CHAPTER III

Understanding Madness

*Show me how you are searching and I will tell you what you are searching for.*

(Wittgenstein, 1975. part III (27), pp.66-67)

Section I

Problem of understanding madness

Human beings are inescapably social animals, dependant on the group for their individual welfare and survival; welfare of the group, on the other hand, depends on the individuals --- on mutual understanding and cooperation among the group members. Also, perhaps unique among species, we are individually aware that our lives are of finite duration. This double consciousness ---of our interrelatedness and our ultimate death ---shapes our behaviors, our personalities and our interactions with others. Since prehistoric times, the bulk of persons within the human community have noticed that some members of the social group behave or think or feel and show emotions in ways that differ markedly from the way of rest of the group ---ways that are odd or maladaptive or, in extreme cases, dangerous to the welfare of the persons themselves. At times these differences may threaten the welfare of others and the group as well. It was these different
ways of thought and behaviors and persons exhibiting them that became the focus of interest of the ‘mind healers’.

Long before the age of reliable psycho-diagnosis (at most the past 200 years of our million-year history), a primitive vocabulary developed to label the persons exhibiting these odd and disturbing thoughts and behaviors, occurring within the totality of social life: terms like wild or eccentric or mad.

The words ‘mad’, with its different variants and equivalents, and the concept of madness have been with us from the dawn of civilization and are likely to be with us in near future. Equally old are the attempts towards understanding and containing it. But what we understand by the word ‘madness’ is often not very clear and more often we are not even aware of this less than desirable clarity, probably because of what Austin calls “blinding veil of ease and obviousness” (Austin, 1979, p. 23) The point unfortunately and frequently missed is that madness was never a unitary concept and the word mad has been and is being used to denote different phenomena in different contexts and at different points of time. An arbitrary list of these meaning may be: a) a pejorative naming of someone not following group norms for whatever reason, b) an affectionate term carrying a license for the addressee to be ‘a little’ different, c) an overtly emotional person, d) an ‘over’-religious person, e) a political rebel, f) an ‘over’-enthusiastic person etc. etc. etc. Moreover, labeling a person mad may encompass the person in her/his identity in totality, or as a temporary state. Depending on the context of use, the usage itself may carry an inbuilt idea of causation (e.g. mad out of grief).

Psychiatry was born with this rich but confusing legacy and a major part of its short life has been spent in efforts to unscramble the message. The process is still on and it is only in the last few decades that we are getting glimpses of what madness and mental illness are about. Expectedly, all different/deviant mental phenomena are not due to mental illness, nor do they reflect pathology in a medical sense. Psychiatry had to devise its own inclusion and exclusion criteria to define its focus of interest. Today the word mad as used in common parlance and literature and some social sciences and ‘mental illness’ as defined by psychiatry are so different that a dialogue between the two seems impossible.
As noted earlier, the debate we are interested in is whether these unusual human experiences and behaviors can be understood as illnesses or, in other words, whether these experiences and behaviors can be reduced to mental illnesses. Thus we can formulate the debate in question as:

*Is madness same as or equivalent to mental illness?*

*Can madness be better understood as mental illness?*

*Can madness be reduced to mental illness?*

These three questions are overlapping queries. Over the last half century a large number of scholars and academicians with different backgrounds have engaged with the enquiries and doubts. (Kendell, 1975; Boorse, 1975; Roth, 1986; Kendler, 2005; Pickering, 2006; Fulford, 2006) Their efforts have opened a lot of new grounds of enquiry and analysis and the last answer expectedly remains yet to be said. We shall cover some of these efforts later in our discussion but let us take note of an important point here. Almost all of these efforts have tried to analyze and understand what we mean by illness and mental illness and has taken the concept of different/deviant/problematic behavior as granted. In our view there is scope of expanding and clarifying our understanding of the issue here. If we have two entities/concepts X and Y and are trying to know if X is Y or if X can be better understood as Y we must have reasonably clear ideas of what X and Y themselves are. Scholars have devoted a lot of effort to define and understand the concept of mental illness but the concept of aberrant behavior (madness) as is defined by society is less clear. There is another point of relevance and importance here. Our concepts reside in different domains and have different methods of their formation. To give an obvious example, how we arrive at the concept of ‘honesty’ and how we arrive at the concept of ‘tree’ are different trajectories, different methods. If, in our endeavor to understand whether X is Y or if X can be better understood as Y, we find that both X and Y are being arrived at through similar trajectories, similar methods, then that itself becomes an indicator of equivalence of X and Y. This will also help us in unraveling the concepts of X and Y as understanding how a concept is being formed is part of understanding the concept itself.
As an aside, let us remind ourselves of the so-called ‘paradox of analysis’ attributed to G.E. Moore. If one takes philosophical analysis to be an attempt to say what something is then it offers an analysis of a problematic concept P by saying ‘P=Q’. But then either P or Q have the same meaning in which case the saying is trivial or they do not in which case the identity is false. (Langford, 1942, quoted in Fulford, 2006, OTPP, p 63) For our purpose, it will hardly be fruitful here to get into the controversy of whether philosophical analysis is at all possible or not and into the philosophical question of how and through what route we arrive at a concept. Suffice it to say here that our aim here is to get a clearer picture of what we understand by the word madness, of what kind of person or what condition of a person do we have a picture of in our mind when we call the person mad. Society’s conception of something is actually a concept/belief shared by most members of the society at a given time and this belief gets reflected in daily usage of the term by the individual members and in pattern of living of these members ---- in their communication, participation and shared living. These concepts/beliefs vary in different societies and cultures and transforms over time but some of them ---- actually quite a large number of them----- have surprising generality and longevity over different cultures and times. On second thought, this is not really surprising given the universal basic life form of humanity on the face of earth. The concept of food remains same across cultures and over time, given the shared biological need for food although what can be considered as food will vary in different cultures and over time. The concept of madness is somewhat similar. Most societies we know of have (or had if they are no more now) a concept of madness. What experiences and behaviors are considered as madness may vary in different society and at different times but a large part appears to be common.

As we said earlier, for the current study we shall keep ourselves restricted to the concept of ‘madness’, implicitly granting that there can be unusual experiences and behaviors that are commonly recognized as such but not termed ‘madness’ by society. It goes without saying that these entities can also become focus of medical/psychiatric interest. Obvious examples will be extreme restlessness and disobedience in children, out of control drinking behaviors in adults, pronounced forgetfulness in old age etc. In formulating this list I am obviously following current
diagnostic systems. There of course can be other examples like the stereotypes of absent-minded professors, eccentric poets and artists, religious devotees etc... The point I am trying to make here is that each and every one of these conditions may come to be termed as madness in lay parlance but an implicit understanding is that these will be metaphorical usage. This raises a very interesting point for discussion. A metaphor, by definition, is ‘the concept of understanding one thing in terms of another’. “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980,p.5) Metaphors are commonly taken to be a figure of speech that constructs an analogy between two things or two ideas, the analogy being conveyed by the use of a metaphorical word in place of some other word. Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphors are not just figures of speech and their locus lies in the concepts and not in words. They also show that a metaphor is, in general, not based on similarity but is typically based on cross-domain correlations in our experience, which give rise to the perceived similarities between the two domains within the metaphor. The difference is crucial in the sense that, according to the traditional view, a perceived similarity between two concepts gives rise to metaphor as a linguistic use and, according to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor itself is a part of the process of concept formation and it, in turn, gives rise to the perception of similarities between the two concepts. Discussion over these two viewpoints need not concern us here but the important point for current discussion is that metaphor is about perceived similarities between two concepts. Now this calls for relatively well defined boundaries for the two concepts and a relatively well defined line of demarcation between the two concepts. For example, if I use the expression “He has a moon-face” to make the metaphorical use meaningful the two concepts of ‘face’ and ‘moon’ should be separately comprehensible, they must not be overlapping concepts and the analogy of ‘roundness’ should be applicable to both. Now, in our daily use of language, concepts carry varying degree of specificity ---- they carry rather loose boundaries. If two concepts are close to each other and have an area of overlap between them, to term a similar linguistic use as metaphorical becomes problematic because the usage may very well be, in reality, an extension of or a confusion between the two concepts.

