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"DEMENTIA IS A FICTION"

KANT ON THE MENTAL DISTURBANCES OF THE HUMAN SOUL

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1. Mental disturbance as a topic of a pragmatic anthropology

Man is riddled with follies.[2]

This is how Kant inscribes the theme of mental disturbance in the field of his anthropological thought. At the same time, and with these

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[2] Paraphrasis of Kant's words: "And we are indeed totally inoculated with follies. Were we to correctly investigate ourselves, and we would find this" (PH: 155); and "Each man has its dose of folly" (AA 25.1: 110). All of Kant's citations will be presented in a traditional manner (Abbreviation of work, Volume of work, number of page(s)). The abbreviation of each work cited shall be displayed as follows: Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. von der Königlich-Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Akademie-Ausgabe (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1901 ff.) (AA); Immanuel Kant, *Die philosophischen Hauptvorlesungen Immanuel Kants: Nach den neu aufgefundenen Kollegheften des Grafen Heinrich zu Dohna-Wundlacken*, hrsg. von Arnold Kowalewski (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1965) (PH). All citations have been translated from their original German language into English and are of my own. The exception is the text "Essay on the Maladies of the Head," in which we have resorted to the translated version of the text in the Cambridge edition of Kant's works: Immanuel Kant, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998 ff).

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very words, Kant imperceptibly shifts the bleak panorama — and attempts to root out the consequent stigma — that has always hung over this topic.

Indeed, until Kant, the problem of mental disturbance was one scarcely considered by the learned community.[3] It was, in their eyes, a dangerous or negative topic — perhaps the most dangerous and negative of all — because it revealed the unconscious or irrational in the human being and thus necessarily labored in obscurity and doubt. As a result, in treatises of psychology and anthropology, the topic of mental disturbance was either completely avoided because it was too sensitive, or mentioned in passing as something real yet shameful, or, at best, considered suitable for a specialized study only, but not for a study devoted to the science of man. So bleak was the previous panorama, that it was notable even in the works which most influenced Kant's anthropological project: neither Baumgarten's *Metaphysica* nor Platner's *Anthropologie für Aertzte und Weltweise* present more than sporadic references to the topic. It was surely bearing in mind these and other omissions that Kant inaugurates his lectures on anthropology in 1772 with the words: "Psychology and the healthy state of the soul are often dealt with; but not *the sick one*" (AA 25.1: 105).

The paradigm shifts with Kant's approach. Not, however, by supposing that folly is to be found everywhere, or that folly burns secretly in *all men*, merely awaiting the moment of its eruption. No, for Kant has no interest in dealing with folly as with a mere pathology, and therefore, as the irrational or *non-natural in man*. Quite on the contrary, Kant intends to ascertain what is common or universal in mental disturbance and considers *the topic from a rigorously human point of view, in the scope of a pragmatic anthropology.* By so doing, Kant can claim that despite its

[3] Such negligence, which does not fully extend to topics akin to that of mental disturbance — such as obscure representations or dreams — is so widespread that few exceptions to it may be found, be it in the field of psychology, philosophy or anthropology. The exceptions, let it be noted, come from the field of medicine: namely, Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621; Thomas Willis, *Pathologiae cerebri, et nervosi generis specimen in quo agitur de morbis convulsivis et de scorbuto,* 1668, and *Affectionum quæ dicuntur hystericæ et hypochondriacæ pathologia spasmodica vindicate: Accesserunt exercitationes medico-physicae duae de sanguinis accensione et de motu musculari*, 1670; Thomas Sydenham, *On Epidemics,* 1680, and *Dissertatio epistolaris,* 1682, and William Cullen, *First Lines of the Practice of Physic,* 1777, among other notable examples.

not very flattering appearance, mental disturbance is *first and foremost a trait of the natural in the human being*. For the natural in the human being is not, in Kant, the same as in Baumgarten, or Platner, or any other author. According to Kant, the natural is that which is human in human beings — that which unites the individual with the whole — and therefore is truly anthropological.[4] And so, in Kant, the topic of mental disturbance is, as much as possible, stripped of its excessive irrationality and obscurity, and seen as a topic as natural as are the senses, the powers of the spirit, or topics akin to aesthetics and psychology. The greatest proof of Kant's humanization — for pragmatic anthropologization — of the topic resides in his defense of the *imaginative* [*einbildend*] *nature of mental disturbance*. By this, Kant intends to show that the illness of the human soul labors in images and in representations of objects as referred to an ideal, and that such *facta* resemble those of the multiple dispositions and re-dispositions of the various possible alignments of the capacity of imagination (*Einbildungsfähigkeit*) in its sane state, which result either in the creation of intellectual cognitions or in the creation of sensible images (as in poetry).

Our objective is to investigate how Kant approaches the topic of mental disturbance within the context of his anthropological writings.[5] First, we shall consider Kant's onomastic of the several species of mental disturbance,

[4] "Here we shall ascertain what in man is natural, and what in it is artificial or acquired — this is the hardest: to separate man, insofar as it is natural, from men carved by education and other influences [...]" (AA 25.1: 8,9).

[5] The topic of mental disturbance in Kant has hitherto been only insufficiently approached in the scope of his anthropological enterprise, which is here the focus of our research. Notable exceptions of this general omission are: Monique David-Ménard, *La folie dans la raison pure: Kant lecteur de Swedenborg* (Paris: Vrin, 1990); Patrick Frierson, "Kant on Mental Disorder, Part 1: An Overview," *History of Psychiatry* 20, 79 Pt. 3 (2009), 267-28; Patrick Frierson, "Kant on Mental Disorder, Part 2: Philosophical Implications of Kant's Account," *History of Psychiatry* 20, 79 Pt. 3 (2009): 290-310; Nuria S. Madrid, "Controlling Mental Disorder: Kant's Account of Mental Illness in the Anthropology Writings," in *Knowledge, Morals and Practice in Kant's Anthropology,* ed. Gualtiero Lorini and Robert B. Louden (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 147-61; Jeffrie G. Murphy, "Moral Death: A Kantian Essay on Psychopathy," *Ethics: An International Journal of Social, Political, and Legal Philosophy* 82 (1972): 284-98; Olaf Nohr, *Vernunft als Therapie und Krankheit: Zur Geschichte medizinischer Denkfiguren in der Philosophie* (Berlin: Logos Verlag, 2015); Constantin Rauer, *Wahn und Wahrheit: Kants Auseinandersetzung mit dem Irrationalen* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007); Mathé Scholten, "Schizophrenia and Moral Responsibility: A Kantian Essay," *Philosophia* 44 (2016): 205-25; Manfred Spitzer and Brendan A. Mahe, eds., *Philosophy and Psychopathology* (New York: Springer, 1990); Helge Svare, *Body and Practice in Kant* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006); Pedro Jesús Teruel, "Die Äußere Schaale der Natur: Eine Fußnote zum Versuch über die Krankheiten des Kopfes (1764)," *Kant-Studien* 104 (2013): 23-43.

