests itself for the first time. It belongs to the life of the poet as a whole and represents his or her firmest and most conscious requirement.

From the measureless tension between *depth* and *shape* which is essential to the poetical language, schizophrenia appears not to be the *occasion* but rather a *projection* at a certain time and on a certain level. Schizophrenia corresponds to the point of the trajectory where the truth of the existence as a whole sacrifices its normal conditions of possibility, ruining the world on which it rests to become merely *pure poetical affirmation*<sup>24</sup>. One cannot simply content oneself to see in Hölderlin’s destiny the fate of an admirable individuality which seeks to accomplish itself in a Promethean tension that condemns it to catastrophe. Hölderlin does not decide his

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18 Blanchot (1955, 225).

19 Jaspers (1922, 173).

20 See Blanchot (1953, 18): “non parce que le démonique, l’esprit, serait malade, il se tient hors de l’opposition maladie - santé”.

21 See Jaspers (1922, 119).

22 See Jaspers (1922, 181).

23 See Blanchot (1953, 19).

24 See Blanchot (1953, 22).

own destiny but the destiny of poetry. He doesn't struggle to accomplish himself but the sense of truth<sup>25</sup>. The movement of his existence is not just his own, it is the very fulfilment of poetical language<sup>26</sup>.

It does not remain entirely clear in Blanchot what the necessity is that, at a certain point in the trajectory, forces the poet to illness. We understand that in a *dürftige Zeit*, located between the abandonment of the gods and their return still to come, the need to mediate between *indeterminate* and *determined*, *measurelessness* and *measure*, *aorgic* and *organic* can determine an intimate upheaval nearly impossible to bear<sup>27</sup>. This is not the reason why the passage from *personal reason* to *pure impersonal transparency* must be necessary. Why must it be seen as ineluctable that the artistic genius progresses from the necessity for the spirit to free itself from its ties to nature to the renunciation represented by the relapse to immediacy?

In any case, Blanchot never confuses the plans. He always keeps distinct the demonic moment that belongs to the movement of truth and the relapse into disease. Unlike Jaspers, however, for whom madness does not constitute a fundamental moment in the construction of truth, according to Blanchot the demonic belongs in its own right to rationality as the other of itself, only by means of which can reason be saved. Madness represents both the laceration between indeterminate and determinate, in which for a moment the trajectories of reason and schizophrenia coincide, and the impossible and inevitable mediation between the extreme poles of that same laceration.

There is no reason which, for Blanchot, can really escape the risk of madness and of disease. What is ruined, as already noted by Canguilhem, is Jaspers' claim to found a language of psychiatry, both in its purely scientific and in its hermeneutical dimensions, which can be constituted in full autonomy with respect to the eminently spiritual discourse of madness and philosophy.

### **3. Ludwig Binswanger's *Daseinsanalyse*: madness before the tribunal of history**

Michel Foucault's archaeology of modern psychopathology is also fundamentally driven by the intention to avoid any *confiscation* of madness by

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25 See Blanchot (1953, 23).

26 See Blanchot (1953, 17).

27 Blanchot (1953, 22 f.); on the difference between "aorgic" and "organic" see Hölderlin (2008, 428 ff.).

mental illness<sup>28</sup>. The discrimen between *folly* and *pathology* is indeed decisive for determining the threshold of the medical-biological reductionism that is at the heart of Foucault's condemnation of modern anthropologism. The diagnosis of modernity's profound biologism which runs throughout Foucault's work and represents the unavoidable premise for the later discourse on *biopolitics*, in fact, is not limited to deploring the undue transposition of concepts directly derived from biology onto the sphere of human sciences. It concerns, moreover, the sharing with life sciences, and more specifically with medicine as with a *technology* for the therapeutic restoration of normality, of a deep anthropological structure based on the distinction between *normal* and *pathological*<sup>29</sup>. To that extent, the critique of the distinction between *normal* and *pathological* has to be seen as part of the broader project to highlight the decisive role played in European culture by medical thought in defining the human being's philosophical status<sup>30</sup>. The reduction of madness to mental illness, particularly the neutralization of its radical otherness by means of its technical-scientific objectification in the field of medicine, has in fact been fundamental for enabling the anthropological structure defined by the partition between normal and pathological to arise. First by virtue of that structure was it possible to develop a discourse providing access to the *natural* truth of man<sup>31</sup>. For man may pretend to hold his own truth and decline it in knowledge, in fact, madness had to cease to be the Night and had to become just the vanishing psychological other of consciousness: "Il a fallu que la Folie cesse d'être la Nuit, et devienne ombre fugitive en la conscience, pour que l'homme puisse prétendre à détenir sa vérité et à la dénouer dans la connaissance"<sup>32</sup>.

Since his initial interest in Ludwig Binswanger's *Daseinsanalyse* and the introduction to the French translation of *Traum und Existenz* in 1954, Foucault endeavored to challenge the claims of psychological positivism to have reduced *madness* to *mental illness* and the historical human being to a *homo natura*<sup>33</sup>. However, to found a new anthropology, it is not *per se* sufficient to oppose the psychological distinction between *normal* and

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28 For the idea of a "confiscation" from the madness through the mental illness see Foucault (1961, 174).

29 See Foucault (1963, 35 f.).

30 See Foucault (1963, 202): "L'importance de Bichat, de Jackson, de Freud dans la culture européenne ne prouve pas qu'ils étaient aussi philosophes que médecins, mais que, dans cette culture, la pensée médicale engage de plein droit le statut philosophique de l'homme".

31 See Foucault (1962, 88).

32 See Foucault (2015, 668).

33 See Foucault (1954, 98).



*pathological* with the phenomenological between *authentic* and *inauthentic*, *fundamental* and *non-fundamental*. Binswanger's tracing back of *positive psychology* to a *phenomenological anthropology* has to be supplemented by a further reduction, namely, the reduction of *phenomenology* to *history*, as to an even more fundamental level. Beyond the mere empiricism of psychological knowledge and the pure speculation of philosophy, reducing psychology and phenomenology to history would allow for *essence* and *existence*, i.e., for the ontological analysis of the fundamental forms of *Da-sein* and for the investigation of its concrete conditions of existence, to be combined in human beings<sup>34</sup>.

Foucault's own radicalization from Binswanger's *Daseinsanalyse* and from his phenomenological reduction of mental illness in the sense of history and anthropology accords madness a fundamental place. Compared to the truly original level of history, however, madness can only take a secondary position. In Foucault's introduction to Binswanger's *Traum und Existenz*, madness occurs in the form of immediacy regained through a cosmic suicide. Behind this suicide, although Foucault does not allude to it directly, it is not difficult to recognize a reference to Hölderlin's *Der Tod des Empedokles*. In particular, voluntary death where dreamt has to be seen as the origin of the absolute imagination at its ultimate end. Just as dreams in the cosmogonic meaning that Binswanger attributes to them represent an escape into the radical subjectivity of the ego, only to the extent that they lie beyond the distinction between subjective and objective, so too does death constitute a return to the original indifference between freedom and the world<sup>35</sup>. In this, it reaches the *idios kosmos* of the Heraclitean dream, not simply a subjective falling back to the "self" before the common world of history, but the original space on this side of the distinction between "self" and "world"<sup>36</sup>.

Binswanger defines essential forms of existence on the basis of the original indifference of dreams which he treats as the fundamental dimension of the imaginary. However, *fantasy* must turn to *practice*, *meaning* must come to *expression*. Having reduced psychological positivism, phenomenology must in turn be surpassed by history as the speculative-empirical knowledge of human praxis. The *idios kosmos* of dreams and madness will thus be brought back to the *common world* of human action in time and

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34 See Foucault (1954, 93 f.; for a detailed reconstruction: Balzaretto (2012, 135 ff.) and Balzaretto (2018, 327 ff.).

35 See Foucault (1954, 125, 140 f.); for Empedocles' death, also Foucault (1963, 202).

36 See Foucault (1954a, 118 f.) and Binswanger (1930, 115 ff.).

space. The science of man developed in this way will finally free *concrete man* from his *alienation*<sup>37</sup>.