Wittgenstein noted that the concept of ‘heap of sand’ has a loose boundary and wondered whether the looseness was given in the thing itself. “‘Heap of sand’ is a concept without sharp boundaries-------- but why isn’t one with sharp boundaries used instead of it?---- Is the reason to
be found in the nature of the heaps? What is the phenomenon whose nature is definitive for our concept?” (Wittgenstein, 1967. 392. P.70e). Madness is a concept with very loose boundaries. Madness has to do with our mental lives, our emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions etc each of these being concepts with loose boundaries. The very concept of ‘mental life’ is one with loose boundaries. Thus, when the term madness is tagged to some particular example of human experience or behavior it becomes difficult to judge whether the use is a metaphorical one or one of extending the concept of madness itself.

Our current endeavor starts from this very point ---- an effort to map out the different possible meanings of the word mad, how the word is being commonly used in day-to-day practice ---- how madness is acquiring multiple definitions in social life. Words in a language have a chameleon like character ---- changing subtly with context of use but still retaining some core meaning unchanged. “How words are understood is not told by words alone.” (Wittgenstein, 1967.144. p. 26e). (Only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning).” (Wittgenstein.1967. 173. p. 31e). Wittgenstein propounded the thesis that our ‘form of life’ gives meaning to our words and concepts and language use. “For a large class of cases --- though not for all --- in which we employ the word “meaning” it can be defined thus: the meaning of a word is its use in the language”. And “And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life”. (Wittgenstein.1953. 19. p. 8e) Wittgenstein used the expression ‘form of life’ variably, never as a technical term. ‘Form of life’ can be loosely understood as the composite of all the social, historical, cultural, physiological and behavioral determinants that form the matrix in which words and language use acquire meaning. Taking this insight as our departure point let us start our investigations into the meanings of the word mad in common usage.
Section II

Analysis of the Word

How do we go about this task? First we shall see what the Oxford philosopher John Langshaw Austin has to suggest in this regard. Austin is widely associated with the concept of the speech act and the idea that speech is itself a form of action. Consequently, in his understanding language is not just a passive practice of describing a given reality, but a particular practice that can be used to invent and affect realities. His work in the 1950s provided both a theoretical outline and the terminology for the modern study of speech acts. Though Austin himself disavowed any overt indebtedness to Wittgenstein's later philosophy he staunchly advocated the examination of the way words are ordinarily used in order to elucidate meaning, and avoid philosophical confusions. To quote Austin about use and meaning of words:

“First, words are our tools, and, as a minimum, we should use clean tools: we should know what we mean and what we do not, and we must forearm ourselves against the traps that language sets us. Secondly, words are not (except in their own little corner) facts or things: we need therefore to prise them off the world, to hold them apart from and against it, so that we can realize their inadequacies and arbitrariness, and can re-look at the world without blinkers. Thirdly, and more hopefully, our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth marking, in the lifetime of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in the ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any you and I are likely to think up in our arm-chairs of an afternoon --- the most favoured alternative method”. (Austin, 1979. p.9)
Against what he terms as “blinding veil of ease and obviousness” Austin proposes some curious philosophical tools. For instance, he uses a sort of word game for developing an understanding of a key concept. This involves taking up a dictionary and finding a selection of terms relating to the key concept and then looking up each of the words in the explanation of their meaning. This process is iterated until the list of words begins to repeat, closing in a “family circle” of words relating to the key concept. To again quote Austin himself:

“……use the dictionary. ……start with a widish selection of obviously relevant terms, and to consult the dictionary under each: it will be found that, in the explanations of the various meanings of each, a surprising number of other terms occur, which are germane though of course not often synonymous. We then look up each of these, bringing in more for our bag from the ‘definitions’ given in each case; and when we have continued for a little, it will generally be found that the family circle begins to close, until ultimately it is complete and come only upon repetitions.”

(Austin, 1979. p.11)

Taking Austin’s suggestion, we decided to approach the problem in two ways. We shall call these Attempt-I and Attempt-II. Attempt I will be to do exactly what Austin advises. We shall search for the word mad in dictionaries. We shall keep search restricted to Bengali as the current author has Bengali as mother tongue and is naturally more comfortable in it. Moreover Bengali, though the eighth commonly spoken language of the world is spoken by far less number of people than English and by people of relatively more uniform cultural and regional background. Bengali and English are the only two options available to the author. Two common and standard Bengali dictionaries, namely Chalantika by Rajsekhar Basu and the Samsad Bangla Avidhan will be used and we shall look up the word pagol (Bengali word for mad) in them in an Austinian method. Attempt II will be to search for the use of the word pagol in Tagore songs (Rabindrasangeet). This may sound somewhat surprising and need some explanation. As we shall show shortly, Attempt I yields very little ---- may be due to the very nature of the problem here ---- madness. This calls for some more effort to tease out the meaning of the word. Use of resource from literature may be grounded on two reasons. First is of course the easy availability of the resource. Second, literature largely reflects the lived life of the people and follows the same linguistic rules as in ordinary usage. Barring works like Joyces’s Finnagen’s Wake or Lewis Carroll’s Hunting of the Snark and such others, the above assumption will be true for most literary outputs and certainly for
most of Rabindranath Tagore’s works. Moreover, it is commonly held in both literary and lay circles that Tagore’s songs in their totality touch and reflect all aspects of Bengali cultural, spiritual and emotional life and experience.

We made a search for three words in the total lyrics of *Rabindrasangeet*. Initially, a manual search by going through all the available lyrics in *Gitabitan* (anthology of *Rabindrasangeet*) was done and the process was repeated with fourth volume (collected lyrics of all the songs by Tagore) of *Rabindra Rachanaboli* (collected works of Rabindranath Tagore) published by *Paschim Banga Sarkar* (West Bengal Govt. 1987). Later an electronic search was instituted through the *Rabindra Rachanaboli* (collected works of Rabindranath) available in electronic version. Expectedly, results obtained through all three searches were identical. The three words we searched for were *pagol, khyapa* and *unmad* as we obtained from attempt I.

Results

Attempt I

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PAGOL ------------- KHSHYAPA/KHYAPA --------------- UNMAD

(a) Chalantika:

Pagol ------ unmad, batul, khyapa, matta
Unmad ------ pagol, khipta, batul
Batul ------ pagol, unmad
Khyapa ---- pagol
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(b) Samsad;

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bengali Word</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pagol</td>
<td>unmad, batul, khyapa, matta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmad</td>
<td>pramatta, unmatta, khipta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batul</td>
<td>pagol, unmad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khyapa</td>
<td>unmatta, pagol,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We have already come across the words *pagol*, *khyapa* and *unmad* all of which can be translated as ‘mad’. *Khyapa* can also be translated as eccentric signifying perhaps a lesser degree of madness. Here we come across a few new words like *matta*, *pramatta* and *unmatta* all of which derive from the root word *matta* which means intoxicated or one too much preoccupied/obsessed with something and being restless for that. *Khipta* is the original Sanskrit word from which *khyapa* is derived and means the same. *Batul* usually means one who talks nonsense and talks too much. It is a word less commonly used in colloquial Bengali today. *Unmad*, *matta*, *unmatta*, *pramatta* and *khipta* (*kshipta*) are all original Sanskrit words while *pagol* is an indigenous Bengali word of uncertain origin and is the most commonly used one of all these. *Pagla* is a more colloquial form of *pagol*.

After going through this dictionary work, we have to conclude with regret that this has not really helped us much in unraveling the meaning of madness. Except giving us a short list of synonyms it does not provide much insight about what madness is about. Still, one interesting point should be mentioned here. Daily linguistic use somehow connects the state of being intoxicated with madness. This is interesting on two accounts: first, the use suggests madness to be caused by external agents, namely intoxicating substances, and second, the use predates psychiatry’s inclusion of substance abuse problems as mental illnesses.

