

Cogito, Madness and Writing

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Abstract

This paper briefly examines the debate between Foucault and Derrida, which focuses on Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*, and copes with madness and reason through Descartes. Foucault maintains that modern reason has founded itself, historically, as a leading type of knowing through the orderly exclusion of its other: non-reason or madness. He argues that Descartes supported the philosophical instant in this exclusion. Derrida not only criticizes Foucault for having misconstrued Descartes' thoughts on madness, but also, in "Cogito and the History of Madness," objects to Foucault having periodised the exclusion of madness as something exacting to the modern period. This paper compares Foucault's response to Derrida in his article "My body, this paper, this fire" with Derrida's response to Foucault, delivered in a lecture titled "To Do Justice to Freud: The History of Madness in the Age of Psychoanalysis." I consider the oft-repeated view crediting Michel Foucault with the "destruction" of subjectivity. As stated by Foucault, we can talk about subjectivity merely within the meaning of that which is itself comprised by and through miscellaneous forces. I argue that attributing the destruction of subjectivity to Foucault needs some clarification. It is not altogether wrong given that Foucault places himself against the philosophical notion of a self-governing thinking subject. Neither is it altogether right since Foucault's scrutiny is still concerned with a variety of ways individuals are constituted. I suggest that Foucault sidestepped Derrida's accusations and instead went on the counter-offensive, hammering away at Derrida's method of public discourse. The peculiar thing about Derrida's position, however, is that it appears as though it repudiates the significance of the Cartesian idea of subjectivity simultaneously as it maintains that we are not able to think without it.

Keywords: Cogito, non-reason, Descartes, destruction of subjectivity, exclusion of other

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