and through the analysis of the powers involved in them, attempt to prove the *imaginative*[6] *nature* of mental disturbances (Section 2). Secondly, we aim at expounding the problem underlying Kant's concept of mental disturbance: the possible bringing together of the mechanics of disturbed imaginativeness and that of sane imaginativeness, and to prove this through their common relation to the ideal and their various arrangements of the powers of the mind, the best example of which is the similitude between the *demented* and the *poet* (Sections 2, 3). Thirdly, as a conclusion, we aim at separating both procedures through the example of Kant's conception of "*sensus proprius*" and "*sensus communis*"; namely, by expounding how Kant links a representing in *sensus proprius* to the demented, and a representing in *sensus communis* to the creations of genius, or poetic creations, thereby definitively separating two applications of one and the same human capacity to imagine and putting them to two different practical (anthropological) uses (Section 3).

2. Mental disturbance as a (Kantian) problem

2.1. *The imaginative nature of the healthy and unhealthy states of the soul*

When he first approaches the topic, Kant preemptively states that *he does not know what mental disturbance is*: "Indeed, it cannot be truly explained what a disturbed human being is" (PH: 155). However, in the

[6] Let it be noted beforehand that by "imaginative" we do not understand imagination as merely regarding the "power of imagination." Instead, and because we are dealing here mostly with Kant's *Lectures on Anthropology*, we respect Kant's therein suggested distinction between "power of imagination" (*Einbildungskraft*), that is, one of the powers of the spirit alongside the understanding or reason, and the "capacity of imagination" (*Einbildungsfähigkeit*), that is, the "power of formation" (*Bildungs-Vermögen*) (see AA 25.1: 76-78), which, according to the philosopher, is a primordial, ever-continuous form of imagination which not only precedes but encapsulates the real actions of the power of imagination and the understanding and hence underlies all human imaginative and/or rational operations, as well as their manifestations, such as those of dream, wit, genius and, as is here the case, mental disturbance. As such, when we use the word "imaginative" on its own — the imaginative nature of mental disturbance — we refer to this underlying, surreptitious, all-encompassing imaginative activity, and not to those of power of imagination, understanding and reason in general, which stand here only as different palpable applications of this original imaginative capacity, be it in their sane state or be it in their disturbed state (that is, imbecility, insanity, dementia).

Lectures on Anthropology (1772-1796), in the "Essay on the Maladies of the Head" (1767) and in the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798)[7] Kant attempts to overcome his insipience on the theme. To do so, Kant often uses the method of briefly listing the various manifestations of disturbance — an "onomastic" (AA 2: 260) of the frailties and infirmities of the soul — which appear here as species (*species*) regarding their genus (*Gattung*), the mental disturbance.[8] According to Kant, this attempt at systematization is indeed complex; for so numerous, so detailed and akin are the manifestations of mental disturbance, that it is often difficult to categorize the latter according to their causes or phenomena — not to mention to diagnose the illness itself.[9] Perhaps for this reason, Kant's own considerations on the subject seem to be exposed to this difficulty, and so, from one work to the other, even from one lesson to the other, Kant's position on the subject, though unaltered in its essence, displays different structures, oftentimes even multiple nomenclatures for one and the same phenomenon, which cannot but affect the concept of the genus and hence cause perplexity.

However, in the hope of bringing order to our view of Kant's system of the illnesses of the soul, we would say that the guideline of such

[7] Despite the fact that our approach of Kant's opinion on mental disturbance is deliberately confined to his anthropological writings (see annotation 5), this does not mean that Kant deals with folly and mental disturbance exclusively in the "Essay on the Maladies of the Head", the *Lectures on Anthropology* (1772-1796) or the *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798). The topic reemerges in the first and third *Critiques*, as well as *en passant* in other philosophical texts. As such, because Kant does deal with the topic especially in his anthropology, and does so over such a long period of time (1767-1798) — a period of time which encapsulates the critical period — there should be no doubt that Kant's multifarious opinions on mental disturbance, herein expounded only in their anthropological expression, exerted an influence upon the philosophical developments that characterize the so-called critical period. The problematization and critical discussion of this influence, because it surpasses the objective of this research — the analysis of the concept of mental disturbance in Kant's *Lectures on Anthropology* — as well as its necessary economy, shall be left here untouched. But, let it be noted, both Monique David-Ménard and Constantin Rauer show us precisely this in their works by surpassing the anthropological scope of the topic at hand and relating it to Kant's view on reason in other works, such as the *Critique of Pure Reason* (where the topic of mental disturbance is approached with regard to the dialectic nature of reason). On this see Monique David-Ménard, *La folie dans la raison pure: Kant lecteur de Swedenborg* (Paris: Vrin, 1990) and Constantin Rauer, *Wahn und Wahrheit: Kants Auseinandersetzung mit dem Irrationalen* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2007).

[8] See PH: 154.

[9] "The gradations of the illnesses of the mind […] are so infinite that one can hardly differentiate them" (PH: 157-158).

complex phenomena is dependent on *Kant's own definition of mental disturbance in general* — the one which reappears equally throughout Kant's work. Namely, mental disturbance consists of an action of the understanding, or reason, or the power of imagination, "directed against the natural laws of the human being" (AA 15.2: 212),[10] and hence against laws that ensure the healthy proportion of the powers of the human being. As such, then, the disturbance always implies a disproportion, a disharmony of the powers of the spirit, which is opposed to the more or less perfect proportion found in sane human beings. Kant names this "a disharmonious disposition of the forces of the mind in illnesses" (PH: 155), or "[a] complete untuning of the forces of the mind, which do not act in the same proportion as in the healthy state of human beings" (PH: 154).