**Attempt II**

There are a total about twenty-two hundred songs composed by Rabindranath Tagore and for about two hundred of these songs we have the lyric but the music scores are not available. The numbers are not
exact because for some of these songs it is not clear whether Tagore wrote those lyrics himself or someone else’s composition came to be known as Tagore’s. For some other songs, lyric is clearly Tagore’s but the music composition was probably by someone else. It is well known that during his early creative years not much importance was given to correct historical documentation.

There is not a single instance where Tagore has used the word *unmad* in any of his songs (though quite a number of times we come across this word in his prose writings). We have identified seventy-five songs where either of the words *pagol* or *khyapa* is used. Quite a number of times one of these words is used more than once in a single song and in five cases both the words are used in a single song. Overall reading of the texts does not suggest these two words being used in any different sense and we have taken them (*pagol* and *khyapa*) as synonymous.

The list of these songs (using the words *pagol* and *khyapa*) is given in the appendix. A few points about this list need to be noted here. First, to avoid unnecessary increase in volume we have given only part of the song containing these words and the minimal part necessary to make the meaning of the usage of the word clear. Where the word occurs not in the first line but in later part of the lyric we have given the first line/stanza of the lyric so that the song can be easily identified. Second, Tagore’s songs and lyrics are virtually un-translatable. These songs are so much replete with multiple nuances of Bengali culture, Bengali language and allusions of myth and text that they defy translation into another language. Some attempts have been made in the past towards translation into English but these have remained relatively insignificant. Translation of Tagore’s songs may be within the capability of some genius scholar-poet of the future but this task is absolutely beyond the reach of the current author. However, some minimal attempt at translation is necessary for the current work just to make the result understandable in English. We have done just that ---- taken the minimal route----- by rendering the minimum part of the song into English so that the usage becomes clear. No attempt has been made towards any literary merit or standard. Third, a song is not just its lyric but a vibrant whole of lyric and music with its melody, rhythm and harmony ----- especially for Rabindrasangeet. It is our strong belief that music lends distinct and valuable nuances to the lyric and the use of individual words within the lyric but we shall not attempt any such analysis here.
Repeated perusal of these songs and lyrics lead us to realize that the different uses of the target words can be categorized into a few types. Each one summarizes a particular and distinctive usage but a single instance of use of the word may sometimes encompass more than one meaning. These categories are not mutually exclusive, rather they overlap in a large way and derive from one another but in each particular use one meaning predominates, sometimes more than one.

The different usages (meanings) of pagol/khyapa in Tagore’s songs can be given as:

a) *Pagol* as one who breaks rules/norms.
   eg. Pagol haoya, pagla jhora etc.

b) *Pagol* as one who is in an intense emotional state.
   eg. Tabe khane khane keno, amar hriday pagol heno,

c) *Pagol* as abujh/boka which can be roughly translated as impractical or childish
   eg. Andhar rate ekla pagol jai knede

d) *Pagol* as one who is over-involved with something.
   eg. 0i dakhin batas gandhe pagol

e) *Pagol* as someone feeling a non-specific disturbance within self (but this disturbance may not have a negative connotation).
   eg. Dibi je pagol kore
f) *Pagol* as the very subject of the song where the meaning has not been clarified within the song but we can understand the meaning to cover all other meanings given above.

eg. *Pagol je tui kantha vore janiye de.*

From the above it now becomes clear that when we use the word mad in daily usage we mean a number of different things, namely, being unruly, being in an intense emotional state, being childish, being impractical, being over-involved with something, being disturbed in a non-specific way etc. And, of course all these can exist in one person at a time\(^8\). As we argued before, it is difficult to judge whether these are metaphorical usage or shows that madness itself is a composite, non-unitary concept. Whether the uses are taken to be metaphorical or not, the obvious conclusion is that madness is primarily a normative concept. Being unruly, being in an intense emotional state, being childish, being impractical, being over-involved with something ------ all these judgments presuppose a norm, a norm of not being disruptive, not being intensely emotional, being practical, not being childish, not being over-involved etc. Judgment of madness consists in identifying a difference from the common, usual and socially accepted standard of behavior. The conclusion seems to be inevitable that societal judgment of madness is fundamentally a normative judgment.

The debate whether madness and mental illness are normative judgments or purely descriptive acts will occupy us throughout the discussion and we shall discuss it in details later. At this juncture it is sufficient to note that our use of the word madness in daily life and language use is a normative one. But there is another interesting twist to the problem here. A judgment is an act of comparing an entity (here a particular behavior) against an accepted standard. All normative judgments are not ethical judgments but a normative judgment of a particular behavior is an ‘is-ought’ judgment and carries an automatic negative evaluation with it. If the ‘ought’ is not followed the behavior is evaluated in a negative way. In other words, if a particular behavior is judged as madness, it is because that particular behavior is judged to be bad or unwanted. This is obvious; but problem arises because in the given examples of usage in *Rabindrasangeet* nowhere is there a negative evaluation of madness; rather most of the usage gives a sense of eulogizing madness! There is a deep contradiction here. If the process of identifying madness is defining something as bad or unwanted and, if at the same breath, one says that ‘it is good to be mad’

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\(^8\) A beautiful description of a common ‘madman’ can be obtained in a poem in Sukumar Ray’s *Abol-Tabol*, a book of nonsense rhymes for children. We have given it Appendix II (B).
there is indeed a contradiction involved. Apart from Rabindranath’s usage, our other daily usage will also confirm this contradiction. We do not always use the word mad in a negative pejorative sense. Quite often the word is used in an affectionate sense [“Oh, she is a mad girl!”]. Stereotypical uses like ‘mad-scientist’, ‘absent-minded-professor’ also confirm that these uses are highly contextual and not always negative.

How do we approach this contradiction? One obvious answer is that here we are talking of two norms, two types of judgments functioning at two different levels. The first is the norm that identifies madness as deviant and unwanted behavior. This norm is functioning at the level of day-to-day social living and is a general norm applicable to all members of the social group. Social living by its very nature calls for a norm of behavior------ is made up of normative behavior ----- without which social life becomes impossible. It is also to be noted here that of all the possible norms that we have or can think of function within the context of social life. In other words, norms function in a relational context. The second is a different type of norm that supersedes the first one in some specific context and makes the same behavior, i.e. madness, which was identified in the first place as unwanted, now valued and wanted in another context. There should not be any theoretical problem or contradiction here provided we stipulate that the first norm is a general one and the second is more specific and contextual one functioning on the background of the first one but superseding it in those specific contexts. William David Ross (1877 - 1971) has made an analogous distinction between prima facie duty and duties-all-things-considered. Ross maintained that there is no one master principle that explains why the particular things that we believe are wrong/right is in fact wrong/right. Instead, there are a number of basic moral requirements which cannot be reduced to some more fundamental principle. These are relied upon in making decisions about the goodness or badness of a state of affairs all things considered, though there is no sense in which this is deduced from these claims. (Ross, 1939) An example will be saying, “It is generally bad to tell a lie but is acceptable when done to save a life”. What these contexts are will be variable subject to changing socio-cultural pattern of life and to some extent on individual judgment. In current discussion, the context of positive evaluation of madness in Rabindrasangeet is obviously a literary one. Literature always carries a license for defying a lot of social norms ------ in a sense it is one of the functions of literature ---- to show the limits and incongruence of social norms. In non-literary contexts also many such
examples are available. We restrict ourselves to give just one example. Take two countries C\(^1\) and C\(^2\) where C\(^1\) is under brutal political and military domination by C\(^2\). A small group of citizens of C\(^1\) carries out token acts of defiance, violent or not, against the police and military might of C\(^2\). Most of the citizens of C\(^1\) will dub this act as ‘madness’ in it being useless, impractical, and impudent, leading to self-harm. But we shall all agree that these acts call for a different and positive ethical judgment despite being judged as ‘madness’ by some other criteria. This other criterion is obviously the usual social norm and this distinction goes on to show that social normative judgments and ethical judgments are not equal and equivalent.

Arguments given above, especially citing the literary contexts will become more relevant when we discuss Michelle Foucault’s criticisms against medicalisation of madness and alleged stripping of meaning from madness by this medical reductionism. We shall come to that in the next chapter. Let us conclude here with the insights that, (a) use of the word mad in ordinary language use connote multiple meanings, some metaphorical some not, (b) identifying madness is essentially a normative evaluative activity but not ethical judgments, and (c) in specific contexts this judgment can be superseded by other judgments (ethical, aesthetic).

