

# A normative view of madness from Kantian philosophy to understand anti-vaccine and anti-mask protests of 2020 and 2021

*Una visión normativa de la locura desde la filosofía kantiana para entender las protestas antivacunas y antimascarillas de 2020 y 2021*

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## ABSTRACT

This text aims to offer a epistemic-normative reading of madness in Kant's work and its different developments throughout his work. This to maintain that madness arises from rationality itself when understood it as a force that exceeds the limits that reason imposes on itself. By outlining normality or mental sanity as the restriction of reason to sensibility, Kant intends -I maintain- to outline the minimum subjective and epistemic conditions for a republican political conformation, which is based on the agreement between subjects about the rules that will regulate their actions and interactions. This reading will allow us to outline an understanding of the anti-vaccine protest that took place during the pandemic. Showing that those who promote and follow them break with this minimum agreement on the restrictions of reason, thus reaching selfish excesses that harm democratic dynamics. I concluded that these people can be understood as madness people who represent a danger to the republican and democratic political organization.

**Keywords:** Madness; reason; epistemology; transcendental; normativity; COVID proteste.

## RESUMEN

Este texto pretende ofrecer una lectura epistémico-normativa de la locura en la obra de Kant y sus diferentes desarrollos a lo largo de su obra. Esto para sostener que la locura surge de la propia racionalidad al entenderla como una fuerza que excede los límites que la razón se impone a sí misma. Al delinear la normalidad o cordura mental como la restricción de la razón a la sensibilidad, Kant pretende -sostengo- esbozar las condiciones subjetivas y epistémicas mínimas para una conformación política republicana, la cual se basa en el acuerdo entre los sujetos acerca de las reglas que regularán sus acciones e interacciones. Esta lectura nos permitirá esbozar una comprensión de la protesta antivacunas que tuvo lugar durante la pandemia. Mostrando que quienes las promueven y siguen rompen con este acuerdo mínimo sobre las restricciones de la razón, llegando así a excesos egoístas que perjudican la dinámica democrática. Concluyo que estas personas pueden ser entendidas como locos que representan un peligro para la organización política republicana y democrática.

**Palabras clave:** Locura; razón; epistemología; transcendental; normatividad; COVID protestas.



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## 1. Introduction

How to understand madness related to reason? Is madness excess or absence of rationality? In this text, I will defend an account of madness as an effect of reason and reason as an effect of madness. I will defend that madness is an excess of rationality, the result of an absent counterweight of the sensible realm over the rules generated by reason. Therefore, I will argue that a mad person cannot be a citizen, because she does not have a unified or regulated experience, nor can she constrain the use of his reason, a necessary epistemic condition to exercise citizenship. Understanding the latter as the interaction between subjects based on the agreement on rules or norms for specific situations. In this sense, madness will be understood here as a kind of incapacity of rationality itself, or as the inability to submit the “Self” to intersubjective constraints and simply let that self be carried away by its capacity to link representations and make inferences, no matter how absurd they might be. Thus, I will argue from a normative interpretation of Kantian critical philosophy that madness is better understood as a lack of control of the rules of reason, where reason overflows the limits of what is sensible. According to that, madness is associated with a sort of egoism, given that reason only looks after itself and its world.

From this normative understanding of madness, some consequences ensue linking epistemology with politics, being that a mad individual cannot be part of the citizenship dynamics, which assumes a regulated and shareable understanding of experience. Here I try to link these views on reason and citizenship to the anti-vaccine protests that took place amid the COVID pandemic in different countries of all latitudes, such as in the United States, Germany, Holland, France, New Zealand, etc. I do such a connection by arguing that at the base of these popular expressions of discontent there is an implicit madness, insofar as they arise from the rupture of a social agreement based on previous experiences and pieces of evidence about sanitary and vaccination practices collected and systematized throughout the development of modern medical sciences.

The present paper consists of five parts. In the first part, I introduce the way in which Kant understood madness and the texts where this topic is addressed. In the second part, I characterized the naturalistic/normativistic debate. In the third part I defend a normative reading of epistemology and I elaborate on my particular reading of what constitutes the concept of normativity. In the fourth part, I develop the normative interpretation of madness. And in the fifth part, I interpret the anti-vaccine and anti-COVID restrictions demonstrations from the framework of the normative interpretation of Kantian epistemology. I close with some conclusions about the subject matter.