As such, it is Kant's opinion that "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" (AA 2: 264). And bearing this in mind, Kant proceeds to distinguish the various illnesses under the genus of disturbance into four different parts:[11] *imbecility* (*imbecilitas*), the error residing here in the understanding; *insanity* (*insania*), the error residing in the power of judgment; *dementia (dementia)*, the error residing in the power of imagination; and *folly* (*vesania*), the error residing in reason.

We now undertake a more precise rendition of the distinction between the several species of mental disturbance. This distinction is resumed in other works not exactly in the same manner, but by dividing the topic into disturbances due to *insufficiency* (frailties of the mind) and disturbances due to *perversion* (illnesses of the mind) — to be sure, the *insufficiency or perversion of the objects represented by each disturbance, which in turn is caused precisely due to the errors and disproportions of the powers of the mind*. Hence, regarding the *frailties of the mind*, Kant distinguishes between many species, such as "Stumpfheit" (*obtusus*),

[10] "He by whom the actions of the understanding are directed against their natural laws, is deranged" (AA 15.2: 212).

[11] This first distinction is reproduced here in accordance with Anthropologie Dohna (see PH: 155).

"Dummheit" (*stupiditas*), "Einfältigkeit" (*simplicitas*), and "Zerstreuung" (*distractio*), among others. Above all these, *amentia* (*amentia*), "the incapacity to bring one's representations to a necessary connection to the possibility of experience" (AA 7: 214) — namely, the deficit or "impotency" (AA 2: 263) of representing things —, and *imbecility (Blödsinnigkeit*), which is disproportionate because it presupposes acute senses, but a frailty of the understanding, are the gravest of all the frailties of the mind (*Gemütsschwächen*), but therefore less harmful than any illness of the mind (*Gemütskrankheiten*). As to the *illnesses of the mind*, or the disturbances by excess or by "perversion" (AA 2: 263) of representability, the distinction is more detailed. According to Kant, *derangement* (*Verrücktheit*) is "the perversion of the concepts of experience" (AA 2: 264) in general. As from this point in disturbance, the individual lives as in a dream, he is "a dreamer in walking", for "he is used to representing certain things as clearly sensed of which nevertheless nothing is present" (265). Resuming the order in Anthropology-Dohna, Kant states that *Insanity* (*Wahnwitzigkeit*) derives from derangement, but still only faintly. It shows disharmony of the powers insofar as the power of judgment thinks to be here in a supreme degree and deems itself in position to discern and reason with supernatural precision (see PH: 157). This arises when the power of judgment "errs in a nonsensical manner in imagined more subtle judgments concerning universal concepts", for instance, the interpretation of prophecies or the mensuration of the extension of an ocean (AA 2: 268). *Dementia* (*Wahnsinnigkeit*) is perhaps the amplest of all the disturbances, and in it the lack of balance between powers focuses on the power of imagination, which in this state strives to realize fantasies; that is, it holds fantasies as real things. Namely, in it occurs a weak use of the senses, but possibly a good understanding and surely an exacerbated fantasy. From such incongruence between powers arise manifestations as far apart as hypochondria, in which the individual is conscious of his state, and the visionary, the fantast, the enthusiast or the fanatic, all of them unconscious of their state and in their unconsciousness perverting their own notions of objects. Lastly, *folly* (*Aberwitz*), "the illness of a disturbed reason", consists of "the ill of the soul flying over the ladder of experience and

snatching principles which may be far superior to the touchstone of experience, and pretending to comprehend the incomprehensible" (AA 7: 215). Examples of this are: "The invention of the quadrature of the circle, of the Perpetuum mobile, the unveiling of the supernatural forces of nature" (215), among others. This latter stage, Kant says, stands before the worst manifestation of mental disturbance: that of *madness (Tollheit*).

Now, in view of this, we may infer that such an onomastic order of the several species of mental disturbance presents *an evolution, in ascending gravity, and subsequent ascending difficulty of treatment, of pathological manifestations*. And, according to Kant, this evolution is directly dependent on a disproportion of the powers of the mind, namely, an uncommon insufficiency or excess of a particular power which generates disharmony between the remaining powers and launches the patient in an infirm state. No doubt because of this, Kant always insists on the specific power whose degree is the cause of error and shows this through examples of irregular thoughts or procedures thus generated.

However, while proceeding with such examples, Kant not only bears in mind the cause, but especially the product of the disproportion. Kant is indeed interested in the fact that such manifestations of human life are enrooted in the disarrangement of the human powers; but he is especially concerned with their direct product, that is, *the representation of such manifestations in the human soul — a representation which is the direct fruit of the different possible combinations of the powers of the mind*. Not by chance, Kant refers to the "tumultuary" disturbance of the representations of amentia, to the "methodic" disturbance of the representations of dementia, to the "fragmentary" disturbance of the representations of insanity, and to the much graver "systematic" nature of the disturbed representations (AA 7: 215-216): thus signifying that, at its basis, the *different manifestations of disturbance do indeed have an occult cause in the disproportion of the powers of the mind, but a visible consequence in the representations of the human soul*, which are to be manifested either in tumult, or in fragment, or in melancholy, or in delirium, or in superstition, and so forth. In other words, and bearing in mind the nature of such examples, we would say that Kant ascribes

importance to a better or worse concatenation of the powers of the mind, which is at the basis of his onomastic and hence of his taxonomy of mental disturbance. But because, according to Kant himself, "the soul of every human being is occupied, even in the healthiest state, in painting all sorts of images of things which are not present, or also in completing some imperfect resemblance in the representation of present things" (AA 2: 264); that is, because, be it in its healthy or in its disturbed state, be it in its conscious or unconscious state, the human soul is by nature imaginative (*einbildend*), then Kant must ascribe an even greater relevance to *the fact that this good or bad joint disposition of the powers of the mind always influences directly the capacity of human representation, and therefore — and here is the core of the question — is itself of such an imaginative nature*: "Dementia is a fiction" (PH: 156)[12]; or better still: "Illusion is designated as fiction" (AA 25.1: 108).[13] Hence, just as the healthy relations of the powers of the mind, its proportion(s)[14] and their different products are of a fictive order,[15] so must be *the disturbed, infirm relations of the powers of the mind, the illusion (Wahn) and its products — and therefore, so must the disproportion by insufficiency, or by perversion of the powers of the mind, be of an imaginative order* which is the same as saying that imagination — in its original fictive dimension, as "*Einbildung*" — is present, either in greater or lesser degree, in all forms of human disturbance. The disproportion of the powers, and their respective disturbance in the soul, thus have direct influence on an impotent, for insufficient, or an excessive, for perverted, connection between the object of experience and human representations or images. And as such, dementia, amentia, derangement, and folly, among others,

[12] "Wahnsinn ist eine Einbildung" (PH: 156).