**Section III**

**Analysis of the Concept**

Some of the uses of the word madness in everyday language are metaphorical. At the same time the concept of madness in itself is imprecise with loose boundaries. This makes deciding whether a particular linguistic use is metaphorical or not problematic. Lakoff and Johnson define metaphor as “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980. p.5) And they differentiate metaphor from metonymy thus: “Metaphor and metonymy are different kinds of processes. Metaphor is principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is to
understand. Metonymy, on the other hand, has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to stand for another.” [italics authors’](Lakoff and Johnson, 1980. p.36) Metonymy commonly utilizes a part of an object or a concept to refer to the whole while metaphor uses a similarity between two concepts to understand one in terms of the other. To understand, metaphorically, a concept Q in terms of P necessitates an agreement that some entity S is common in both P and Q and, of course a relatively clear idea of P. On the other hand, if we are not very clear what P is but find P to be subject of metaphorical use in multiple instances amounting to saying that P is Q, R, S,T… the analogies being S^q, S^r, S^s, S^t… we can reasonably conclude that S^q, S^r, S^s, S^t… are properties of P or constitutive of the concept of P. Thus, whether all or most uses of the word madness in language are metaphorical or not, it can be concluded that the identified meanings of the term (unruly, emotional, disturbed, impractical etc) are constitutive of the concept of madness. The same argument will also hold in case of a metonymic use of the word. If this is acceptable, we are one step ahead in understanding what madness is or how society defines madness. What this amounts to is to say that when society finds a piece of behavior to be unruly, too emotional, disturbing, impractical etc. society tends to consider that behavior as madness. “…..most of our normal conceptual system is metaphorically structured; that is, most concepts are partially understood in terms of other concepts.” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980. p.56)

Experiments by Elanor Rosch have shown that people categorize objects, not in set-theoretical terms, but in terms of prototypes and family resemblances. (Rosch, 1977. quoted in Pickering, 2006. p. 20-1) When we think or talk about a supposedly mad person the prototypical picture conjured in our mind is of a person restless, overactive, disheveled, dirty, muttering, laughing without reason, not engaging in normal talk and interaction, unpredictable, violent etc. --- a typical madman on the streets. The description already carries most of the characteristics listed above and, being prototypical, this picture is the common description of a madman but it is not the universal description of all madmen. Then, in individual cases how do we reach the judgment of madness? Simply identifying one or more of the above given characteristics in an individual may not suffice. Or is there some other factor universally present in our judgments of madness?

To understand this other factor involved in judgment of madness we shall use a hypothetical example. The example is common enough and, in one form, is given in OTPP. We shall use this
and shall also extend it beyond its common use. Suppose we come across someone crawling in the grass in an agitated manner. We may call him mad because his behavior goes against expected social behavior in this situation. This will be a perfectly valid judgment but before judging we may ask the question why he is behaving in this manner. Now suppose we get two different answers to this question ---- (a) that he has lost his key and is searching for it or (b) that he believes crawling is the best form of human locomotion. In the first instance we shall immediately revoke our judgment saying that the person’s behavior now becomes ‘understandable’ and, therefore, not really a case of madness. In the second instance, we shall say that the person is harboring a wrong belief and that makes the initial judgment of madness correct. The obvious conclusion will be that wrong belief is an indicator (sign/symptom) of madness but more introspection about the issue will reveal the case to be somewhat more complicated. In normal life we often come across individuals who hold beliefs different and, at times, opposite of our beliefs. We usually declare these beliefs to be wrong but do not necessarily declare the person holding these beliefs to be mad. A confrontation between a theist and an atheist over belief in God will bear this out. Thus, it is primarily not a question of the belief being right or wrong but whether we can understand how the person comes to hold the belief. This determines whether the person will be judged as mad or not. We can often understand how a person comes to hold a wrong belief ----- maybe he starts from wrong premises, maybe he uses faulty logic, maybe he fails to evaluate his own experience correctly but none of these cases will warrant a judgment of madness. We need not go into the logical and philosophical foundations of belief formation here but the point we need to acknowledge is that judgment of a belief to be wrong does not necessarily give rise to a judgment of madness on the person holding the belief but our failure to understand the process of formation of the wrong belief that gives rise to the judgment of madness on the holder of the belief. In other words, in the context of judging someone to be mad, it is not the belief that is being judged primarily but the process of formation of the belief and the criteria of judgment is understandability. This is not to deny that the two acts of judging a belief and judging the process of formation of the belief may be intricately mixed up in the awareness of the individual making the judgment.

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9 Meaning and understandability are hotly debated issues in philosophy but here we are using the words in an ordinary daily use sense.
We have so far examined the case of understandability in relation to belief but the same argument will apply equally to all the other features of madness. For example, if we observe a person to be extremely restless and in the grip of an intense emotion, and if we can, given the specific context of that person at that time, understand why that person is experiencing and behaving like that, we shall hardly call that person mad. Sudden and unexpected bereavement, property loss etc are common examples. The other features of madness are not sufficient grounds for a judgment of madness and non-understandability is the necessary ground for such a judgment.

What do we mean by this understandability? To understand something may mean many different things in different contexts but here we seem to be concerned mainly with two important aspects. First, by ‘understanding’ why a person does something, we mean we can follow the reason or motive behind that behavior. Second, by ‘understanding’ why a person does something, we sometimes approve of that behavior. In this sense, understanding is an evaluative act. This second meaning derives directly from the first in the sense that we approve of a behavior precisely because we can follow the reason/motive leading to that behavior and we actually approve of that reason or motive. To approve of something we must first understand that something. Understanding is a necessary pre-condition for approval. Let us discuss these two points in some more details.

Analysis of human behavior reveals that we have different mental states, that one mental state can give rise to another mental state and that arising of one mental state from another occurs most of the times according to some identifiable rule or norm that can be followed or understood. To give an example, suppose X insults Y in some way and Y gets angry and slaps X. Now, keeping aside the question of what implies or constitutes an insult or what kind of a belief system defines insult, the case here is interpreting a behavior as insult to me ‘naturally’ makes me angry. Or, the mental state of perceiving a particular behavior as insult gives rise to a second mental state of feeling anger. This second mental state of feeling anger ‘naturally’ (but not necessarily) gives rise to a third mental state of intention to harm the other/taking revenge on the

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10 This is not to say that understanding and approval are same because there can be instances where we understand the motive but do not approve of it. E.g. “I understand why he stole the money (he had to buy medicine for his ailing mother) but I don’t think he should have done that”.

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other/insulting the other in turn. The third mental state of intention leads to the action of slapping. Our theoretical understanding of the connections between these mental states is not yet complete but these connections appear to be apparent and obvious in our daily practices. This is so because we feel a kind of naturalness about these connections ---- it is ‘natural’ for the mental state of ‘intent to harm’ to arise from the mental state of ‘anger’ and it is ‘natural’ for mental state of ‘anger’ to arise from the mental state of ‘perceived insult’. We also have a kind of intuitive feeling of rightness about this connection between different mental states and these two, the ‘naturalness’ and the ‘intuitive feeling of rightness’, seem to go hand in hand. Reason and motive are both problematic terms in philosophy but for the present discussion we may take them simply to mean something that qualifies the connector between two different mental states. Motive is something we tend to use in relation to intention to action and it is thus a special case of reason. Thus, when we judge a particular action to be madness or not, we actually judge the reason/motive behind the action by some criterion of intuitive understandability.

Two questions still remain unanswered. First, feeling of ‘naturalness’ about the ‘reasonable’ connection between two mental states; what gives this ‘naturalness’? Second, the case where one meaning of ‘to understand’ is ‘to approve’; what justifies this use? These two questions seem to be interdependent and inescapably related to each other. By common usage we find a statement like “I understand why X did A” actually means “I approve of X doing A”. [This use is quite common but is not necessarily always true. There can be situations where “I understand why X did A but I don’t approve of it” (see footnote 9 above)] We can elaborate the situation further by thinking up a short series of statements, each deriving from the previous one and each generalizing from the previous one. It will be somewhat like this:

I understand why X did A.

