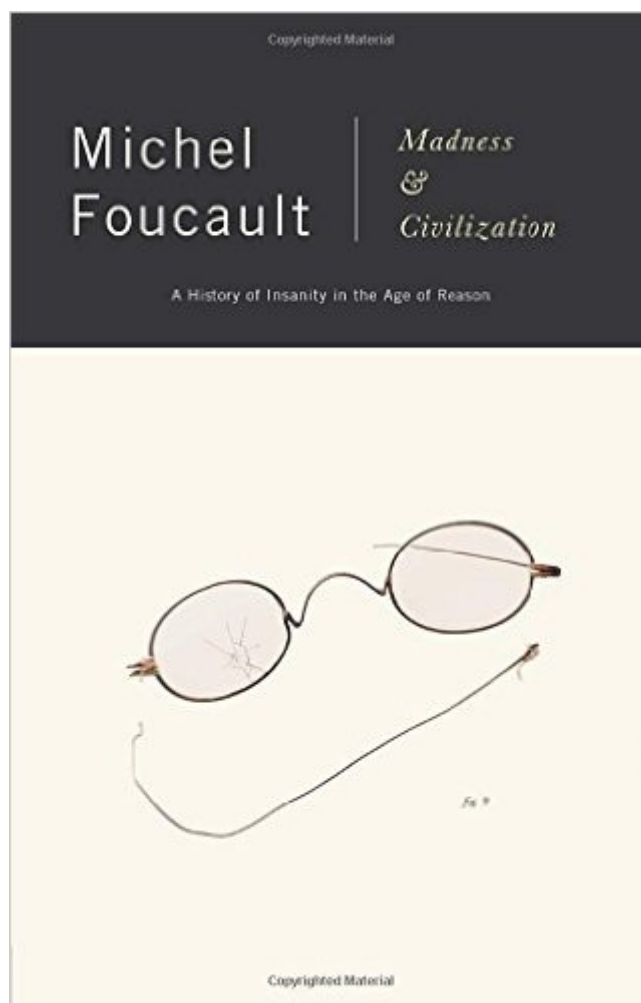


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Madness And Civilization: A History Of Insanity In The Age Of Reason



Synopsis

Perhaps the French philosopher's masterpiece, which is concerned with an extraordinary question: What does it mean to be mad?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Madness and Civilisation", which was first published in 1959, was the first major work of the cultural critic and maverick structuralist Foucault, and it eloquently and stylishly establishes the main themes, (namely, power, knowledge, confinement) of his later works. Foucault, in his brilliant and forceful exposition, traces the codes or "epistemes" responsible for the shaping of madness from the Renaissance and up to the late nineteenth century. He charts the history of insanity from it being considered as a virtually harmless "wisdom of folly", to it being considered as a disease in the age of confinement and the psychiatric clinic. Drawing on several important representations of madness in culture, which include the Ship of Fools of Jerome Bosch, and "The Disparates" of Goya, as well as the fates of Van Gogh, Nietzsche, Nerval and Artuad in the modern era, he "deconstructs" the concept of "reason" itself, by placing it in an inverse relation to supposedly "mad" experience. He asks the fundamental, and highly philosophical, question of "what does it mean to be mad, and what is the qualitative distinction between 'sanity' and 'insanity'?" This leads him to make the extraordinary claim that the "pathologisation" of madness, its treatment as a disease, is something approximating a disease of the modern era itself. Madness represents a moment of rupture, whose suppression is an attempt to avoid something mysterious, unseizable and dangerous within our own selves. In his examination of the history of confinement, and the supposed devastation that it has

caused, Foucault is not trying (as his critics have alleged) to promote insanity in a bid to transgress social modes and conventional wisdom.

This is a Michel Foucault masterpiece that delves into the history of insanity. Foucault was a student of philosophy and psychology, and it opened up his mind so that he could study the history of mental health. His book provides a compelling exploration of leprosy and other ailments that plagued Europe. One of the biggest questions Foucault strives to answer is whether or not madness is a social construction. In exploring the idea, the author is able to negate many classical ideas that have dominated culture in recent years. He even relates treatment of madness to the process that eliminated leprosy as he states, "the formulas of exclusion would be strangely repeated" with "poor vagabonds, criminals and `deranged minds'." While this book centers on the treatment of the insane in the clinical settings, it also explores other facets of mental health. In this book, Foucault talks about early doctors and nurses in psychiatry. He also explores the relationship between religious fanaticism and the concept of moral treatment for those who were deemed insane. This makes for an intriguing book that is also easily accessible for readers of varying levels. Foucault is also the author of the book "Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison", a book that is comparable to "Madness and Civilization". Both are books about society's reactions to something deemed "not normal." On the same topic, I really like the work of Sander Gilman, who applies his understanding of psychology and psychiatry to role as historian when writing the books Seeing the Insane.

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