## 2. Madness and reason in Kantian philosophy

*An artificially induced dementia could easily become a genuine one"*

(Kant, 2007, p. 322) [AA, VII, 217]

The topic of madness is not alien to Kantian philosophy, it can be traced from his pre-critical phase to the last works published during his lifetime. Foucault (2008, p. 29) shows the relation between the Anthropological inquiry and its relations with pre-critical and Critical works. Also he relates the concepts of "reason" and "madness" are inseparable, he even argues that the former is defined by virtue of the latter, insofar as the task of philosophy, for him, is to limit the reason from its excesses, a perspective that could offer a way to interpreting Kant's "curiosity" about madness, which kept him intellectually occupied for almost 25 years. The texts "*Essay on the maladies of the Head*" (1764) and "*Dreams of a spirit-seer elucidated by the dreams of Metaphysics*" (1766) are irrefutable proofs of the philosophical-conceptual preoccupation for this subject on the pre-critical Kantian philosophy. These works outline some ideas that will become central to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, namely reason's constraints in its claims of knowledge acquisition, and the constitution of mental faculties that are at stake in the act of knowing and dealing with world objects. Kant addresses madness in his "*Anthropology from a Pragmatic point of view*" (1798), where he collects and systematizes what was postulated in the pre-critical stage with the theorization of the transcendental subject in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). I will now briefly present the most important elements in each of the referred essays.

In the "*Essay on the maladies of the Head*" Kant makes a classificatory exercise of types of disorders that each faculty of reason can suffer. In this essay madness is presented as a weakness or illness that occurs only within social dynamics, given that Kant seems to argue for an association between nature, simplicity and harmony, something he inherited from French Contractualism (Kant, 2008, p. 65) [AA, II, 259], a view in which all evil and illness emerge from the social context. Thus, madness is understood as an evil that affects the faculties of reason and inverts their *correct* functionality. The term "inversion" (Verkehrtheit) can be read here in at least two different ways. The first sense represents a lack of control of the rational force over both sensible and conceptual impulses. Therefore, this inversion presents itself as a weakness and also as a disease. In this sense it is a weakness of reason as a force that fails in containing passions, consequently overwhelming the sensible realm by self-generated affections of passions and ideas. On the other hand, that "inversion" represents an unbridling of rationality as an intellectual force that presents itself as imagination without any control from the sensible realm. Then the inversion of the faculties refers to the fact that, instead of unifying and constraining the experience, they unbridle it either the sensible or intellectually, leading to clashes and contradictions, even destroying reason itself. Here we can find melancholy and other "outbursts" of passion. The reason inversion is the most worrisome one because in this case the rules that shape and direct reason's activity are generated merely from within reason itself without any constraints from the sensible restrictions, which results in a completely alienated experience of the world from any intersubjectivity or common sense.

The frailties of the disturbed head can be brought under as many different main genera as there are mental capacities that are afflicted by it. I believe to be able to organize them all together under the following three divisions: firstly, the reversal of the concepts of experience in *derangement* (Verrückung); second, the power of judgment brought into disorder by this experience in *dementia* (Wahnsinn); third, reason that has become reversed with respect to more universal judgments in *insanity* (Wahnwitz) (Kant, 2007, p. 70) [AA, II, 264].

On the other hand, inversion (Verkehrtheit) or perversion also can be read as a failed correspondence between a desire and what satisfies it, namely a contradiction between concepts and desires.

If the dominant passion is odious in itself and at the same time insipid enough to take for the satisfaction of the passion precisely that which is contrary to the natural intension of the passion, then this state of inverted reason is foolishness (Narrheit). (...) The fool (Narr), however is at the same time rendered so imbecile by his passion that he believes then to be in a possession of the thing desired when he actually deprives himself of it (Kant, 2007, p. 68) [AA, II, 262].