I understand why X did A in the given circumstances.

There were compelling reasons for X to do A

I too would have found these reasons to be compelling

I would have done A in the given circumstances.
Most would have done A in the given circumstances.

Anybody would have done A in the given circumstances.

The term “in the given circumstances” needs to be considered in the case of a judgment. Act A is being judged as different from the usual in the first place and, in the act of judging, the particular context may mitigate the difference. Now, we have seen in this short series of statements each one derives and generalizes from the previous one. The generalization flows from the first to the last one. On the other hand, approval seems to flow in the other direction, from the last to the first one. I would have done A because anybody would have done A and I approve of X doing A because I would have done A.

From the above discussion, we shall try to reach three important conclusions: (a) use of the word madness is not just a description but an act of judgment, (b) what is being judged is not primarily correctness/incorrectness of an act or decision on the part of the person being judged as mad but the process of reaching that act or decision for that person, and (c) this is a normative judgment but is not an ethical judgment.

Each of these points needs some elaboration.

(a) The insight that use of the word madness is primarily a judgment and not a description will seem to support Thomas Szasz’s claim that so called ‘mental illnesses’ are not really illnesses but myths created by psychiatrists. As we have seen in the previous chapter, one of the two fundamental claims of Szasz is that scientific medical diagnosis of a condition should be a value-neutral description and not a value judgment. Superficially this claim seems to be rational but some more thought will render this claim a little problematic. All acts of description have an element of intentionality and directionality. The act of description intends towards and is directed towards something that is being described. Of all the possible entities given us, a specific one is being selected for description and the very process of selection differentiates and isolates that something from the others. One cannot describe ‘all one surveys’ at a time. Even to describe a landscape one sees, one has to describe it part by part or component by component. Each act of such description will involve selecting one part/component from the background.
process of selection is itself an act of judgment. On the other hand, we cannot really select/judge any entity without having a description of it. Any act of perceiving an object entails a description that differentiates the object from its background. Apparently we are talking of description at two different levels: the second mentioned description is ‘given’ in our fundamental capacity for perception while first mentioned one is a formal one serving a specific, here scientific, purpose. Szasz, presumably, has this in mind and claims that the act of selecting an entity suitable for a scientific description of pathology should not be an ethical judgment. This requirement for a formal scientific diagnosis of pathology is fundamentally sound. But Szasz does not make any attempt to differentiate between ethical value judgments and non-ethical normative judgments or amongst the different types of judgments possible. He rather claims that all psychiatric diagnoses are ‘ethical, moral and social’ value judgments as if these three are same and the only possible ones.

(b) When a judgment of madness is being made, what is being judged is not primarily the correctness/incorrectness of an act or experience but how the act or experience came about. Our judgment of a person as mad implicitly entails an effort to understand the person’s experiences and behaviors and a failure in that effort. Our mental fields comprise of three (not exclusively) inter-connected domains: given a set of sensory data a particular perceptual experience occurs; given a set of perceptual experience a particular meaning or interpretation is derived; and given a set of meaning or interpretation of the environment a decision for a particular act is arrived at. The kind of understanding we are discussing here basically means understanding the connections between these domains: how one state derives from the other. As we stated earlier, the given criterion for judgment here is an intuitive sense of ‘naturalness’ which in turn derives from a perceived universality of the condition. Thus, what is being judged here is the epistemic capability of the individual ---- an ability to form a correct picture of the environment in one’s mind, ability to arrive at a correct interpretation of the sensory experience and ability to make appropriate actions in accordance with that interpretation. These abilities
form a chain and cannot be taken out separately. Lastly, the correctness is given by what appears to happen in most, if not all, of us.

Thus, we may claim that judgment of madness is really a judgment of the epistemic capability or skill of the person who exhibits behaviors typically identified as madness. Development of human cognitive skills is an inter-subjective phenomenon and this is well recognized by both Kant (1789[1929]) and Wittgenstein (1953). “Both argue that a grasp of the rules that govern the use of a concept (its applications and its internal role in thought sequences) is shaped by modeling the actions of fellow human beings and responding to their corrective responses”. (Gillett, 2007. p. 25) In what Gillett terms as “discursive naturalism”, “mind is fluid, dynamic, and open to interpersonal effects, its operations governed by informal (prescriptive) norms imparted through discourse.” (Gillett, 2007. p. 25) Human beings continually shape and reshape each other’s cognitive networks to work with congruence in a shared environment. For successful life and survival for a collectively adapted species each of us need to have a largely shared cognitive or epistemic skills so that the kind of mental picture we form of our shared environment overlaps to a very large extent. This gives us the universality that acts as a criterion for the act of judgment of each other’s epistemic skills or each other’s madness. Understanding the ways of madness and the manner in which it appears defective arises from our understanding of our normal epistemic techniques. “In health of our intellect we are surrounded by madness”. (Wittgenstein, 1977. p. 44e)

These epistemic techniques are basic and given, in the sense that they are indispensible for survival in the world we have and a deficit in these techniques will render one in a disadvantageous position regarding survival. We base our actions, both physical and social, on what we take to be true ---- true in the sense of the information being corresponding to the world out there, our mental picture being a correct representation of the world out there. Truth or correctness in this sense matters to us because it has survival value and allows us to function in our world. Most of these information we accumulate -- about our bodies, the people we interact with, and our immediate physical and social environments --- play a role in our daily functioning. Even for an animal, a wrong or distorted evaluation of its environment will definitely entail survival threats. Madness is a
failure of the machinery responsible for this information gathering and storage, retrieval and use. For us humans, invariably living in a social and cultural matrix, for the basic epistemic techniques, ‘natural’ and ‘socio-cultural’ components are inextricably intermixed and cannot be teased out\(^\text{12}\). Thus a judgment of madness is at the same time a social judgment and judgment of a basic skill of survival. In this sense, madness is inefficiency at the level of basic mental skills and madness occurs in the social sphere. In other words, madness is a social phenomenon primarily involving the basic mental skills that make the social world possible. Even as a social judgment it is not a judgment of social dissonance but of social disability. This disability comprises of failure in correctly perceiving social cues and making appropriate responses to it. Our social lives are multi-layered and multi-structured acts of social dissonance, social defiance and conscious efforts to change social norms and practices occur at the super-structure while the deficit of madness occurs at a very basic level. It is somewhat like playing a game: one may decide to change the rules of a game, or to play a different game, or to quit the game altogether but these are possible only after one has grasped the rules of the game. Failure to grasp the rules of a game cannot be viewed as a different mode of playing the game.

(c) From the above discussion it should by now be clear that a judgment of madness is not an ethical judgment. It is a judgment of incapacity and judgment of incapacity is fundamentally not an ethical judgment. This arises from two considerations. First, an ethical judgment presupposes free agency of the subject. The subject must be free to choose between right and wrong and must have the ability to make such a choice. Recognition of inability or deficit in this area precludes this free agency. Thus, we cannot talk of ethicality of an act done by a child or an animal\(^\text{13}\). Judgment of madness, as we have shown above, is

\(^{12}\text{“…... what we call “direct physical experience” is never merely a matter of having a body of a certain sort; rather, every experience takes place within a vast background of cultural presuppositions. It can be misleading, therefore, to speak of direct physical experience as though there were some core of immediate experience which we then “interpret” in terms of our conceptual system. Cultural assumptions, values and attitudes are not a conceptual overlay which we may or may not place upon experience as we choose. It would be more correct to say that all experience is cultural through and through, that we experience our “world” in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself.” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980. p. 57)\}

\(^{13}\text{We can talk of a ‘mad dog’ but not of an ‘unethical dog’.}\)
fundamentally a judgment of incapacity and not of difference and, thus, cannot be an ethical
development. Second, in our daily lives, we frequently make judgments of mistake and these
are in no way ethical judgments. To say that one has done a mathematical sum wrong is to
recognize difference from an accepted norm of doing the sum correctly but that does not
constitute an ethical reprimand. All judgments are not ethical judgments.

