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**QUAKERISM AND APPROACHES TO MENTAL AFFLICTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GEORGE FOX AND
WILLIAM TUKE**

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This thesis explores the association of George Fox (1624-1691) – Leicestershire-born founder of the Society of Friends – and William Tuke (1732-1822) – leading York Quaker, businessman and philanthropist – to the treatment of mental illness. Split into three main chapters, the author explores changes in the meaning of madness (from possession to mental affliction; from the madman as bestial to a person who had misplaced their reason) before closer discussions of the two men and their respective approaches: of faith healing in a world of demons, witches and sin where Dissenters were considered mad, witches or allied to Satan; and humane institutional care at the York Retreat within a faith cemented by orthodoxy and influenced by the reason exalted by Enlightenment thought. For both, Quaker belief in the redemptive salve of Christ through the personal choice of heeding the Light at once indicated that cure was possible and that it could be attained through religious observance.

Keywords: mental illness; madness; insanity; York; The Retreat; miracle; cure; Quaker; Quietism; faith healing

Useful for: those interested in mental affliction and its care in the past, especially the treatment of Quakers; students of the slow shift from religious to worldly explanations of sickness; historians of psychiatry, madness, medicine and early Quakerism; those exploring the York Meeting and applications of differentials in Quaker theology.

A copy of the full thesis can be downloaded at

http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/548/1/Lawrence10MPhil_A1a.pdf

Chapter One: Introduction

Overview

This study contrasts the notions of insanity and healing of two key Quakers in two different eras, whilst positing that their faith was instrumental to their approach; in fact, they both recognised that mental distress was a part of reaching God, which meant that the ability to discern between spiritual experiences and religious excess was imperative. This section forms the backdrop to the work outlining: the central themes and rationale, relation with wider scholarship, the sources and methodology, and the structure of the work.

The Two Quakers

George Fox (1624-1691) was a religious leader and healer and is regarded by many as the founder of Quakerism at a time of great tumult and suspicion. William Tuke (1732-1822) was a wealthy merchant and the philanthropic founder of the York Retreat, an asylum for insane Quakers, at a time when Quietism (an approach of separateness from the World) and Evangelicalism (actively working in the World) met.

Quakerism and Mental Affliction

Using Fox's *Book of Miracles*, in which he recounted instances of his spiritual healing of mental illness, as well as primary sources from or about the Retreat, the author argues that Quakerism was central to Fox's and Tuke's conception of insanity and its treatment. At the heart of this was the belief that the light of Christ touched everyone, no matter how removed from reality was their mental state. For both men, careful assessment of an individual and their behaviour was the only way 'to distinguish the true voice of God from deluded hallucination' in an atmosphere where Quakers and other Nonconformists were considered more susceptible to madness. A supportive milieu alongside 'the practice of looking inward in silence' were considered of profound help.

Chapter Two: The Meaning of Madness

Overview

Using the findings of other scholars, this chapter essentially presents an overview of the meaning of madness in England between c.1500 and c.1800; tracing its transition through the religious shift away from explanations of sin and the Devil towards an understanding of illness and experience based on reason.

Michel Foucault

At its most basic, Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* argued that Medieval madness was tolerated; this diminished until the 1600s, when the lunatic in the community gradually became considered as a problem and was increasingly confined across Europe. The late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century reform of the lunatic asylums that had emerged rejected chains and whips and promoted 'moral management'. Foucault saw this – epitomised by William Tuke and the Retreat – not as progress, but as a more sinister way of controlling the insane 'through surveillance and moral condemnation'. His contentions have been continually challenged by other scholars since the 1970s.

Traditional Meaning

Insanity was bound up with notions of God's punishment for sin, or else connected to the Devil. Within this belief system, the clergy were healers. Richard Napier, for example, has been seen as 'the last of his kind – a Renaissance healer combining magic, power and medicine'. His clients included the poor, though many instead chose to visit wise women. At the same time, the spectre of witchcraft grew and was thus linked with madness. The seventeenth century bred social tumult and radical religions formed to combat Devilry and uncertainty. Quakerism offered miracle cures and lent credence to revelation and prophesying, at once becoming open to charges of insanity themselves.