According to that, the inversion is associated with the deviation from “normal” reason, because in the latter sense of inversion the satisfaction of its ends or desires leads to its own destruction. “I hold that every offensive folly is properly grafted onto two passions: arrogance (Hochmuth) and greediness (Geiz). Both inclinations are unjust and are therefore hated. Both are insipid by nature, and their end destroys itself.” (2008, p. 68) (AA, II, 262) It follows from this that for Kant and according to some rationalist postulates, by nature reason does not tend to its own destruction.

Following on the idea of madness as a lack of rules or control of rational capacities, in “*Dreams of a spirit-seer elucidated by the dreams of Metaphysics*” (1776), Kant criticizes the Swedish theosophist and mystic Swedenborg (1668-1772), who claimed to be able to communicate with the spiritual world. Kant already had outlined the idea that objective and valid experience has to be governed by rules that unify it (the categories of experience), otherwise, reason, untied from its empirical chains, would move further and further away from the realm of the verifiable, giving itself the authority to speak of God, spirits, and demons. In this sense, Kant compares Swedenborg’s visions with the ambitions of the dogmatic Rationalism of Wolff, Leibniz, Spinoza and even Descartes. In their systems, they tried to explain the nature of truth and reason standing on metaphysical postulates that needed to go through God and his properties, as well as the soul and its thinking ability.

Kant proceeds to formulate his rational criterion of knowledge from the duality between dreaming and wakefulness. He argues that having knowledge of the world of spirits and believing one is a “citizen of it” is like being in a dream since the dreamer only subscribes to the subject’s experience narrating the event without an intersubjective shared world. That only occurs in wakefulness (Kant, 1992, p. 329) [AA, II, 342]. Kant also suggests that under this duality a mad subject, the metaphysician and the visionary live in their dream world, a world that is reduced to their own ego, as distorted as it might be, and since it is their own world, under their own rules, it can only be experienced by them.

In “*Anthropology from a Pragmatic point of view*”, a text in which Kant worked for 40 years and was published a few years before his death (1798), the topics of the weaknesses (Gemüthsschwächen) and illnesses (Gemüthskrankheiten) of the soul appear after the characterization of the human subject as a being with a self-consciousness that unifies his experience as he grows and matures. Kant understands the human as the *concrete being* of the formal subject outlined in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787). This means that Kant give an account of the *Mensch* (Anthropology) from a metaphysical understanding of the possibility and scope of knowledge of the human (*Der Mensch*) . Once his formulation of knowledge is outlined, he moves on to account for particular cases, where this transcendental generality about knowledge and subject undergoes alterations depending on the particular case. “Let us now make some observations about human beings, how one differs from another in these endowments or in their habitual use or misuse, first of all in a healthy soul, and the also in mental illness” (Kant, 2007, p. 304) [AA, VII, 197]. This is important in comparison with his pre-critical works because here the transcendental image of the subject formulated in the Critique is the framework that allows us to understand the human being as a spontaneous subject who produces rules for his benefit:

If by the word “understanding” is meant the faculty of knowing rules (and thus cognition through concepts) in general, so that the understanding composes the entire *higher* faculty of cognition in itself, then the rules are not to be understood as those according to which nature guides the human being man in his conduct, as occurs with animals which are driven by natural instinct, but only those that he himself *makes* (macht). (Kant, 2007, p. 305) [AA, VII, 198]

This understanding of the human being as a rational rule-creating spontaneous being allows him to formulate a criterion of normality regarding the use and abuse of these capacities. Hence, Kant argues that only through exercise and discipline it is possible to direct this creative force of directionality that is rationality:

Natural understanding can be enriched through instruction with many concepts and furnished with rules. But the second intellectual faculty, namely, that of discerning whether something is an instance of the rule or not -the power of judgment- cannot be *instructed*, but only exercised. That is why its growth is called *maturity*, and its understanding that which comes only with years. (Kant, 2007, p. 306) [AA, VII, 199]  
A similar quote can be found in *Critique of Pure Reason*, (KrV, A133-135)

From that normative conformation of the subject and as a result of the enlightened image of humanity, Kant derives the principle of “avoid error” for both Logic and Anthropology, one that every enlightened man must always keep in mind:

- a. To think for oneself.
- b. To think oneself (in communicating with human beings) into the place of every *other person*.
- c. Always to think *consistently* with *oneself* (Kant, 2007, p. 332) (AA, VII, 228)