One may argue that we have derived the whole of our argument from a single example of a
wrong belief as a marker of madness but madness constitutes much more than wrong
beliefs. This is true but the counterargument to support our stance will run as follows.
Beliefs are generally (but not universally) our interpretation of the world we live in and
about the appropriate behaviors in that world. Our actions and emotional reactions are
always guided by these beliefs. On the other hand, beliefs result, largely but not wholly,
from our perception of the world we live in. Thus, altered perceptions and wrong beliefs
form the core of the concept of madness, other characteristics like inappropriate or
uncontrolled emotions, unruly behavior etc arising thereof.

Thus far we have claimed that efforts at understandability form the core of a judgment of
madness; or, in other words, non-understandability is the hallmark of madness.
Understanding here means understanding the connections between different mental states
when one mental state derives from another. This understanding is not the causal
explanation of how one state results from another. “Dilthey decreed that we can explain
nature, not understand it, but we understand psychic life, and such understanding does not
explain.” (Radden, 2004. p.10) Understanding thus gains a special significance in this sense
and to have a clear grasp of that, we now turn to the philosopher Karl Jaspers who first
brought in the concept of understandability into the discourse on madness and mental
illness.
Section IV
Karl Jaspers and Understandability

Thus far, we have discussed how the concept of madness evolves and functions in our day-to-day lives and have avoided how psychiatry and mental health sciences approach and understand madness. Now, we are going to change our previous method and bring in a discussion of Karl Jaspers’ approach to psychopathology. Karl Jaspers’ contribution to psychiatry and psychopathology are phenomenal and he is rightly called the philosophical father of modern psychopathology. A foremost exponent of Existential Philosophy, Jaspers made his contribution to psychiatry in the early part of his career, during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Relatively unknown in the English speaking world, his seminal work on psychopathology had to wait almost five decades for the first English translation to appear.

Jaspers graduated from medical school in 1909 and then worked at the mental hospital in Heidelberg; Emil Krapelin also worked there some years earlier. Jaspers was not satisfied with the way the medical science of the time approached the study of mental illness (this was a phase when biological psychiatry was on an upswing) and set himself the task of improving the pure psychiatric approach. In 1913 Jaspers occupied a temporary post as a psychology teacher at Heidelberg University. The post later became permanent, and Jaspers did not return to clinical practice. In the same year he published his first major work Allgemeine Psychopathologie which was much later translated into English as General Psychopathology by J.Hoenig and M.W.Hamilton. In many ways this book has remained one of the most influential in psychiatry and even now, after almost a century, acts as our premiere guide to phenomenological approach to psychopathology. In this book Jaspers was concerned with the relationship between meanings and causes, developing the phenomenological method for the study of subjective experiences and the wider issue of relation between natural and human sciences. We shall very briefly touch upon these here.

Jaspers develops a distinction between causes/explanations and meanings/understanding. Jaspers uses the German word verständlich which can roughly be translated into English as
‘meaningful’, or better ‘understandable’. Jaspers’ concern over the distinction between meaning and cause or between understanding and explanations reflect the late nineteenth and early twentieth century debate and discussion prevalent in German philosophy over the distinction between natural and human science. People like Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Rickert, Max Weber and others played important parts in this debate over what was termed Methodenstreit. At the risk of oversimplification the issue can be stated very briefly as follows: natural sciences like physics, chemistry etc and human sciences like psychology, sociology etc are fundamentally different and call for different methods of investigations. The distinction arises basically from the difference between the subjects of these two disciplines. Natural sciences operate in the ‘natural world’ or the ‘world out there’ where entities are supposed to exist independent of human mind and are subject to natural laws. Causality plays an important role in the natural world defining relation between two or more separate phenomena. Leaving aside the Human skepticism over cause and induction, causality may simply mean an explanation of why and how one phenomenon A (always) follows another phenomenon B. This amounts to saying nothing more and nothing less than saying that there is a ‘law’ in nature that makes B follow A or, in other words, ‘if A then B’. One stipulation over this law is that it is universal in the sense that in every case of A, B will follow and in every case of B, A must have preceded it. This effort to explain B in terms of A is what we term explanation. On the other hand, when we are dealing with human sciences, the focus is not on the objects of the natural world but individual human beings or human groups as subjects. Focus immediately changes from the general to the particular and method of study changes from, what Wilhelm Windleband termed nomothetic (based on laws) to ideographic (based on particular individuals). In case of human sciences, some entity we know as ‘mind’ plays an important role and the functions of mind, at least apparently, are not (natural) rule based. Something that we call ‘motive’ connects different phenomena in the mental field and this takes the explanatory role in place of cause here. The grasp we gain through this motive is best termed as ‘understanding’ and is thus different from explanation that operate in the natural world. The connection between two events in natural world is what we term cause while the connection between two events in the human mental world is motive and the connection becomes meaningful when we grasp the motive; causal explanations and meaningful connections play similar but not identical roles in these two domains. Thus cause/explanation and motive/understanding are entities of two different domains giving us different kinds of grasps
over our surroundings. Psychiatry, being a discipline that deals with human mind and its pathology, has to necessarily undertake an ideographic motive/understanding approach as its method.

Though we have presented the case this way to help easy comprehension, the issue is little more complex. The focus of study need not necessarily determine the method of study in the sense that the fields of human sciences are also open to nomothetic natural science approach towards delineating universal laws. The two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive but result in different kinds of grasps we gain over the subject. Rickert (quoted in OTPP, p.231) argued “that one must look for the differences between natural sciences and so-called ‘human sciences’ not in their subject matter but in the methods.” Rickert emphasizes that any ‘reality’, whether mental or physical, ‘human’ or ‘natural’, can be studied using the methods of the natural sciences; what is distinctive about ‘human’ or cultural sciences is the distinctive method and aims they bring to a study of the same reality”. In the same vein Jaspers maintained that any event that we understand as involving a meaningful connection can in principle be investigated causally, though not every event can be understood in the first place. This insight is essential for psychiatry and medical science in general. Ideographic approach through grasp of meaningful connections between different mental events is essential for psychiatry to have a grasp on mental health and pathology but, at the same time, being an applied science, psychiatry and medicine has to look for general laws to make insight gained from one individual applicable to another. For medicine, individuals are unique but their pathology has to be general across individuals; otherwise medical theory and medical interventions become meaningless and impossible.

Let us now turn to Jaspers’ idea of understanding and his phenomenological approach to psychopathology. For Jaspers, understanding is both an effort to have access to another mind and our grasp of this another mind ---- ‘to understand’ and ‘having understood’ being two expressions to depict these two aspects. Jaspers distinguishes two main forms of understanding: static and genetic. Jaspers’ static understanding (statische Verstehen) is our understanding of someone’s mental states considered individually --- that is, the mental state being considered in isolation. Genetic understanding (genetische Verstehen) is our understanding of how in someone’s mind one state may follow from another mental state. To quote Jaspers:
**Static understanding**: “we present vividly to ourselves separately and describe in detail psychic states experienced”

**Genetic understanding**: “we understand how psychic events can emerge out of other psychic material”\(^{14}\).

Jaspers further develops our access to another mind by distinguishing among different areas of another’s mental field available through different approaches. Some are available through the observer’s sense organs, e.g. speech and motor behavior of the subject being visible or audible to the observer. Some others are available through rational thought of the observer. The rest, unavailable through sense organs and rational thought, can be grasped through a kind of intuitive understanding (something like empathy or may be empathy itself though Jaspers does not clarify this). Jaspers terms approach through sense organs and rational thought as objective psychology and the other as subjective psychology. Static understanding covers the whole of objective psychology and some part of subjective psychology while genetic understanding covers mostly subjective psychology. Jaspers uses the word *phenomenology* to denote the method of static understanding and gives its aim as to inject some sort of initial order into the ‘manifold diversity of psychic phenomena’.