[13] "Wahn heißet Einbildung" (AA 25.1: 108).

[14] Namely, the power of re-imagination (*Nachbildungsvermögen*), the power of imagination (*Einbildungsvermögen*) and the power of pre-imagination (*Vorbildungsvermögen*), as they are presented, for instance, in AA 25.1: 76-7.

[15] "Dementia is a fiction" (PH: 156). "Fiction," a central concept in this research, is here and throughout the text understood as the imaginative capacity for representational (and/or po(i)etic) composition (hence our option as a possible translation of "*Einbildung*"). By it we mean to stress not the current sense of the word, but its original sense, which is of an imaginative order which renders it adjacent to the formative, fictive (*fictis*, *fingendi*), poietical character of all human representations as presented by Kant in his anthropological lectures on wit or genius.

are therefore distinguishable through the more or less disproportional treatment they apply to the image of an object, and how that treatment is to be reproduced in the conduct of the mentally infirm.

2.2. *The longing for an ideal as the common ground of sane and insane mental states*

Kant explains the previous conclusions in greater detail and thereby identifies another problematic aspect, one which he often approaches in lectures on mental disturbance and uses as *further proof* of the imaginative nature of the infirmities of the soul.

As was described above, according to Kant the different species of disturbance arise from a disarrangement of the powers of the mind. This disarrangement is one that is common to all the general formative faculties (*Bildungs-Vermögen*) of the human being: it is of an imaginative nature and, as such, it tends to arise as differently as the different powers of the spirit in which it emerges. This is why Kant divides the disturbances of the soul according to the power of the spirit affected, as well as the feebler or graver manifestations (representations) drawn from the latter. As such, we reiterate, *imbecility or dementia*, which may serve here as examples, are antipodes, and the reason for their separation is manifest. Namely, in the imbecile, representations are devoid of image, for in him the senses are strong, but the power of imagination, and therefore the understanding, are barely present; that is, one could say that in him ideas dissipate, they lose their reality to the point that they evanesce in ideality — hence his *insufficiency* in representing. Whereas in the demented, the opposite takes place: "The demented goes beyond the senses […], demented is then he who substitutes the things of imagination as real" (AA 25.1: 108).[16] Namely, demented individuals realize their fantasies; they "believe to feel what they imagine", or rather, "they believe they feel in things more than what is really there" (AA 25.1: 105), and therefore, in the fantast, whom Kant designates as

[16] "Der Wahnsinnige geht weiter als die Sinne […], wahnsinnig ist also der, der die Sachen der Einbildung als würcklich substituiret" (AA 25.1: 108).

a daydreamer[17] and oftentimes compares to a poet,[18] ideas, which are perverted by an excessive power of imagination and a timid use of the senses, lose in ideality until they seem to come to reality.

According to Kant, however, these disarrangements of powers and their images have a common ground, one which they share with the normal, healthy arrangement of the same powers in mental sanity. Kant articulates this common ground in Anthropology-Collins,[19] and designates it as *the envisagement of an ideal — in this case, an ideal of representativity, or human imagination*. For it is Kant's view that in the normal disposition of the powers, and the sanity of their products, a longing for the ideal is always to be discerned. This longing is inherent to man, and it is even more visible in the case of human imagination, where we represent and therefore deal with the greater or lesser "novelty of the thing": "All novelty of the thing causes one to believe he feels more in the thing than what is really there" (AA 25.1: 105).[20] There is, then, in human representations, and in their eminently imaginative or inventive nature, *a longing towards an ideal*.

The proof of this is in what follows. According to the philosopher, the quest for the ideal is indeed characteristic of the human being. Now, here as well as in the third *Critique*, it is Kant's view that *the obtention of the ideal is however impossible*: "In its most complete degree it is in concreto impossible" (AA 25.1: 106). But the fact that it is impossible *in concreto*, in its completeness, does not mean that it is so *in abstracto*, that is, in contemplation. And hence, Kant explains, there are two ways of envisaging the ideal: either one sees it "as a means of appreciation (principium dijudicandi)" (106) — that is, by taking the ideal regulatively, knowing beforehand that it is indeed remote, but in awareness of the possibility of its finite approximation; or one sees it "as the object of desire that we seek (principium practicum)" (106), that is, one takes

[17] See AA 2: 265; AA 7: 202; AA 25.2: 1008.

[18] See AA 7: 202; AA 7: 215.

[19] Namely, in "Of the fantast and of the disturbed human being, or of the ill state of the soul" (AA 25.1: 105-106).

[20] "Alle Neüigkeit der Sache trägt hiezu bey, man glaubt bey der Sache mehr zu empfinden, als würcklich da ist" (AA 25.1: 105).

the ideal constitutively, knowing that it [the ideal] is reachable and in *actual attainment of the latter*. Or, in other words: either one takes the ideal as does Kant oftentimes in his work, which Kant considers to be the only viable option as, for example, in the case of the ideal of perpetual peace,[21] or the ideal of perfectibility of the human species,[22] or the ideal of the perfect constitution of our universe,[23] or one takes the ideal as an immediate, direct approximation or even appropriation of the absolute, which Kant considers to be erroneous. Now, in the face of this, one must infer the following: the correct aspiration to the ideal is surely that undertaken by the sane man, through the proportion of the powers of the mind and its harmonious products, using the ideal as "a means of appreciation" (106). But, because *there is no reason to believe that in the state of disturbance our spirit follows laws other than those of the state of mental health,*[24] — which is proved by their mutual compliance to the laws of the capacity of imagination — there is also no reason why one should not think that *the disturbed man is guided by the same law of imagination, and that this law of imagination envisages the same ideal as it does in the sane man*: in what is surely a reversely disposed law of imagination (the ideal as "the object of desire that we seek" (106)), but the law of imagination nonetheless. *Indeed, this is the case*. And, as such, from one extreme of the table of the disturbances of the soul to the other one progresses, though with different intensities and degrees

[21] Kant's whole project towards a perpetual peace is proof of the (remote, yet possible) feasibility of an ideal; as is Kant's conception of a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view, expressed in 1784, according to which there is a "consoling perspective on the future […] in which the human species will be represented at a great distance: how, at last, it will elevate itself through work to the state in which all the germs that nature laid in it may be fully developed, and its destination on Earth fulfilled" (AA 8: 30).

[22] See Kant's lecture on Anthropology – Friedländer (AA 25.1: 675-697) entitled: "Of the character of humankind in general ["Vom Charakter der Menschheit überhaupt"]: "This consideration [the idea(l) of the perfectibility of man] is quite agreeable, insofar as it is an idea that is possible, to which however millennia will still be required" (AA 25.1: 696).

[23] In *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens,* Kant refers to the ideal constitution of the universe and all that is in it. Referring to this, Kant says that "millions and mountains of millions of centuries [are required] in order [for the universe] to form itself and attain perfection" (AA 1: 313). But such a state is possible, and shall be attained, so says the philosopher.

[24] Paraphrasis of Kant's words relating to the unconsciousness of dreams, which may here apply to the unconsciousness or irrationality of mental disturbances: "One has no cause at all to believe that in the state of being awake our mind follows other laws than in our sleep" (AA 2: 264).

of success, *towards the (imaginative) realization of an ideal — as does the sane man, who thus envisages the same ideal*. In other words, it is Kant's opinion that from the faintest case of imbecility, which is surely characterized by the insufficiency of its images and therefore seems to aim at a degree-zero of representation (through similarity, as close to the object as possible), to the utmost case of dementia, which renders visible a perversion of the image, which renders the image real and therefore aims at a quasi-palpable representation (through sensible incarnation of the object), all attempt one and the same thing: to tend towards a human ideal representation of an object: an ideal which, in Kant's words, "signifies the maximum of a thing, insofar as I think that thing from myself, without any senses" (AA 25.1: 105).

Now, one could ascertain that Kant sees sane and insane representability as founded on the same imaginative trunk. Here he distinguishes between "a good and useful" way of connecting the representations of the soul to their ideal, namely, a correct way of aspiring to gradually bring representations to an equal condition with objects; one which is founded upon a proportion of the powers. This shows mental sanity from its executor and an erroneous way of bringing images, *de facto*, to the condition of objects: a way which is founded upon a disproportion of the powers as is visible in the fantast, the fanatic, and the imbecile which therefore shows mental disturbance from the part of its executor. This distinction, seems to be incontrovertible insofar as it seems to propose one path as good and another one as bad and hence is a distinction which could explain Kant's position on the whole problem.

However, this is not the case, because precisely where the problem seems to subside *lies its true kern*. The explanation of this turnaround is simple and has to do with Kant's notion of (good) proportion and (bad) disproportion of the powers of the mind. For, if we read attentively Kant's lectures on the different powers of the mind,[25] we will see that these powers establish multiple relations and assume multiple forms

[25] For instance, in "Von den Bildungs-Vermögen" (AA 25.1: 76-78); in "Von dem Vermögen über alle diese BildungsVermögen zu disponiren" (AA 25.1: 85-87), as well as in several thematic lectures on memory, power of imagination, wit, or genius contained in volume 25 of the *Akademie-Ausgabe*.

between themselves which leads us to assume that *what Kant understands as a (good) proportion or a (bad) disproportion is not something fixed and unilateral, rather, it is something heterogeneous*. Kant himself explains why. According to him, there are several dispositions, ones surely better, others not as good — but even so not disproportional — of the powers of the mind in a sane state. As an example, we evoke the concatenation: *rational memory / reproductive power of imagination / understanding*, a logical, quasi-mathematical concatenation of powers which merely produces repeated representations, and therefore does not stimulate and advance the spirit, but which in no way is disproportional or a mark of disturbance. For instance: the concatenation *judicious memory / reproductive power of imagination / understanding*, is one which is supposedly optimal for philosophy; or the concatenation *ingenious memory / productive power of imagination / understanding*, the concatenation of poetic creation, which, with the necessary aid of wit and genius, enlivens the spirit with new representations and thus favor the spirit.[26]

As such, all these states are examples of possible manifestations of proportions of the powers of the human soul and only faint modulations in the strength or weakness of one or the other power distinguish them amongst themselves and from various other sub-dispositions of the sane proportion of the powers of the soul. Indeed, precisely the same modulations that we witnessed in the plane of mental disturbance whose onomastic, but also the manifestation of its various sub-species, must rely on the very treatment of images and their relation with objects. The reason of being of the proportion of all these sane dispositions seems to be obvious: for they grow from the intention of attaining, through their very images, an ideal of human representativeness. They each form a relation between object and image; a relation which may be one aiming at a degree-zero of image — as is the case in the first, more rational disposition of the proportion of the mind — or the ideal of a total-degree of the image — embodied in the ideal of poetry, which aims at sensualizing the image. But this, we underscore, *is also the case with the plane of mental disturbance*; namely, that of imbecility (degree-zero of images)

[26] On Kant's different associations of the powers of the mind, see AA 25.1: 756; AA 25.2: 1463; AA 15.2: 148; AA 7: 182-184.

and dementia (total-degree of images), which also seek the ideal. Hence, this leads us to two conclusions: 1) that there is indeed a good and a bad method, a sane and an infirm aspiration to the ideal. But 2), that these methods are not to be distinguished except insofar as they are to be deemed the inversion of one and the same method. This means that between the good, sane proportion (or proportions) of the human soul and the bad, infirm disproportion (or disproportions) of the human soul, there is not just a difference, or a linear option between good and bad. Rather, there is also *a connection*. *And not just any connection, but a mutual mirroring, indicative of a common origin, procedure and end*. For, one could say, the powers of the mind in their sane, greater or lesser proportion, are like a mirror of the powers of the mind in their insane, greater or lesser disproportion. An inverted mirror, to be sure; but a mirror nonetheless, identifying equal powers, proceeding through one and the same law — *the imaginative one* — and tending towards one and the same ideal: that of human representativeness.

At this point and in face of the previous degrees of proof of the affinity between the infirmity and the health of the human soul, let us undertake a deductive exercise through which we intend to fully explain the problem at hand. In order to do so, let us depart from a *belief of community* between mental sanity and disturbance. The facts drawn from this are now evident. As such, then, the sane disposition of the powers of the mind consists of an alignment, or several alignments of the various powers, having in view the designation of objects, events, and experiences. The same is the case with the disturbed disposition of those very powers. Furthermore, from that ascending alignment, or alignments, results a certain order of representations, now akin, now differentiated, and those representations envisage the previously mentioned designation of objects, and the same is the case with the infirm disposition of these powers. In addition to this, such a designation via images depends on the powers, and the powers depend on the images, the relation with the ideal depends on both and their interdependence, and the same is the case with the disturbed plane of the powers. To summarize, given that the communion between mental sanity and insanity is stated in every step of a same, yet inverted, process, then we ask: *is it not possible to state more than just a mere mirroring connection*

between proportion and disproportion, sane and infirm: one which almost seems to render both planes of the human spirit undistinguishable? Furthermore, given such an intimate communion between a good and a bad concatenation of the powers of the mind, then we ask: upon approaching the point that is most visible, that of a total-degree of human representativeness, which is simultaneously sought by the best possible proportion of the sane human powers, the poetic disposition, and by the gravest stages of human mental disturbance, such as that of dementia or derangement, *can we not see a very real connection between the latter: a perhaps unsuspected connection between poetry, wit, genius, dementia, and even madness*?

Our problem lies in Kant's answer*: yes*, *we can and we should discern between poetic creation and folly more than just a casual similarity, more than a mere relation*; and yes, there is between both planes of fantasy more than mere proximity. The proofs of this are truly unequivocal: for in describing the sane concatenations and proportions of the powers of the mind, Kant often alerts to the danger that, due to the excess of one or other creative power, or the insufficiency of an intellectual one, wit or genius may easily overflow into excess and folly.[27] On the other hand, in lectures on mental disturbance, Kant oftentimes interposes the topic of poetry, of dream, to the extent that sometimes he almost deliberately mixes the fantast and the poet[28]: "Madness […], just as the poetic enthusiasm (*furor poeticus*), borders on genius" (AA 7: 202), or: "The demented of this order [deranged] is not to be healed: because he, just as poetry in general, is creative and to entertain through multiplicity" (AA 7: 215).

[27] Not fortuitously, Kant often approaches the topics of wit or genius and the excesses of the human soul in the same lectures. As an example of this, Kant warns against the risk of the images of wit deceiving us (AA 25.1: 316), or the danger that wit might be no more than "[...] a turmoil of representations which is very harmful to the concepts of the understanding" (AA 25.2: 1463). Furthermore, he states that the exacerbated imagination of the genius deceives, obscures and confounds the understanding (cf. AA 25.2: 887, 1229).

[28] Examples of this are Kant's study of the topic of *dream*, wherein the philosopher closely connects the consciousness and unconsciousness (and hence the rationality and irrationality) of the human spirit around one and the same imaginative or *poietical* process — a process that is also intimately connected with the ideal of human representability; or Kant's treatment of the topic of obscure representations, also bordering between the sane and not-sane states of the human soul due to its *imaginative-poetical* nature and therefore also related to the (possible or impossible) attainability of the ideal of human representations.

In summary, our problem lies in the present *quasi-undifferentiation of the sane and disturbed states of the human soul in their natural imaginative procedures*. Hence, we now propose to attempt to distinguish such states, so as to perceive Kant's position on them. That is, we ask along with Kant if there is not a distinctive sign that allows us to differentiate "between derangement and fantasizing" (AA 25.2: 1014). Namely, "if there is not a state through which the state of a demented is differentiated from that of fantasy" (1012).

3. Between genius and madness: The key factor of *sensus communis*

Kant undertakes the analysis of this problem, of the almost undistinguishable relation between genius and mental disturbance, in a lecture entitled "Of the fantast," in *Anthropology – Menschenkunde* (1781/82). Herein, Kant deals with the complex problem according to which, at the corollary of the imaginative process of the disturbed state, as well as in its correspondent in the sane state, in poetry, "imagination deceives the senses; one believes he sees that which one can never observe as an object of experience" (AA 25.2: 1007). In question here is then the fantast, who "realizes ideas" (1006), who thinks he is "an exalted one who, so to say, is inspired by God" (1007) (is in a *raptus*) and therefore walks the earth as "a dreamer in daytime who during his dream cannot convince himself that he dreams and that his dream contains no truth" (1008); and the poet, who, as it seems, shares this problem and is object of all the latter accusations; and so similar are their procedures that *between fantasy and dementia there seems to be almost no difference*.

As he sets forth towards ascertaining the differences between these two procedures, Kant departs from one specific point: the belief that the difference between the fantasy of poets and the fantasy of disturbed individuals depends on their use of the *understanding*;[29] namely, on the

[29] See Kant's words: "One has never seen a demented child. The absurd comes about only when the understanding matures" (AA 15.2: 211).

different dispositions assumed by the understanding in one and the other cases, and subsequently in the multiple dispositions of the aforementioned powers. Hence, according to Kant, the question depends on the assumption of the understanding as *sensus communis*, the "bon sens or the sane human understanding", or its assumption as *sensus proprius* (AA 25.2: 1012) — the understanding *strictu sensu*. Now, the understanding *strictu sensu* is indelibly valid and necessary, and no other understanding is employed in philosophical reasoning. But, Kant adduces, "We human beings are so constituted that we do not appreciate all things from the point of view of our own understanding and taste, rather we posit ourselves in the position of a communitarian understanding and taste, and according to it we appreciate things" (1012); and this because, Kant proceeds, "to experience if in the apperception there may lie appearance, one must use the concordance of others. We need the eye of others to correct our own" (1013). For this one needs the *sensus communis*, that special disposition of the human understanding which is justly deemed as sane, or common understanding, and whose characteristic is to be *a guarantee of correction, a certainty of the common or general truth of representations or images of the human soul*, which these must always have if they are to be deemed as human cognition: "When we say something, this truth must be valid not only for us, but it must also be in accord with the judgments of others" (1012). Hence, it is between the *sensus proprius*, or private understanding, as the touchstone of the truth that things have to the individual, and the *sensus communis*, or common understanding, as the touchstone of the truth that things have to a community of individuals, that the fate of such representations will have to be decided, upon their extraction from experience and their submission to the scrutiny of the understanding. From the concord between these two dimensions of the understanding there must arise truth: "Truth is the concordance with the general human understanding" (1013).