Diseases are then characterized as weaknesses or as atrophy of some of the subject's faculties in the growth and maturation process of each particular person. The link between the weaknesses of the soul with a political and enlightenment component, not fully developed by Kant, is also of special interest because he understands weaknesses as inability to exercise the coming of age, autonomy, and the ability to issue concepts and thus standards for oneself. Kant further suggests that many people -intentionally- seek to see themselves as incapable because they prefer the comfort of not thinking for themselves and obeying orders from a superior, clergy or king. In this context, being a rational and autonomous subject is an indispensable condition for the republic's existence and for any effort to move away from political absolutism to succeed. The consequent outline of a political understanding of madness will be a fundamental matter for the final part of the present text, where I will correlate Kant's conception of madness with the political fanaticisms of the twenty-first century. Now I will continue distinguishing between weakness and illness.

While addressing the difference between weakness and illness, it is important to note that the classification does not change much from Kant's "*Maladies of the Head*" to "*Anthropology*", what changes is the consolidation of the transcendental view of knowledge. Here I defend along with Bejar (2015), that a transcendental analysis of madness appears in Kant's *Anthropology* since the approach to this issue does not seek to find physical causes nor symptoms or contents that a "mad individual" can experience. This work shows that madness can become a reason "without positive"; a completely coherent system of rules that only makes sense within the subjective unit that connects them, but not intersubjectively. Béjar argues:

Madness is thus proposed as a formal disorder: it does not depend on certain contents, but they are organized in experience with a particular construction rule. We thus see how his ideas on mental illness appear closely connected with the development of his philosophy and the new understanding of the subject-object relation that it implies. (Béjar, 2015, p. 27. My translation)

Then, faced with the duality of weakness and illness, Kant writes:

The defects of the cognitive faculty are either *mental deficiency* or *mental illnesses*. Illnesses of the soul with respect to the cognitive faculty can be brought under two main types. One is *Melancholia* (Hypochondria) and the other is *mental derangement* (mania). With the *former*, the patient is well aware that something is not going right with the course of his thoughts in so far as his reason has insufficient control over itself to direct, stop, or impel the course of his thoughts. (...) Mental derangement indicates an arbitrary course of the patient's thoughts, which has its own (subjective) rule, but which is contrary to the (objective) rules that is in agreement with laws of experience. (Kant, 2007, p. 309) [AA, VII, 202]



In this text, weakness is called hypochondria (Grillenkrankheit) and the sickness of mania (gestörte Gemüth). Hypochondria is defined as an incessant affliction that keeps the head full of thoughts and sensations. Kant proposes the ability to abstract as a cure. According to him, this illness of the imagination intensifies gradually throughout the person's life via mood swings (Wechsel der Launen) to the point of melancholy (depression).

Madness (Verrückt) as a disease occurs when reason gets overwhelmed by its own rules and ends up dominating the individual, leading him to states where he loses contact with regulated experience (objective or intersubjective). Kant proposes four possible ways in which this condition expresses: a) Deviation: the loss of the capacity to unify the experience (apperception). b) Insanity: when the rules of reason are taken as perceptions of reality without empirical limitation. c) Insanity: is characterized by associations lacking support in experience. This one is considered by Kant as an incurable condition. d) Vesania: it is a "disturbed reason". Represents an individual whose reason no longer touches the ground of experience and since such capacity is the only way to know the particular through the universal, it becomes an opening for fantasies and connections that cannot be refuted. "The invention of the squaring of the circle, of perpetual motion, the unveiling of the suprasensible forces of nature, and the comprehension of the mystery of the Trinity are in his power" (Kant, 2007, p. 321) [AA, VII, 216]. It is a level of systematic madness called reason "without positive" (positive Unvernunft).

For in this last kind of mental derangement there is not merely disorder and deviation from the rule for the use of reason, but also *positive unreason*; that is, *another* rule, a totally different point of view into which the soul is transferred, so to speak, and from which it sees all objects differently. And from *sensorio communi*, which is required for the unity of *life* (of the animal), it finds itself transferred to a faraway place (2007, p. 321) [AA, VII, 216].