Before we go into more details of Jaspers’ phenomenological methods, we need to mention another of Jaspers’ contribution ----- the distinction between form and content ----- that has proved to be of immense value in our understanding of psychopathology in last hundred years. Form/content distinction has a rich history in philosophy probably starting from Kant. Kant demonstrated that knowledge is a product of both incoming sensory input and the order imposed on it by necessary principles. Kant considered the incoming inputs as *content* of what he called ‘intuitions’ and the imposed structure as *form*. Without an experiential input thought will fail to have meaning or substance but without the structure provided by principles the rational significance of thoughts will be missing. (Kant, [1781] 1929). Kant gave three distinct kinds of a priori principles: Form of Pure Intuition (e.g. space and time), Categories of Pure Understanding

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14 Jaspers’ notion of ‘understanding’ owes much to the work of Wilhelm Dilthey. Dilthey’s philosophical approach is termed ‘life-philosophy’ where Dilthey considers human existence as something that cannot be comprehended by rational and logical way of thinking. (OTPP, 2006)
(e.g. causality, property, substance) and ideas of Pure Reason (e.g. coherence, relation, systematicity). (OTPP, 2006. p. 172-3). Jaspers’ notion of form/content distinction derives not directly from Kant’s, occurs at a different level of psychic function and is more akin to Husserl’s notion of form/content distinction. For Kant, as we have seen, form-content distinction occurs at a level of perceptual experience while for Jaspers the distinction occurs at the level of what we know as mental functions and what they are about. Jaspers writes, “Perceptions, ideas, judgments, feelings, drives, self-awareness, are all forms of psychic phenomena; they denote the particular mode of existence in which content is presented to us” (quoted in OTPP, 2006. p.219).

Thus firm, fixed but wrong belief that ‘I have cancer’ and a repetitive doubt that ‘I may have cancer’ while myself realizing that this doubt is unfounded are two different forms of mental phenomena having the same content while two firm, fixed but wrong beliefs that ‘I have cancer’ and that ‘my neighbor has caused the cancer to occur’ are the same form of mental phenomenon but with two distinct (but related) contents. Our understanding of psychopathology started from this insight provided by Jaspers ----- psychopathology has to do with forms of mental phenomena and not, primarily, with contents. Disordered forms of mental phenomena are to be considered as psychopathology and content has little to do with it. Whether I believe myself to be Napoleon or I believe myself to be a cow ----- in both cases it is the same type of psychopathology, namely delusion, and the two different contents of them plays only secondary role in the determination of psychopathology. Developments in the study of psychopathology in the last hundred years have largely followed this dictum.

Let us now turn to Jaspers’ use of phenomenology as a method of studying psychopathology. The word phenomenology has been used in philosophy at various times, by various authors, in different senses but at least for last hundred years phenomenology has been most often associated with Edmund Husserl. Husserl’s phenomenology is too large and too complex and does not directly concern us here except noting the commonly held notion that Jaspers derived his ideas of phenomenology from Husserl. This is probably historically true as Jaspers was well acquainted with Husserl and his works but Jaspers’ phenomenology differs considerably from Husserl’s. Jaspers’ phenomenology is a much simpler and straightforward notion and is basically a philosophical method to investigate psychopathology. While Husserl’s phenomenology is a fundamental philosophical activity, an attempt to analyze the basic
conceptual framework within which discussion about mental states become at all possible, Jaspers’ phenomenology is a method of clearly describing and cataloguing different mental states. Marleau-ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* was more in line with Husserl than Jaspers’ *General Psychopathology*. Jaspers’ notion of phenomenology is more or less same as his notion of static understanding and forms the preliminary step towards genetic understanding. Jaspers says: “… preliminary work of representing, defining, and classifying psychic phenomena, pursued as an independent activity, constitutes phenomenology”. Thus for Jaspers phenomenology is a descriptive activity aimed towards forming a taxonomy of psychopathology. Phenomenology is a descriptive and not an explanatory undertaking, different from genetic understanding and concerned with forms of mental phenomena and not their contents. As a purely descriptive endeavor, Jaspers emphasizes that phenomenology has to be presuppositionless. What Jaspers means here is that the description of a particular mental state must not be colored by any preconceived theory that tries to explain how and why that particular mental state came about. This immediately brings to mind Husserl’s notion of ‘bracketing out’ and Jaspers may have borrowed the idea from Husserl.

Developments in the study of psychopathology in psychiatry over last hundred years have largely followed Jaspers’ phenomenology and, of late, in psychiatric jargon the word phenomenology has oddly come to mean just a list of different psychopathologies and their descriptions, or in other words, a taxonomy given in standard textbooks. The result is being metonymically termed by the method! In the last few decades, especially after coming out of DSM-III and DSM-IV, interest in phenomenological research in psychopathology has declined as is evidenced by appearance of only a handful of research papers in peer-reviewed journals. There seems to be a strange complacency as if the whole gamut of psychopathology has been exhaustively studied, formulated in taxonomy and there is nothing further to be achieved. Nothing can be further from the truth and this fact has been deplored by various authors. (Andreasen, 2007)

Our previous discussions on the development of the concept of madness and our discussion on Jaspers’ ideas of understanding and phenomenology, taken together, may yield the following insights:
(a) We have showed that in common daily life a judgment of madness occurs when we fail to understand how, in another person’s mind, one mental state derives from another. We fail to grasp the connection between two mental states in terms of what is commonly seen in most people. This understanding is clearly Jaspers’ ‘genetic understanding’. It seems reasonable to conclude then that ‘genetic understanding’ helps us to identify which mental state (or experience) can be considered a pathology and ‘static understanding’ (or phenomenology) helps us to clearly describe such states.

(b) We started our investigation from an effort to understand how the concept of madness forms in the society and how the word mad is used in day-to-day linguistic use. On the other hand, Jaspers started his investigations as a formal and scientific study of psychopathology. We have seen how these two efforts tend to converge at certain points. This convergence tends to show that the method of science actually starts from and is actually a development on our day-to-day common cognitive efforts to have a grasp on our surroundings in our common daily life and not a specially constructed esoteric method.

Such attempts to conceptualize madness through failure of understandability a lá Karl Jaspers finds some validation from the works of another philosopher – Ludwig Wittgenstein. There is no parallelism between the works of Jaspers and Wittgenstein and precisely because of that such convergence becomes important. One such attempt is to understand the philosophical approach to meaning and understanding through the works of Wittgenstein and by applying such insights to analysis of specific psychopathology like delusion or odd/unusual speech etc. Such attempts have been undertaken by scholars like Sass (Sass, 2003; Sass, 2000), Read (Read, 2001) but our current investigations need not involve these researches. We’ll try to develop a different line of convergence. “To understand may not mean only to grasp the motive behind a certain piece of action because our very grasp of what a motive is derives from a prior grasp of how the connection between certain forms of mental state and certain actions can be meaningful or understandable”. (OTPP, 2006 p.231) The understandability ultimately derives from the

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15 Similar, but not identical, attempts to conceptualise psychopathology through Jasper’s sense of understanding has been termed ‘neo-Jasperian’ by Lois A Sass (Sass, 2003)
compiled experiences of group living over a long period of time. From our previous discussions it should now be apparent that we consider madness to be a normative judgment imparted by a community on certain behaviors and that such judgments reflect not only a deviation from a norm of behavior of that community but as an inability to follow the norm and the norm is in turn judged to be necessary for smooth running of life of the individual members of that community. The judgment is not just an imposition on one person by another but results from the accumulated wisdom of the community. This necessitates an understanding of the community’s life that gives meaning to the shared practices and communications within the community; that is exactly what Wittgenstein meant by ‘form of life’. “So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?” ---- It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in the form of life.” (Wittgenstein, 1953. 241. P. 88e). Two important extrapolations are possible from Wittgenstein’s observation. First, our ability to understand another person’s experience and behavior results from a shared form of life and, consequently, our inability to understand the same results when that shared form of life is broken or absent. Thus, a judgment of madness through failure of understanding indicates an inability to share the community’s form of life which is essential for a meaningful life. Here we are not talking about biological survival of individual and the species as a whole but what the accumulated wisdom of societal living understands as meaningful human life. Second, there is an important difference between agreement in opinion and agreement in form of life; and by extension, between mere group agreement and developing shared understanding through a shared form of life. Judgment of madness is not just one group’s (majority) opinion imposed on one individual but the community’s concern over one’s inability to share a common form of life and understanding. If someone constantly commits random mistakes, if standard practices of daily life have lost all significance for him, then, indeed, he himself must be regarded as mentally lost and incapable. The rule breaking results from an inability to understand the rule and not from a decision to break it to form and follow another. That the deviation is not one’s (chosen) alternate form of life can be derived from another of Wittgenstein’s remarks from another source: “What would a society all of deaf men be like? Or a society of the ‘feeble-minded’? An important question! What then of a society that never played

