

At the Opening of Madness: An Exploration of the Nonrational with Merleau-Ponty, Foucault and Kierkegaard

I. Introduction

- a. ...explore the irrational and integrate it into an expanded reason.¹

II. The Pre-rational & Irrational through a Phenomenological Lens

- a. Mythical or dreamlike consciousness, madness [*la folie*], despite all their differences, are not self-enclosed; they are not islands of experience without any communication and from which one cannot escap...mythical consciousness opens onto a horizon of possible objectifications.²
- b. Pre-rational: lacks the rational by taking place before or prior to the rational



- i. Our body may be in one place, but this landscape is not necessarily the landscape of our life. I can “be elsewhere” while remaining here, and if I am kept far from what I love, I feel far from the center of real life.³

- c. Irrational: lacks the rational by being contrary or opposed to the rational

III. The Irrational through a Historical-Structural Lens

- a. What happened between the end of the Renaissance and the height of the classical age was therefore not simply an evolution of the institutions: it was a change in the *consciousness of madness* [*la folie*], and thereafter it was the asylums, houses of confinement, [jails] and prisons that illustrated that new conception.⁴



IV. The Supra-rational through an Existential-Religious Lens

- a. [Abraham] is mad and cannot make himself intelligible to anyone.⁵
- b. Supra-rational: lacks the rational by being above or going beyond the rational



V. Conclusion

- a. Madness is a possibility of man without which he would not be what he is.⁶

¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Hegel’s Existentialism,” in *Sense and Non-Sense*, trans. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Patricia Allen Dreyfus (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 63. This was originally published in *Les Temps modernes* in 1946.

² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), 305.

³ *Ibid.*, 299.

⁴ Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London: Routledge, 2006), 120.

⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Sylvia Walsh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 67.

⁶ Henri Maldiney, *Regard, parole, espace* (Lausanne: Editions l’age d’homme, 1973), 210. French: “La folie est une possibilité de l’homme sans laquelle il ne serait pas ce qu’il est.”