In conclusion, it is evident that Kant was not indifferent to the issue of madness, and he addressed it at different times in his life and philosophical work. In his reflections on madness certain continuity can be found, since he associates them[those representations] as inversions or deviations of the faculties of reason, where they lose all restraints coming from the sensible realm over the reason or vice-versa. This inversion can be read also as a contradiction in reason desires, where it tends to its own destruction. Both ways of understanding the inversion have similarities that I will point out in the last section of the present work. Finally, following Kant's conception of reason as an activity that has to refer and limit itself to the possible experience ensues a vision of reason as one that remains regulated by the restrictions of sensibility. Importantly, this normality is what makes objective experience possible.

### 3. The naturalistic and normativistic approach of knowledge and reason

Throughout the development of modern epistemology, two ways of approaching or studying knowledge as a subject matter have consolidated: either from a descriptive or a normative one. (Hatfield, 1991, p. 14) The former aims generally to determine and describe the processes that explain sufficiently how individuals know. Under this view, knowledge is understood as events or facts; these can be either internal events of an individual or external to him, so they allow him to know and act in the world. In this sense, a descriptive explanation aims to trace the causes or conditions that produce knowledge through generalized descriptions or laws coming from Biology or psychology:

A further assumption is perhaps more philosophical than scientific, but still seems to me to bind contemporary mind science as much as it does philosophy of mind: consciousness is an expression purely of bodily chemistry (...). At its heart is the notion of a *neural correlate of consciousness*. (Waxman, 2019, p. 13)

In contemporary epistemology, naturalistic interpretations of Kantian philosophy are the most influential ones, taking naturalism as the philosophical stance defending that every epistemic problem has to be solved with methods developed by experimental sciences. Accordingly, I understand naturalism as a descriptive account of knowledge. In the specific case of Kant's view of madness, naturalized accounts argue that Kant defends reason as a cognitive structure resulting from nature and madness as a natural conflict that denotes the division of reason throughout history.

Kant places the origin of madness together with the complex, paradoxical and conflicting character of the human psyche, in its natural condition. He thus inaugurates a hypothesis that has endured in the scientific community for more than two centuries putting forward the idea of a humanity afflicted by an innate neurophysiological fracture. (Teruel, 2021, p. 56. My translation)

Following this account, reason is understood as a natural fact or product, understanding natural as what can be sufficiently explained from the postulates and procedures developed by modern scientific disciplines (Kitcher, 1995, pp. 306-310). In this sense, madness is also understood as a natural fact having a sufficient explanation as such. However, this reading is not enough to account for the diverse dimensions of understandings, knowledge and madness. If human reason and cognition are natural phenomena and categories form part of the cognitive architecture as the result of evolutionary biological processes, it would not be possible to explain the closeness of such dissimilar and diverse conceptions of knowledge and madness through history. As intended by the dogmatic rationalism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the hermetic knowledge that flourished between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. On the other hand, the naturalized description is insufficient to understand how knowledge, as a result of certain conditions, can also be a cause and generate changes in the subject that knows.

The normative perspective approaches knowledge from the "*What for?*" question. For example, What is the purpose of knowledge? This purpose or "what for" also implies a connection or relationship between concepts and values that run not only downwards the cause-effect relation, but also upward the effect-cause relation, hence establishing a reciprocal community between these concepts (Kant, 2000, pp. 242-247) [AA, V, 370-372]. The normative reading then looks at causes and also at how the concept (rule) generates knowledge that enables any knowledge of objects and properties. In this way, normative questions are answered by assuming a guide or an end that allows directing and guiding the course of knowledge. I defend a normative reading because; 1) it transcends the field of any scientific explanation by broadening the use of the concept and; 2) it allows us to see the connec-



tion between the epistemic project with the anthropological and political one. That is, it allows us to interpret knowledge as one of the most important pieces of a civilizing project, introduced in a certain historical moment allowing us to ask what changes or effects knowledge produces in the subject who knows or who is the cause of such knowledge.