16 This not to deny that false judgments may occur or that willful misuse of a false judgment may be perpetrated by a powerful majority on an individual or a minority community.
many of our language games?” (Wittgenstein, 1967. 371. p.67e). Also: “One imagines the feeble-minded under the aspect of the degenerate, the essentially incomplete, as it were in tatters. And so under that of disorder instead of a more primitive order (which would be a far more faithful way of looking at them). We just don’t see a society of such people” (Wittgenstein, 1967. 372. p.67e) For it is “through compelling uniformities that the life of a society becomes ordered, such uniformities determine the boundaries of a society, that is, only through such uniformities does the society as such become constituted”. (Nyiri, 1982. p.2)

Section V

Is ‘madness’ something that can’t be explained by ‘reason’ but by ‘cause’?

We have recognized above that our world seems to compose of two different realms; one that constitutes the ‘world out there’ where cause/explanation operate and the other of human mind where motive/understanding operate. Philosophical naturalism and the doctrine of unity of sciences provide a powerful impetus for a sweeping reductionism by which the mind, including the mind of madness, is nothing more than the brain. But Thornton has pointed out, and this is well recognized, that “there is a long tradition that can be traced from Jaspers through Wittgenstein to the contemporary philosopher John McDowell’s contrast between the space of reasons and the realms of law, in which mind, meaning and mental content, and mental disorder (read madness) are importantly irreducible”. (Thornton, 2004. p.15) By ‘space of reason’ or human mind we do not mean just an human individual’s mind and happenings there but also the totality of how human mind operates and creates knowledge, emotions, imaginations and decisions. Thus, the space of reasons is both intra-subjective and inter-subjective; it consists of not only one individual’s psychic life but also the totality of human experiences. Whether the two realms are mutually exclusive or not may be subject of further enquire but apparently functions in one realm cannot and do not interact with functions in another. Mind-body dualism
Donald Davidson’s theory of Anomalous Monism suggests a different way of viewing this apparent distinction. Davidson has argued for the compatibility of three principles: (i) that at least some mental events interact causally with physical events — The Principle of Causal Interaction; (ii) that events related as cause and effect fall under strict laws (that is, laws that are ‘precise, explicit and as exceptionless as possible’) — The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality; and (iii) that there are no strict laws (as opposed to mere generalizations) relating mental and physical events — The Anomalism of the Mental. Of these principles the first two would ordinarily be held to be incompatible with the third, and to imply, not the ‘anomalism’ of the mental, but rather, in the case of mental and physical events related as cause and effect, the existence of strict laws relating those events. To argue, as does Davidson, for the compatibility of the original principles is thus also to argue for the truth of the third, that is, for the truth of anomalous monism. (Davidson, 1970)

Whether the meaningful connections can, at least in principle if not by today’s available technology, be reduced to causal explanation is debatable but we all recognize that the realm of mind is open to influence from the natural world. Factors operating in natural world can bring about changes in mental state and this is not just through mind’s perception of the change in natural world. Human beings’ long history of use and abuse of ‘mind-altering’ addictive substances bear clear witness to this. Leaving aside the question whether all mental states and meaningful connections between different mental states can ultimately be reduced to natural laws, we can at least recognize the fact that, at a given time, while some mental states can be understood in terms of meaningful connections, some other mental state can be explained causally and these two processes can operate at the same time. Jaspers recognized that not all mental states are understandable and not all connections between mental states are meaningful. (OTPP, 2006)

Given these two findings we can claim here that when our attempt to understand one’s mental state fails, we assume a causal factor to be operating here. Causal explanation of a mental state and its connection with other states become operative by default. This is not to say that natural causes were not operative behind what we understand as motive but our (commonly) preferred form of grasp of events in mind is through understanding/explanation and if and when that fails we take resort to causal explanation of the same mental event. In order to have a grasp of another
person’s mental state we always look for the motive/meaningful connection behind it and when that attempt fails we assume a natural/causal explanation of the behavior.

Along with this, consider our previous demonstration that judgments of madness occur at failure of one’s attempt to understand another one’s behavior in terms of motive/meaningful connections. As long as we understand (and approve) the motive operating behind another person’s behavior, we do not judge that behavior to be madness or that person to be mad17. Taken together, the above two points seem to yield that madness is something that is being ‘caused’. Because we fail to understand the reason/motive operating behind a particular behavior we tend to think that that particular behavior being caused by some factor outside the ‘space of reason’. For example, a person is behaving in an odd way and we do not understand why (sphere of reason/motive) he is behaving like that; the explanation supplied and accepted is that he has a high level of alcohol in his blood at this time (realm of nature/law). This is an important point in itself. We recognize that factors of natural world may and do bring about changes in mental phenomena and some of these changes may constitute madness; factors in natural world are responsible for producing the mental phenomenon of madness. Recognition of this point automatically leads to two inevitable corollaries: (i) as ‘natural causes’ are understood to be beyond one’s conscious control, one cannot be held responsible for becoming mad, one becomes a victim of ‘madness’, and (ii) as our common understanding of disease is something that is caused by natural factors and that brings in unwanted changes in the state of our body, by the above argument, madness becomes something very akin to disease; nay, madness becomes a disease by its very nature.

Let us recapitulate our argument this far. We started our discussion with an attempt to understand how the word ‘mad’ is used in day-to-day linguistic usage and how the concept of ‘madness’ functions in day-to-day social life. We have tried to show that, in daily social life we tend to understand and judge another’s behavior in terms of motive/meaningful connections. Of the all possible different or deviant behaviors there are some where we understand but do not approve

17 Barring of course those occasions where we make a metaphoric use of the word mad. Expressions like “she is mad about movies” do not mean she is ‘really’ mad.
of and these we may judge morally/ethically but do not consider them to be madness. In case of other different/deviant behaviors we simply fail to understand the reason/motivation background for these behaviors and these we categorize as madness. When our attempts to understand fail, we judge the behavior to be madness and the person to be mad and we assume this to be caused by natural factors operating outside the space of reason/motive. This assumption seems to occur by default because we do not precisely know what these factors are. Thus common sense concept of madness itself dictates madness to be a disease. Cultural syndromes of madness are often seen in folk psychology. Deborah Bhattacharya found three Bengali categories of folk interpretation of madness: tuktak, mathar golmal and bhor. Tuktak is sorcery, often due to the envy of neighbors. The person is struck by madness, disease or misfortune, his personality changes and he acts against his own best interests. In mathar golmal (dysfunction or confusion of the head/brain), [mathar dosh/ matha kharap/ matha garom] madness is seen in activity, anxiety, anger, sexuality and sometimes burning sensations. Bhor is possession by a ghost, which often occurs during religious festivals; this is expressed by rigidity and personality changes. (Bhattacharya, 1986) While Ayurvedic psychology emphasizes individual responsibility, folk psychology speaks of madness due to illness and action of others. Illness and action by others are not mutually exclusive categories in folk belief. The important point to be noted here is that in all three cases, tuktak, mathar dosh and bhor, the putative causative elements, black magic, dysfunctional head/brain and ghost, are entities of the natural world.

What is important in this discussion is that we have restricted ourselves to a day-to-day common sense understanding of madness and, except for the brief description of Jaspers’ contribution, have nowhere touched upon medical/psychiatric approach to madness. Yet, we arrive at a point that shows ‘madness as disease’ as a concept arising out of day-to-day common sense use. If this is so, medical/psychiatric understanding of madness as a disease arises out of and in continuation of this commonsense view and not as a new and formally constructed concept. We shall come back to this argument in the next two chapters when we discuss Foucault’s and Szasz’s view of medicalisation of madness.
References:


