CHAPTER THREE

SECULARIZED/MEDICALIZED CONFESSION AND THE PROBLEMATIZATION OF RATIONAL AUTONOMY

However, Foucault also thematizes the way in which, in diametric opposition to the four different disciplinary/bio-power technologies and their respective transcendent orientated implicit founding assumptions, discussed in the previous chapter, other psychiatric technologies emerged concomitantly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from within the spectrum of bio-power. In short, these not only propagated new myths of madness that intimated the impossibility of subjects being able to exercise rational autonomy in perpetuity. In addition, they also couched such myths in terms of a new transcendent orientated implicit founding assumption, namely one that advanced the existence of an elusive, more primary realm of psychic truth, to which one always ultimately had to defer authority. Consequently, disciplinary/bio-power society became infused with tension not only because of the way in which its different technologies simultaneously advanced conflicting concepts of autonomy, but also because of the concomitant incongruity between the divergent transcendent orientations of their respective implicit founding assumptions, all of which, in effect, constituted subjectivity as a locus of perpetual discursive conflict.

Unfortunately, the account of the arising of such discursive tension is unavoidably complex and convoluted, owing largely to the way in which it involved a series of discursive feints, thrusts and parries on the part of psychiatric and juridical authorities, in a duel over the issue of legitimacy, which continues to be fought in the contemporary era though through far more muted means. However, arguably, in its early stages, this duel involved four rather drastic gestures that, although no longer repeated, can nevertheless be understood as both setting the tone for the ‘dialogue’ between the two great discursive authorities and establishing its order of exchange. In short, the four moves can be summarized as follows: an initial move was made by psychiatric authorities in the late eighteenth century to extend their sphere of influence. This was followed by a counter-move launched by juridical authorities to extend their own sphere of influence, which involved a
partial co-option of the myths used by the psychiatric authorities in their strategy to attain further legitimacy. In turn, this became subject to a *counter-counter-move* on the part of psychiatric authorities that, ultimately, led to their threatening of juridical power via the notion of homicidal monomania. After this, a somewhat *conciliatory move* on the part of juridical authorities established a situation of compromise that saw a more even distribution of power and, concomitantly, the muting (rather than the silencing) of the antagonism between psychiatric and juridical authorities.

To begin with, in order to obtain a better perspective of the way in which the new myths of madness advanced by psychiatric authorities in the late eighteenth century, as part of their *initial move* to extend their sphere of influence, differed from earlier notions of madness, it is helpful to consider madness within the context of the Greco-Roman tradition. This is because, as Foucault points out in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, for a long time the ideas of this tradition continued to inform the prevailing view of madness as the end result of an habitual excess of passion.\(^1\) In other words, as Foucault later emphasizes in both *The Use of Pleasure* and *Fearless Speech*, madness was traditionally perceived as following on from the repeated failure to restrain passion through the exercise of moderation and self-mastery,\(^2\) which allowed such lack of restraint to take root and become ever more profoundly entrenched until it ultimately usurped the individual’s capacity for autonomy.\(^3\) As such, madness did not constitute an entity-in-itself that could be restrained since, by definition, acts underpinned by such excesses of passion were formless, in the sense that they emerged, gradually, through an erosion of constitution as a result of the habitual absence of self-restraint. In effect, Foucault illustrates this neatly in relation to the similar distinction between the positive and negative sense of *parrhesia*, or the practice of open and honest speaking; in terms of this, while *parrhesia* in its positive sense was able to effect political change because it was the product of years of philosophical training and development, *parrhesia* in its negative sense was utterly useless in this respect because,

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\(^{2}\) Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, 64–65.