I argue that Kant's critical philosophy is already a normative perspective of knowledge and there is evidence in each of his texts, although in greater clarity in the second part of the *Critique of Judgment* (critique of teleological judgment). Nonetheless, since it will always be a matter of controversy, what I will defend instead is a normative perspective of Kantian critical philosophy. Under this interpretation, it is understood that the phenomena of subject (*Gemüt*), experience, knowledge and madness will result in a mixture of rules and guides that human reason provides to a substance in principle not produced by humans. Then, for example, experience is shaped and regulated by rational rules, which guide the individual's capacities to unify the objects he experiences to be able to use them to his advantage as he progresses in their unification. These rules must be restricted to the substance that affects human capacities because their realization occurs only in the restriction to the material and the sensible.

Naturalist and normativist sustain that his readings are confronted with each other (Waxman, 2015, p. 138; Hatfield, 1991, p. 244) because the point of departure about the characterization of subject or mind are very different. While Naturalistic approach assume a passive notion of subjectivity, normative ones start with an active notion of it. "and yet, the *Anthropology*, at least in the version available to us, leaves no room for any kind of psychology whatsoever. It explicitly refuses psychology by focusing on the *Gemüt* and not the exploration of the *seele*" (Foucault, 2008, p. 57).

The normative interpretation emphasizes that knowledge is produced from the normative rational activity applied to sensible matter. This entails, as I said, an extension of the use of the concept. That is, knowledge is obtained from constraining rational rules to the operation of sensibility. Understanding the foundation of knowledge from restrictions and limitations that reason must apply to itself (discipline) is part of the critical project that aims to know the sources, scope and limits of knowledge.

In the same line of thought is Foucault when characterize the notion of Mind (*Gemüt*) in Kant's *Anthropology*:

It was not the aim of the anthropological thinking to bring an end to the definition of a human *wesen* in naturalistic terms: the *collegenwürfe* from 1770-80 were already saying that "our search for Man here is not for what he is in a natural way". But the *Anthropology* of 1789 transforms this decision into an ongoing method, a resolute readiness to follow a path which, it is clear from the outset, would never lead to the truth of nature. (Foucault, 2008, p. 51)

#### 4. From the Normativity of knowledge to the constitution of citizenship

Given that knowledge consists in the restriction and application of rational rules on the empirical matter to produce a regulated and shareable experience with other subjectivities, it follows that subjectivity itself is the outcome of a constant exercise of restriction and application of rules on cognitive capabilities. The subject is a concept's effect or a movement of ideas, like Foucault affirm.

The *Gemüt* is not simply “what it is” but “what it makes of itself” (...) to which we only need add that what the *Gemüt* has to make of himself is (...) use that is to be the greatest possible thanks to the “*Druch ideen*” [through ideas] (Foucault, 2008, p. 63)

This opens the way to a normative understanding of the concept of subject since the subject is the one restricting his rational action over the experience; his contents and knowledge are the results of the application of these ideas and constraints on his cognitive forces or capacities. Moreover, subjectivity is an idea about what an individual must be in the face of knowledge of objects and how he must operate to have a valid experience able to share with others.

For it is a subjectively necessary touchstone of the correctness of our judgments generally and consequently also of the soundness of our understanding, that we also restrain our understanding with the *understanding of others*, instead of *isolating* ourselves with our own understanding and judge *publicly* with our private representation, so to speak (Kant, 2007, p. 324) [AA, VII, 219].

This outlines an idea of subjectivity as a duty to be what the modern enlightened individual must aspire to be and thus fixes this ideal of what the human being must be, both individually and collectively. It is useful to remember that the questions leading the entire Kantian critical project are: What can I know? What should I do? and What is it given to me to expect? These interrogatives are summarized in a single question: What is the human being? The answer is traversed by this normative formulation. In this way, it shows how knowledge—as an effect of the subject who knows related to objects—is both cause and restriction of the possible actions of the subject and other subjects. A human individual is that being who can formulate rules for himself, conduct and self-constrain based on those rules to live in the incipient city and thus become a citizen with a vision for universal or cosmopolitan citizenship.

Under the normative interpretation of knowledge, anthropology is understood as a novel project of shaping individuals as citizens, which implies understanding knowledge as the cause of an image of the human subject. This means that at the base of the conception of the human being originated in the Enlightenment, there is a rational core allowing the subject to self-constrain and to be constrained by the rules that configure citizenship.