Now, the examination of this double scrutiny, which we attempt here firstly with regard to the sane state, directly follows our reflection on the imaginative nature of human representation; for depending on the special concatenation of the powers of the mind in a sane state, the

emergence of a greater or lesser degree of *sensus communis* must be brought about and this, in turn, brings about different degrees of validation of those very concatenations.

Hence, in the rational concatenation of the powers, a scarce but real degree of *sensus communis* is necessary; for in this rational concatenation there is already a sufficiently strong degree of understanding in general, which, held by all as equal so to say, forms generally known truths and thus substitutes the *sensus communis*. Of this one could say, then, that the *sensus communis* is here in such high immanence that its actual presence is barely required.

As to the intellectual concatenation, a greater degree of *sensus communis* is necessary; and yet, only as much as is necessary for the understanding to work properly.

As to the ingenious-poetic concatenation — that which truly matters to our research — what happens here? Here, one could say, there takes place a natural and very intense manifestation of the *sensus communis*. The reason for this is simple. Namely, in this disposition of the powers of the mind, ingenious memory revolves images from among a whirlwind of past experiences, buried under the dust of time, images which are meticulously chosen — for bearing a moderate degree of fantasy — and thus transmitted to the power of imagination.[30] The power of imagination, here in its productive disposition, and with the aid of wit and genius, unites said representations to others in a hitherto unsuspected connection, thus forming images if not new per say, at least new to the understanding; and in this momentary whirlwind (the poetic enthusiasm), the power of imagination submits these new images to the understanding. Now, since these images, the images of poetry, or of purely imaginative creation, are characterized by their *novelty, their inventiveness, their singular feeling*, they are naturally seen as dangerous by the understanding; and this by the understanding in general, regardless of its dimension. But, according to Kant, the images of poetry are

[30] "Fantasy is like a restless activity, it is, so to say, a torrent of images which flows ceasslessly. These images are sometimes known to us, sometimes not; here an image enlivens the other, and that goes on and on, endlessly" (AA 25.1: 314).

nothing but beneficial since the poet is no prestidigitator, because he does not deceive,[31] rather momentarily entertains the understanding through a play[32] on images which the latter would otherwise reject. In a word, because the images of the poet are indeed honest and *true*, then, once the whirlwind is through, such true images, because they are so in a color other than that of grey experience, and because they thus direct rationality towards a progress which it would not attain by itself, must be accepted as such by the understanding. This means that, regardless of its disposition, the understanding has the natural tendency to promptly negate such images; but given the nature of poetic images and their special attributes, given their general truth and their relation to the ideal of human representativeness, the understanding is led to concede them. For this to happen, *a high degree of sensus communis is required* to validate the general, communitarian acceptance of such images. Hence, once imbued with this disposition, what happens is that the understanding *sensus proprius* accepts such images and by so doing is validated not only in itself, but in general, and this in such a way that the knowledge hereby validated, which is true, can and deserves to be communicated to others. Namely, such a validation of the understanding *sensus proprius* is amplified and reflected in an understanding *sensus communis*, simply because the images of poetry are universally communicable and universally understandable.[33] Hence, one could conclude that the images of poetry have no folly, no mental disturbance in them. They rather propose *their very own logic, a logic perhaps illogical, of a*

[31] In the text "Entwurf zu einer Opponenten-Rede" (AA 15.2: 903-935), Kant speaks of "charlatains [...] demagogues [...] and even hyerophants" who, "with the objective of profit, deceived the unsuspecting crowd"; a trick, the philosopher says, which is "completely contrary to the spirit of poets, whose hearts are hardly moved by the cupidity of gold" (905).

[32] In the text "Entwurf zu einer Opponenten-Rede" Kant mentions a playful appearance, in a word, a *play* created by poets with the specific purpose of enlivening and vivifying, thus "flattering the ears and, by means of fictionalized images of things, stimulating and enjoying the spirit" (AA 15.2: 906).

[33] See § 49 of the third *Critique*: "the happy relation, which no science can teach and no diligence learn, of finding ideas for a given concept on the one hand and on the other hitting upon the expression for these, through which the subjective disposition of the mind that is thereby produced, as an accompaniment of a concept, can be communicated to others. The latter talent is really that which is called spirit: […] to express what is unnamable in the mental state in the case of a certain representation and to make it universally communicable [...]" (AA 5: 317).

singular relation between the sensus proprius and the sensus communis and, as such, it is only their transition from *sensus proprius* to *sensus communis* which, as we have seen, is so singular and complex, which ascribes the creations of poetry the appearance of absurd, disturbed images.

Now, in light of this, how to consider the manifestations of mental disturbance which Kant indeed identifies with those of poetry? The course of our analysis, we believe, may be similar to the previous one. As such, one may affirm that imbecility, which is the least grave of all disturbances, has a lesser or weaker use of the understanding; which to us, who work now with two dimensions of the human understanding, means that the imbecile only has commonly known cognitions, operates with commonly accepted representations, and has difficulty in thinking for himself, let alone being inventive and original. His relation to the ideal of inventiveness is to him therefore nearly unknown. In him, one could say, the understanding is in scarce degree; to be sure, the understanding is in the *sensus proprius*; for the *sensus communis*, more sensible in nature, exists here in high degree. The same is the case with amentia, or the "impotency" of the representation of things. However, from derangement onwards — that is, from the point in the scale of mental disturbance in which the derangement starts acting not by impotency, but by *perversion* — the case is different, insofar as there is an inversion of the weights of the two dimensions of the understanding: *one wherein the sensus communis tends to disappear and the sensus proprius of the understanding tends to emerge*. Namely, from derangement onwards, to insanity, which consists of perverting universal concepts through an exacerbated use of the power of judgment, to dementia, which consists of holding as real ideal things, and folly, which believes to be in possession of all the mysteries of the world; in all these there are not just degrees of an ascending scale in the gravity of the mental disturbance, or different manifestations of disproportion or disharmony of the powers of the mind. No. In all these there is first and foremost *a scale of inversion of the general disposition of the human mind, once again centered in the human understanding: namely, one in which there takes place a gradual decrease in the intervention of the sensus communis and a simultaneous gradual increase in the influence of the sensus proprius*. This, in