Enlightenment Meaning

Using historian John Henry's words, the author argues that between c.1660-c.1800, 'philosophers, scientists, and artists ... believed themselves to be participating in an intellectual 'revolution of reason''. Rational thought rejected the association between the supernatural and the insane, and men of medicine were increasingly healers of choice amidst a rich and varied marketplace of quacks, clerics and faith healers. Even so, the perception shared by philosophers, established churchmen, the medical

profession and the ruling classes was that religious enthusiasm was an especially pernicious form of madness. In the mid-1600s, this had been an effective attack on radical sects.

Chapter Three: George Fox, a Seventeenth-Century Healer

Overview

This section outlines Fox's theology and its influence on his views of insanity and care.

Fox's Faith and 'Merrekales'

Fox believed that caring for the sick was central to his ministry. God worked directly through him, and God decided if cure occurred. The emphasis on miracles was emblematic of the period and of early Quakerism, though became an embarrassment amongst leading second-generation Friends.

Mad or Sinful

Fox's belief that he was 'the true voice of God on earth' has always led to doubts about his sanity'. Some have evidenced this with the 1651 'Lichfield incident', where Fox walked barefoot through the city with cries of 'Woe unto ye'. For Fox, periods of mental distress were part of experiential faith. Yet insanity was suspected amidst all spiritual radicals, whose faith could manifest in fasting, nakedness and strange utterances. Quakers could be considered mad, a cause of lunacy, or even witches allied with Satan. For Fox, Satan and sin were real dangers, driving the need to distinguish between 'Divine revelation' and 'diabolical delusion'. Certainly, with challenges to the faith coming from within and without, especially from James Nayler in 1656, Fox found ways to discern insanity from blasphemy.

Salvation could be reached through silent reflection and stillness amongst a community of Friends. Listening for God and acknowledging the Light could illuminate sin and enabled choice. Yet ultimately, and whilst equipped with 'a measure of God's grace', redemption was a personal responsibility; a continual negotiation resting on the possibility that perfection could be reached here on Earth.

Healing the Insane

Allowing for 'double referencing', approximately 150 separate cures were described in Fox's Book of Miracles. The author reaches 'seventeen examples of probable mental illness'; in only one did Fox see possession as insanity. The central approach of Fox seems to have been to address directly the person

described as afflicted, praying together and reconnecting the spirit of the afflicted to the wider world and God. Occasionally, ministrations could occur through a letter or an intermediary. Even so, Fox is considered to have recognised the need for 'safe havens' to protect mentally ill Friends from the World, or even the World from them.

Chapter Four: William Tuke, Provider of Care and Cure in the Eighteenth Century

Overview

This chapter argues that Tuke's Quietist approach to Quakerism, insanity and cure, infused practice at the York Retreat: 'an asylum for insane Quakers run by Quakers and guided by Quaker principles'.

Tuke's Faith and Cure

Tuke was a leading Friend locally and nationally, with York meeting unusual in its connectedness with the community. He left no explicit records of personal belief, though his correspondence and the Retreat itself reveal Quietist leanings: profound introspection; notions that misfortune evidenced 'Divine judgement'; 'the seeking of corporate approval, then action combined with commitment' – a commitment that also privileged a belief in cure for insane Quakers and those connected with Friends.

Mad or Religious

The Retreat grew from the conviction that the Light resided in lunatics and that cure was attainable. This ran counter to contemporary philosophy, which emphasised that at birth individuals were a blank slate. Religiosity was at the heart of the Retreat. Yet Samuel Tuke, William's son and author of the 1813 *Description of the Retreat*, recognised that Quakers were traditionally linked to lunacy and made efforts to underplay religious insanity. For French physician Philippe Pinel, another contemporary advocate of humane care, religious enthusiasm of any ilk precipitated madness.

This settling of reason alongside Quaker orthodoxy during the 1700s meant that madness was discerned more easily. The author noted that 'two patients ... had symptoms of religious delusions' which 'would have sat easily in the seventeenth century'. Moreover, religious melancholy, links between refusal to eat and religious anxiety (and the Quaker lineage of fasting), and psychosis evident in 'religiously odd behaviour' all featured in the case histories of the Retreat.

Healing the Insane

Influenced by abuse at York Asylum, though unaware of wider reform inklings, William Tuke's intimate involvement and beliefs determined the character and philosophies of the Retreat, including the ethos of the humane and homely institution as a family. Whilst there is wider scholarly controversy, the author maintains that medicine was utilised so long as it worked and that Tuke consulted with his nephew William Maud, a distinguished medical man. Chains and whips were largely rejected and replaced by 'considerable 'psychological control'' to encourage adherence to societal and Quakers norms of 'marriage, family and diligent work'. Taken together, the methods were exported to the wider world and became 'moral management' – and corrected conduct meant cure.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Overview

This conclusion clarifies the author's ideas on the relationship between the theologies, perceptions of madness, and the healing of George Fox and William Tuke. It is argued that both men harboured a 'similarity of intent and philosophy', though their practical expression differed, reflecting their disparate times. The author also includes a useful discussion of potential new directions for historical research.

Definitions of Madness

The author argues that both Fox and Tuke saw madness as a state that separated man from God and therefore a state of distress and unfulfillment. In a World stalked by the Devil and witches, Fox considered sin as a rupture in right thinking and the insane 'distracted'. Confusion unbalanced the relationship with God, but personal choice to concentrate on the Light reconnected relations. Whilst aware of sin, Tuke understood madness through the refraction of rational thinking and recognised 'unreasoned behaviour'. Even so, behaviour was an indicator of mental distress for both men; something which was considered to be within the orbit of a personal responsibility.

Treating Insanity

Both Fox and Tuke saw God as the ultimate healer and themselves as instruments through which God worked, and employed similar unwavering and kindly approaches to mental illness. The author argues that the two amateurs were pragmatic about the use of medicine and challenged orthodox medical

practice. Their central remedy was that the weakened, ill individual should be quiet and still amidst the calming bond of a familial community, overseen by 'stronger' Quakers. From the late 1660s Fox advocated institutional care; 'Tuke put Foxian ideology into practice'. Yet this emphasis on conformity has been read as controlling and a potential abuse of power in wider scholarship. Cure was assessed through the individual following the rules and returning to the Quaker community. From early charges of madness and through Samuel Tuke's active engagement in the World, the Quaker Retreat became a propagator of reform, if gradually staff lost empathy for their wards.

Further Research

The author indicates the value of further explorations in Foxian and Quaker theology, and also in local histories of grassroots meetings. More than this, the author calls for a deeper exploration of the involvement of the Society of Friends in mental healthcare (as Edward Fox, proprietor of a private asylum in Bristol, a pre-cursor of the Retreat) and for Quakers to 'reclaim ... unconventional Friends'.

Appendix One: Table of Fox's Miracles

Appendix One consists of three pages of discussion by the author, outlining which cases she considered to be mental illness and why in relation to the decisions of other scholars. The following seven pages present these seventeen cases in tabulated form under the headings: miracle number, page number, type of mental distress, year, place, gender of patient, comments, extract from *Book of Miracles*, and brief extract from additional text.

Appendix Two: Letter to Cromwell's Daughter, Elizabeth Claypole, 1658

This appendix contains the copy of a letter of spiritual advice for a troubled mind addressed to Elizabeth Claypole, the daughter of Oliver Cromwell (leader of Parliament during the English Civil Wars, and head of state in Britain after King Charles I's execution).

Summary prepared by Rebecca Wynter (2012)