#### 5. A normative account of madness

Under the normative interpretation of Kantian philosophy that I defend, madness is understood as an effect of normative reason, since only those who possess rationality and live in society can be

mad, someone whose reason has overflowed all sensible and empirical limits. I understand madness as the overflowing of the rational rules whose constraints allow the regulated and valid experience for subjectivities. In this sense madness is a defiance of reason, an internal lack of control of its abilities. The sensible capacity of the mad individual is unable to restrict the rules of understanding, and then they are eclipsed by the forces of reason. At the same time, reason is understood as an effect of madness because thanks to these cases of abnormal individuals, rationality is reaffirmed as distinct from madness, and rational subjects as distinct from mad individuals.

By understanding madness this way, we can see why the mad individual does not play any role in the new citizenship and enlightened society. First, because to be an active citizen is necessary to share a common experience with the rest of the subjectivities, and this condition is not satisfied from the beginning under the abnormal condition of madness. On the other hand, the enlightened ideal invites to exercise autonomy, to exert the capacity to issue laws for oneself and not to depend on any external force capable of shaping what every individual seeks. Here autonomy is a mandate and an obligation to be a citizen, the “coming of age” of the subject in the Kantian sense. Under this ideal of what the individual as a cognizant subject must be, the mad subject does not satisfy said requirements given that, according to Kant, he does not need and must not resort to any kind of divination, premonition, vision or any other “extravagance” to obtain knowledge about his future or about what he is supposed to do. That being a resource that in other societies had its value, like in the case of the soothsayer, the alchemist and the ecstatic visionary in the Middle Ages, the pythoness or the one who communicated with the *daimones* in classical Greece.

One of the consequences of this configuration of rationality and its role in a society is that the mad individual is to be set aside, secluded and medically treated as someone abnormal and sick. The treatment consists in putting him back under the restrictions of the rules; in Kantian terms this means that the sensitive experience must always be regulated and intersubjectively valid, excluding and eliminating consciously or unconsciously what is presented as different. This is noticeable in the way Kant speaks of the asylums in his three texts about madness. He says in his essay on the maladies of the head:

Since according to the observation of Swift, a bad poem is merely a purification of the brain through which many detrimental moistures are withdrawn for the relief of the sick poet, why should not a miserable brooding piece of writing be the same as well? In this case, however, it would be advisable to assign nature another path to purification, so that he would be thoroughly and quietly purged of the ill without disturbing the common wealth (*gemeine Wesen*) through this. (Kant, 2007, p. 77) (AA, II, 271)

In *Dreams of a spirit-seer elucidated by the dreams of Metaphysics* he writes: “I do not therefore blame the reader at all if, instead of regarding spirit-seers as semi-citizens of another world, he simply

dismiss without further ado as candidates for the hospital, thus saving himself the trouble of any further investigation.” (Kant, 1992, p. 335) [AA, II, 348] And in the *Anthropology* he notes:

The simpleton, the imprudent person, the stupid person, the coxcomb and the bufoon differ from the mentally deranged not merely in degrees, but in the distinctive quality of their mental discord and because to their ailments they do not yet belong in the madhouse, that is, a place where human beings, despite the maturity and strength of their age, must still, with regards to the smallest matters of life, be kept orderly through someone else’s reason. (Kant, 2009, p. 209) [AA, VII, 202]

One final remark to open the next section is to see that a normative lecture of madness opens a political and social dimension of this term. This in contrast with naturalistic approach that relegates the concept to its medical definition and use. In the normative lecture madness is the incapacity to have a common ground of beliefs and behaves in the dynamic of being citizen, but not produced by a sort of medical condition, but because the influence of certain ideas that configure the subjectivity of that or those persons.

## 6. Normative madness and Anti-vaccine movements

In this last part I try to apply Kant’s understanding of madness, as interpreted from the framework of a normative epistemology, to the recent demonstrations against health measures in different countries amidst the COVID pandemic. I argue that the protesters are “mad” in the sense developed by Kant, insofar as there is an excess of or uncontrolled rationality in their actions, leading them to positions that may denote a “minority of age” and therefore selfishness. This madness, an effect of rationality, serves as a cause for the individuals who participate in it, leading them to radical political positions that sit closer to authoritarian ideals than democratic exercises. This allows us to interpret the Kantian notion of madness as similar to egotistic delusions that are detrimental to the republican and democratic life. It is then possible to link madness with social and political organization.