The very novelty of *Histoire de la folie*, compared to Foucault's first attempts to reduce the psychological distinction between normal and pathological to phenomenology and then to history, lies in the reversal of the relationship between one's *own world* and the *common world*. Madness, so to speak, *penetrates* history. It no longer represents the *idios kosmos* that needs justify itself before the *koinos kosmos* of the vigilant community. On the contrary, it is now history that is called before the tribunal of madness as before its most intimate *ratio*<sup>38</sup>. The pretention to speak about madness in the anthropological vocabulary of normal and pathological is definitively ruined. Similarly, Binswanger's claim to constitute a positive psychiatry by overcoming, on the one hand, Freud's *homo natura* and by integrating, on the other, the original, existential dimension of infinity is thus undermined at its base<sup>39</sup>.

#### 4. Rameau's Nephew: the sleep of wakefulness

Foucault seems to take Hegel by the letter where the latter states in the *Encyclopedia's* anthropology that madness does not merely concern the difference between wakefulness and sleep, as in the whole process of the spirit's becoming and consciousness' awakening, but also and more specifically the moment in which sleep penetrates the selfsame wakefulness: "hier fällt der Traum innerhalb des Wachens selbst"<sup>40</sup>. The *idios kosmos* belongs to the same *koinos kosmos*. To that extent, the special emphasis placed by Foucault on the close reading Hegel gives in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* has to be seen as highly meaningful. The pages Hegel dedicates in the anthropology of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* to madness and to Philippe Pinel, the French alienist known to have freed the madmen of La Salpêtrière from the chains in which they had been kept, certainly plays an important role for Foucault's archeology of modern psychopathology. They especially relate to Hegel's *partial liberation* of madness from the oblivion to which it was relegated in the classical age. With Pinel's *moral treatment*, madness is finally recognized as

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37 See Foucault (1954b, 110).

38 See the last paragraph of *Histoire de la folie*, Foucault (1961, 662) and also Foucault (1962, 89): "Jamais la psychologie ne pourra dire sur la folie la vérité, puisque c'est la folie qui détient la vérité de la psychologie".

39 See Binswanger (1930, 129 f.), Binswanger (1936) and Binswanger (1950).

40 Hegel (1992, § 408A, 426).

a moment of reason and is no longer treated as its mere abstract negation. However, the pages of the *Encyclopedia* do not constitute Foucault's true focus in dealing with the Hegelian conception of folly<sup>41</sup>.

The fundamental ground from which madness must be investigated has to be seen not in the *subjective spirit* and, particularly, in the *soul* of the anthropology as *Naturgeist*, consciousness's still natural state, but rather in the heart of the spirit itself as *objective*, where in the shape of "Bildung" it is already articulated as social praxis, language and institutions. This way, Foucault seems to follow up on two of Hegel's suggestions. On the one hand, Hegel notes that madness can be considered both as *illness* and as an *essential moment in spirit's development*. As such, spirit is free and is therefore not subject to disease. Only as *psychic*, i.e., as an inseparable unity with the corporeal, can the spiritual legitimately be called ill<sup>42</sup>. On the other hand, in the *Encyclopedia's* introduction to the philosophy of spirit, Hegel stresses that madness is not just a problem of spirit in its still natural shape, but of spirit *per se* as constrained to finitude. It therefore concerns the *objective* no less than the *subjective spirit*<sup>43</sup>. Madness is not, then, simply the sick obstinacy of those who oppose their own dream world to the watchful world of the community, nor is it – as is commonly admitted – even the madness of those who claim to transgress the point of view of finitude. It is rather, strictly speaking, "Verrücktheit", the *drifting* toward its opposite. It is the self-contradiction of a reason that seeks its foundation in what is, by virtue of its very nature to essentially *become something else: finiteness* as the very heart of the *dialectic*<sup>44</sup>. To this extent, madness – accordingly to Hegel's philosophy – has to be directly related to the absolutization of finitude and of a purely anthropological point of view, following the victory of bourgeois reason and values decreed by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. In a way, madness can be seen as the consequence of the *modesty* of the Moderns, which in its fixation on the *vain*, the finitude, turns into *vanity*<sup>45</sup>.

