

# Mind over matter

Psychology



A Matter over Mind What is the difference between mental illness and insanity? (Hint: What is the important second prong of the M'Naughten rule?)

Mental illness is a medical term which refers to a mental disorder or disease of the mind. Insanity is a legal description implying that an individual is so mad to an extent that he or she cannot be held accountable for his actions. In this case, people who are mentally ill can still make rational decision and function well daily as opposed to those who are insane (Erickson and Erickson, 2008). " M'Naughton rule" in this case is based on insanity presumption. As such, a defendant who pleads insanity at the time of committing the act is required to prove beyond reasonable doubt that he or she was suffering from mental disorder so severely that he or she could not know the quality and nature of the act committed at the time of insanity (John, 2006). This implies proving that he or she was not at a position to establish that the act was either right or wrong. However, John notes that mental illness cannot act as defense since an individual may be mentally ill but still know the nature of the act. This shows the reason why Clark's case was dismissed.

The M'Naughten rule cannot be used to defend the actions of a person who drinks alcohol and then murders someone. Why not?

Alcohol usually alters an individual's rational thinking making individuals not to function in the normal way and make rational decision. However, this may not be used as a defense under M'Naughten rule. This is because alcoholism is considered one of the causes of mental illness and not insanity. The presumption made is that an individual who murders someone is capable of knowing the type and quality of action committed and must therefore take

<https://assignbuster.com/mind-over-matter/>

responsibility for his actions (John, 2006). Therefore it does not fall under the definition of insanity with which McNaughten rule is based. Under this rule, the murderer will be required to prove that he or she was insane and did not know what he or she was doing which is not easy.

#### Rational and guilty

This is a situation in which an individual committed an offence, knew what he or she was doing, and had knowledge of whether the act was right or wrong. The person is, therefore, considered rational and guilty for the offence committed.

#### Guilty but insane

This is a situation in which an individual accused might be found guilty of an offence, but due to the fact that he or she was insane at the time of commission of the act, the person would be taken for a medical check-up and treatment first after which the accused would proceed to prison. This is based on the fact that the accused has pleaded guilty of the alleged offence.

#### Not guilty by reason of insanity

This is a situation where the accused is judged not guilty due to the fact he or she did not know his or her actions and the consequences of the act. However, such people are usually taken to a mental organization until he or she becomes of sound mind or sometimes stays locked for life.

If you were deciding this case, how would you rule? Briefly explain your decision

My ruling of the case would be that the murderer is rational and guilty. This is based on the fact that the person only suffered mental illness but not insanity. For this reason, he did it, knew what he was doing and had knowledge that the murder was wrong.

## References

Erickson, P. E. & Erickson, S. K. (2008). *Crime, Punishment, and mental illness: law and the behavioral science in Conflict*. London: Rutgers University Press.

John, G. (2006). A Matter Over Mind: *ABA Journal*. Vol. 92, Issue 4, 32-39.