The pandemic, and especially the incipient post-pandemic, have consolidated a worrying rise of reactionary and frontist political and social movements, marked by hate speech that questions the legitimacy of the basic coexistence agreements and proposing a “new” model based on the division, the negationism, the exclusion of all those who do not “affiliate” with their identity agents and the constant and progressive confrontation. (Rodríguez et al., 2022, p. 2. My translation)

Due to the serious and severe restrictions that politicians decided to implement following the close and almost imposing advice of the WHO (World Health Organization) in different countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, many felt directly manipulated by their government when their individual liberties were restricted in such a dramatic and unusual way. In consequence, several anti-restrictions and anti-vaccine marches took place in different major cities around the world. One might think that these protests can be the result of the collective ignorance and poverty of less “developed”

countries. However, they occurred with greater intensity and frequency in first-world countries, as in major cities in the United States and countries of the European Union (Rodrigues et al., 2020, pp. 32-33).

Taking note of the banners and slogans in the demonstrations, it is clear that some “rational arguments” were used, at least in formal terms, to oppose restrictions and vaccination policies. It is ironic to see how scientific reasoning was mockingly used or imitated for many to conclude that they did not want to be vaccinated, some because considered that vaccines were a government mechanism for microchip insertion to somehow control the population. Many others defended their individual “freedom” by claiming that, as free beings, they had the right to transit wherever they wanted without being restricted by the State. Those people are “proposing a new “social construction” based on the division and persecution of anyone who threatens identity while creating an offensive against principles and movements that promote social progress” (Rodriguez et al., 2022, p. 2. My translate) Considering this it seems to me that those who participated in such demonstrations can be described as “crazy”, because their madness is an excess of reason, one that generates, connects and relates ideas to other concepts but has no sensible restriction whatsoever, something that gives place to the fact that there is no way to convince them otherwise.

This madness leads to an egotistic attitude, where the person overflowed by reason ceases to consider others. The appeal to the experience in Kantian philosophy has the purpose of constraining the activity of reason and its creation of concepts to what affects us as sensitive subjects because only in sensitivity reside the necessary conditions for sharing an experience. In absence of a shared experience, there is no possibility of understanding the other and making a consensus, and the development of the individual’s rational maturity becomes impossible, leaving him at the mercy of the authoritarian pretensions of some political leaders.

Under authoritarian populism there are various social, political, religious and economic movements that, in their search to accumulate political power, have created a discursive agenda that seeks to reissue political representation based on the systematic attack of social sectors that have been demanding a greater recognition of rights. such as women, LGBTQ+ movements, ethnic minorities or migrants. (Rodriguez et al., 2022, pp. 3-4. My translation)

I have argued how madness is an effect of reason, now it is turn to elaborate on how the rationality of individuals may also be an effect of this madness. The overflow of reason produces selfish and authoritarian subjectivities that although they gather to protest, they do not share an experience constructed by themselves, but rather they are subjected to the experience of a leader with authoritarian and anti-democratic tendencies, who feeds that unbridled reason, reaching the extremes of the democratic spectrum, posing a risk to the republican and democratic institutions that found our modern

Western societies. Today those leaders with such tendencies are people like Trump, Bolsonaro, Putin and other movement leaders with conservative and neo-fascist tendencies. Are not Putin or Trump subjects that can qualify as crazy and dangerous politically speaking?

## **7. Conclusions**

“The dream of reason produces monsters” is the title of one of Goya’s immortal engravings and here it can be read in two ways leading my conclusion: First, from the Kantian context, when the reason is dreaming and not sharing a world with others, it falls prey to its dreams and fantasies, [imposing] its creative capacity over sensible restrictions, just like the dogmatic metaphysicians that Kant criticized in his attempt to moderate and constrain reason to the sensible capacities. Secondly, Kant can see as his monster of reason the anti-vaccine protests that took place during the recent pandemic, a product of a dream called “progress”, accompanied by the emergence of authoritarian and anti-democratic movements that sadly are gaining ground in public life putting it at risk.



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