*Vanity* is – according to the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* – the true characteristic of *reasoning* by the modern *philosophy of reflection*,

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41 For an interpretation that focuses, on the contrary, on the pages of the *Encyclopedia*, see Morani (2003). For Hegel's *partial liberation* of madness and his interpretation of Pinel, see Foucault (1961, 597 f.); for Jean Hyppolite's influence on Foucault's lecture of *Rameau's Nephew*: Angelini (2017, n. 31, 131 f.); more generally, for Foucault's dealing with the Hegelian conception of madness: Kelm (2015, 346 ff.).

42 See Hegel (1992, § 408A, 426) and also Hegel (1970, § 408Z, 163 ff.).

43 See Hegel (1992, § 386, 394–396).

44 See Hegel (1992, § 386, 395).

45 See Hegel (1992, § 386, 395).

insofar as this thinking is opposed to the *conceptual grasping* of speculative thought. Vanity is the *vanishing* of every determination, both of the content and of the self, which follows the modern reduction of the spirit to merely formal, external relations<sup>46</sup>. As such, it is the simple consequence of the Promethean presumption of the Moderns and of a finite thinking that, in its fixation on the substantiality of things, remains essentially *natural*. The Nephew embodies emblematically this Promethean vanity of the Moderns in the prerevolutionary time of the French Enlightenment. It belongs to the phase of “Bildung” when the spirit, which already had *certainty* of itself and of its reality in the world, *alienated* itself from itself to obtain its *truth* by becoming world and history. In particular, the Nephew is part of the movement which has to lead from the particularity of the individual person, who is still taken in the naturalness of the ethical relationships of the family and community, to the general self of *absolute freedom* and *terror*<sup>47</sup>.

In the process of the “Aufhebung des natürlichen Selbsts”<sup>48</sup>, which constitutes the very goal of “Bildung”, the Nephew represents an intermediate stage. He finds himself located somewhere between the first experience of the spiritual conservation of the self in language, and the complete erasure of its natural existence through the death of the guillotine. The Nephew distinguishes himself through the inconsistency of his own name with which he takes advantage of his uncle’s fame. His existence as a scrounger, vagabond and original is that of an “expèce”, as he is called by his contemporaries<sup>49</sup>. In Diderot, the Nephew appeals precisely to his own character of *species* to give a biological account of his social status: just as in nature all species devour each other, so too do all conditions devour each other in society, without the law being able to offer a word of opposition in the face of the generalized domination of violence<sup>50</sup>.

The Nephew is unable to develop an accomplished individuality. This incapability corresponds exactly to the nature of his species and to the still essentially *natural* character of the state of spirit’s alienation which he embodies. Having already expressed his immediate natural self, the rest of naturality in him is not a problem of *substance* but of *form*. What is still fundamentally *natural*, or even *biological*, is the type of relationship that is

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46 See Hegel (1992, 42-44).

47 See Hegel (1988, chapter VI.B.: “Der sich entfremdete Geist; die Bildung”).

48 See Hegel (1988, 324).

49 See Hegel (1988, 325).

50 See Diderot (1951, 421): “Dans la nature, toutes les espèces se dévorent; toutes les conditions se dévorent dans la société. Nous faisons justice les uns des autres sans que la loi s’en mêle”.

established in him between the self and its manifestations, universal and particular. As nothing more than a *species*, though essentially spiritual, the Nephew presents a relation to his self which is homologous to the natural relation of a genus to its species. This is the *external*, in its hanging on substantiality still *natural* relation of a *judgement* and not yet the immanent, eminently spiritual relation of a *syllogism*.

The relation established by the Nephew to his self is fundamentally the *wesenlogische* relation of an immediate coincidence between *identity* and *difference*, without any superior *identity* that could mediate between them. That is why, in the pre-revolutionary world where the substance is represented by the bad universality of wealth, the Nephew always identifies himself with his social self and knows at the same time his immediate superiority to it. As Hegel put it, he is *pure personality* as *absolute impersonality*<sup>51</sup>. With the “schizophrenia” of the Nephew, the pure *identity* of the self immediately becomes *difference*. The madness of his *disrupted consciousness* as “Verrücktheit” is the immediate *drifting* of every determination toward its opposite: it is the principle of the “Eitelkeit aller Wirklichkeit, und alles bestimmten Begriffs”<sup>52</sup>.

