

Featured article

A Philosopher cannot be other than 'Mad'

by Rev. Dr Mark Montebello



Most of us are normal people. At least that's what we think, and it is probably truer than we know. For being 'normal' could mean, to assign to it a non-clinical meaning, adhering to the sanctioned norms of the society of which we are part. These 'sanctioned norms' would clearly be human constructs, very often consciously so.

A whole array of writers and philosophers have, for over the last two centuries, made this clear us in more ways than one. Starting with Kant, and at least continuing with Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, just to mention some peak moments, we have taught to at least suspect what we generally take for granted when it comes to societal organisational processes.

More recently, we were made conscious of a more disturbing kind of construct, that fabricated by the sophisticated PR agencies hand in hand with economic and political operators. Starting with the thrust provided by Edward Barnays in the inter-war period, such PR strategies and procedures "govern our minds, mold our minds, form our tastes, and suggest our ideas" (Barnays, *Propaganda*, 1928). Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky saw in this an insidious and clever way of manipulating the mind of the masses (*Manufacturing Consent*, 1988). Foucault saw in it, moreover, a kind of "enlightened" form of "extensive social control" (*Discipline and Punish*, 1975).

In other words, what we would consider 'normal' is, in fact, a way of being *domesticated* according to the whims and interests of unseen and unknown powerful people. 'Normal' would mean, then, living an acceptable way of life which is in harmony with the general drift or trends to the time.

Such blind adherence to artificial and contrived norms is, according to Plato, a form of 'normalized' enslavement from which we need to unfetter ourselves. Plato identifies such a liberation as "a divine release from human convention" (*Phaedrus* 265a), and does not shirk from calling it "a kind of madness" (quite distinct from, though not entirely unrelated to, the pathological type). Plato insists that this is the calling of a true philosopher.

Derrida and others (such as Saussure, Foucault, Habermas, etc.) suggested diverse tools, not least the deconstructivist one, with which one can begin to unshackle oneself from the clench of normativity, and 'embrace', so to say, the 'madness' advocated by Plato. Philosophers, in fact, cannot do otherwise lest they be part of the false engineered construct of normative thought and manipulative conduct.

A philosopher, in the proper sense of the word, cannot be other than 'mad'.

*This short article was submitted by
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author and do not necessarily reflect the position
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