turn, leads us to an important conclusion: that, according to Kant, the previous characteristics of mental disturbances, and their respective weighing factors, such as its greater or lesser gravity, or imaginative intensity, or degree of practical belief in the ideal *all are, in their accentuation, intimately connected with the simultaneous intensification of the sensus proprius of human understanding and the subsequent dis-intensification of the sensus communis*. Hence, if one considers the evolutive table of the problematic powers in the different manifestations of disturbance, what this means is that, as the *sensus proprius* augments, and the *sensus communis* disappears, 1) the gravity of the illness is indeed greater, but not just because its expressions become more pungent, rather because they become more enrooted and more intimate — more torn from common reality and the living community, in their bearer; 2) the imaginative intensity of representations is indeed greater, but not just because this is its natural tendency, rather because, according to Kant, this takes place in the exact measure in which the *sensus communis* decreases — and hence, with the disappearing of the *sensus communis*, all powers, but especially that of fantasy, are unbridled and naturally fall into excess; 3) the belief in the ideal is indeed greater, but not just because that is the natural outcome of an evolution, rather because the loss of contact with what is commonly accepted, with what is general, results in an introversion of the images produced and therefore in a complete omission of the truth of representations (something which only the *sensus communis* may provide). In Kant's words:

> The sensus communis is differentiated from the sensus proprius, where one cares not for the judgments of others; the disturbed man judges everything according to the sensus proprius and cannot consider anything from the point of view of the sensus communis; before all objects he takes advice only from his private sense. (AA 25.2: 1013-1014)

Let us then one last time take the fantast as the superior example of these considerations. It is a characteristic of his, as seems to be that of the poet, to hold as real things which do not exist: to realize that which is ideal and hence to be in position of attaining the ideal of the relation image-object. In this sense, *he is indeed the poet*; and it is so because, through an excessive use of the power of imagination, both the fantast

and the poet create new representational compositions, they extract new images from the ones they previously had. One could even deem the fantast *a genius, and hence truly ingenious*. Kant does not deny this. However — Kant adduces — here lies *a great difference*. For it is visible that in the demented the *sensus proprius* of his understanding is in extremely high degree, which must of course be accompanied with an equally vibrant power of imagination. Therefore, in the fantast, there lies *in much smaller degree the sensus communis*, which precisely should regulate the intensity of one's belief in the realization of individual representations, but which, in its absence, rather gives rise to the latter's exacerbation. As to the poet, precisely the opposite takes place: in him the *sensus proprius* is very low, and the *sensus communis* very high. And hence, one could say, in the fantast occurs precisely the same disposition of the powers as in the poet, or the genius. But this disposition is inversely brought forth, or inversely put into practice by both parties which precisely makes them now coincide, now separate from each other, within the scope of a pragmatic anthropology or, in Kant's words: "He [the fantast] sees things which do not agree with the senses of others, which a reasonable man would promptly notice" (AA 25.2: 1014); and this, quite undeniably, is also common to poets. But, Kant proceeds, "he [the fantast] does not let himself be disturbed by this and does not discern if his senses do not concur with those of others" (1014). As to the poet, however, he is indeed the owner of an initially unbridled fantasy; but ultimately this fantasy is controlled through a disposition of the powers of the mind especially conceived for this purpose, whereas the demented "fears his own fantasy, he knows that he is wrong, but the images which spontaneously spring forth in him are not in his power, and he must cede to his affection as to his manner of thinking" (AA 25.2: 1014). Now, if this is the case, then the demented, seized by the *sensus proprius* of his understanding, produces untruthful, even absurd representations, whereas in the poet the special disposition of his powers, along with the *sensus communis*, renders his images truthful and hence universally communicable and understandable. The poet, one could say, passes off as a man of follies but in him, and in his controlled irrationality, the images end up composing the ground of active humanity.

They are, even in their novelty, even in their awkwardness, *intimate cognition of the human community*. The man of follies may even pass off as a poet, but with the difference that he can never leave the whirlwind of representations in his spirit; they serve his purposes only, and therefore can only be communicated to, as well as understood, by him.

Keywords: Immanuel Kant, mental disorder, imagination, *sensus communis*, poetry.

Summary:

According to Kant, *folly* directly depends on the human capacity to imagine, i.e. the capacity to adequately connect or disconnect, through the power of imagination, object, and representation. Likewise, the sane use of the productive power of imagination and its characteristic forces all depend on a singular connection between object and representation, and their respective presentation.

The problem, however, lies in the *quasi-indistinction* between these two modes of human representation, which are based upon one and the same imaginative capacity (the *Einbildungsfähigkeit*) and must be referred to by two analogous, yet ultimately different, uses of the latter. It is Kant's view that between both courses of human imagination — that of genius and that of folly, and the powers of the spirit they resort to — there are common processes, but also a threshold that the supplanting of which distinguishes these two imaginative applications of representations. This threshold is not a mere division, rather it is a hybrid beam of mutual appropriations and concessions between the two courses of human representativeness.

I argue that, according to Kant, such a singular space is that of the complex, non-linear relation between universality and individual-subjectivity, between health and illness, in a word, between the truth and falsehood of human representations. As such, I wish to diverge from studies which fully separate Kant's theory of sane imagination from his positions on disturbed imagination. Instead, I propose that these have a common basis, are inter-dependent, and that they are only inverse in their application. Furthermore, I wish to expound how precisely genius and folly demonstrate the faint uniting-dissociative character of these two applications of human imagination. Finally, it is my aim to show how genius and folly, in their apparent indistinction, succeed in portraying the private, egoist vision of the disturbed (*sensus proprius*) and the philanthropic, cosmopolitan view of the poet (*sensus communis*), thus once and for all dissociating sane and insane human imagination.