Hegel denounces the folly of a social reason which believes it could rest with impunity on its own *anthropological* foundations. The *common world* that it presumes to establish on solid ground is actually crossed from within by an essential rest of naturality and violence that drive it toward implosion. The Nephew's vanity and schizophrenia can thus represent the truth of objective spirit on the way of its own fulfillment and decline. For his part, Foucault sees summarized in the vaniloquence of the genial scrounger and musician the parallel *anthropological* and *natural* character of the anthropological structure that allowed modern psychopathology to reduce madness to mental illness. Thus, the Nephew in his intimate dissociation and loss can say the truth of the fundamental equivocality – between *facts* and *values*, *knowledge* and *power* – of the pretended science of madness. Modern psychopathology claims to found its scientific knowledge on the positive notions of “normal” and of the “*homme normal*” or “*homo natura*”. Actually, these result, as from their “concrete *a priori*”, from techniques and practices of interdiction and internment that always presuppose *social* and *juridical* judgements and values<sup>53</sup>. By virtue of its fundamental ambiguity, psychopathology, not unlike Hegel's objective spirit, which loses

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51 See Hegel (1988, 341).

52 Hegel (1988, 347); concerning Hegel's interpretation of the Nephew in the *Phenomenology*, see also Balzaretto (2018, 214 ff. and 240 ff.).

53 See Foucault (1961, 176).

itself in the vanity of its claims of self-foundation, represents an *anthropoi-  
atry*, an essentially bio-medical understanding of man. In this anthropology,  
it is possible to see a form of *biopolitics*, a fundamentally instrumental  
and technological construction of human being which is determined by  
biology, not just through the importing of some specific notions but also  
and moreover on a formal, structural level.

Most especially, Foucault sees in the figure of Rameau's Nephew the  
synthesis of the entire history of madness, on an archaeological level, from  
the late Middle Ages until the nineteenth century<sup>54</sup>. Under the time of the  
historians, of a positivist history that presupposes the *nature* of madness as  
an illness and tells the story of the progressive, patient triumph of medical  
rationality, the Nephew designates the broken line that runs from Brant's  
*Ship of Fools* to Nietzsche's last words and perhaps to the cries of Artaud.  
The return of the figure of the *fool* in the Paris salons of the 18th century  
marks the reappearance of *unreason* and the *tragical experience* related to  
it after they had been reduced to silence by the rationalism of the classical  
age and by the practice of internment that corresponds to it. The Nephew's  
mocking laughter represents for Foucault, as for Hegel, not merely  
an error. On the contrary, the conscious confusion of the Nephew ("diese  
sich selbst klare Verwirrung")<sup>55</sup> tells the truth of a common language and  
world which, in the essentially still *biological* and *pathic* form of their ar-  
tication, believed they could base on their own vanity the vanity of their  
determinations. The principle of each and every determination's reversal  
into its opposite, according to which the Nephew in his "Verrücktheit"  
nullifies the *unverrückte* determinations of the vain power of his donors,  
is nothing more than the consequence of a reason that fails to go beyond  
a pure relation of *judgement and definition* – a "pur rapport de jugement  
et de définition" – to madness as to its own other. The Nephew embodies  
the truest truth of this anthropological reductionism and of its formalism.  
That's why Foucault can say of him and of his laughter that they prefigure  
and reduce the entire anthropological movement of the 19th century.

At the same time, according to Foucault, the Nephew anticipates those  
extreme experiences that alone know how to return *madness* to the free  
horizon of *unreason*. To precisely that *absolute freedom*, before the division  
between reason and unreason, existences such as those of Hölderlin, Ner-  
val, Nietzsche, van Gogh, Roussel and Artaud had devoted themselves,  
before sinking into the *renunciation* of madness and disease. Madness had  
now penetrated that same history which claimed not only to judge it but

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54 See also Balzaretti (2018, 230 ff.).

55 See Hegel (1988, 345).

even – as Alexandre Kojève states in his introduction to Hegel<sup>56</sup> – to cancel it completely from its face. It tells, finally, the truth about a *koinos kosmos* which is at least as sick as the presumed disease that it persists in wanting to cure. At the same time, madness calls for a gesture of pure folly, as necessary as it is impossible, that alone could redeem history's blind violence.

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<sup>56</sup> See Kojève (1947, 32 ff.).

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