

THE YOKE OF EROS AND THE INCOMPLETE EROTIC EDUCATION: NOTES ON THE DIALOGUE *PHAEDRUS*

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Abstract: The Socratic method has four processes, out of which the first one is double. Briefly, the processes of the Socratic method are irony and self-irony, maieutics, induction and universal definition at the end. It does not matter that, by applying the processes of the Socratic method, one does not reach any truths; it only matters that the method in its whole or on segments is completely unable to be applied to the theory of Eros. The paradox is that if Socrates speaks besides truth when he brings into play the processes of method, it seems to have much more success when one excludes the method. This is possible when it is dealt with the theme of Eros and manifestations of madness as prophecy, as a ceremonial form, as religious delirium and poetic as well. Looking for here everything is happening in excess.

Keywords: Eros, love, education, madness, god, enthusiasm, excess

In *Phaedrus* (244a), Socrates says that “among goods, the most important ones are born from the madness given to us as a gift by the gods”. The Prophetess of Delphi, the priestesses at Dodona, help the Greeks in “their holy madness”; when they let themselves guided by reason, do not do good things, frankly speaking they barely do anything. *Phaedrus* mentions two kinds of madness - the one caused by human diseases and the one which is due to a divine call. Divine madness (divine delirium) is divided by Socrates into four parts, according to the four gods, namely:

- the prophetic madness (prophetic delirium), reported Apollo, equals to the “inspiration of the one that sees the future”;
- the madness of the “initiator into the mysteries” or “ritual madness”, telestic, as Dodds calls it, is ascribed, as a protectorate, to Dionysus (religious delirium);

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- the poetic madness (poetic delirium), inspired by muses (or “the inspiration that is personal to the poet”, according to Socrates) and
- the erotic madness (erotic delirium), “the madness of falling in love, of which I said it’s the important of all, I put it on Aphrodite and Eros’ account”¹ (this form of madness leads to universal science).

Eros is perceived as a frightening god, one must keep away from him when he makes gifts, moreover, Eros’ gifts should not be craved for. Eros is most often responsible for the disasters brought in people’s lives, is, therefore, a powerful and capricious daemon. However, the erotic madness, among all passions, is preferred as is the best (“we can therefore say that of all forms of divine enthusiasm, this one proves to be the most important and consists of all the best; and it is clear that precisely this sort of madness makes the one who loves beauty to be called in love” - *Phaedrus*, 249e). It’s not by chance that in the case of erotic madness, especially in this case, Plato uses the old religious language (but which does not exclude the explanation of erotic attraction in mechanistic terms, as suggested by Empedocles or Democritus - *Phaedrus*, 251b, 255c-d)². Eros is important also because it brings together the two natures of man, “the divine ego and the chained beast”, with the expression of Dodds. Based on this dual nature, Eros shares with man the sex drive, on the one hand, and the urge, as dynamic, by virtue of which satisfaction can transcend the immediate experience. Eros shows man what he, the man, is, but also what he can be. For this reason speaks Claude Calame about the “yoke of Eros”³ and Eros is likened to a “soldier of pleasure”, a soldier in excess and excessively, inheritance from his parents, also masters of excess (Penia, homeless and beggar; Poros, adventurer, hunter and wanderer). Poros, with a name received from Diotima (and if *nomen est omen*), it means “passing”, “communication channel”, as in the word “aporia” and which is only apparently foreign and opposed to ethic that, in fact, it implies by denouncing the place where the error

¹ Plato, *Phaidros*, 265b. See also E.R. Dodds (1951). *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Romanian translation (1998): *Grecii și iraționalul*. Iași: Polirom Publishing House, pp. 65-95. Dodds often follows the Erwin Rohde’s interpretation in his *Psyche* (1890-1894). See Romanian translation (1985): *Psyché*. Bucharest: Meridiane Publishing House, pp. 236-263.

² E.R. Dodds, *op. cit.*, pp. 189, 199.

³ Claude Calame (1992). *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece*. Romanian translation (2004): *Eros în Grecia antică*. Bucharest: Symposion Publishing House, pp. 11-18.

creeps into reasoning. In this way, *aporia*, and with a geographical sense as a matter of fact, narrow place, a strait difficult to cross, becomes an opposite excess precisely because, suggesting a difficulty, it also shows the place and the mean by which it can be overcome.

It may, as times show, die for love. But does that mean, really, being crazy because of love? I think not. If things were this way, then the sacrifice (death for love) would annihilate precisely the problem / theme that it brings out - love, not *mania*. When passionate love is positively in excess, it also becomes negative, since excess is the way in which passion creates its own nothingness. Jankélévitch sees here a paradox (“the sharp point of paradox”) and he is right where he refers to Tristan and Isolde, but not if he takes into consideration the dialogue *Phaedrus*⁴. In courtly love, love is given, rather by manners expressed in and by the laws of courtship; erotic madness is deeply tributary to transcendence. Here Eros comes in; beyond, he is involved (and Eros does not like to be suggested anything!).

I will briefly refer to the analysis made by Jesper Svenbro for this problem⁵. The premise from which he starts is drawn by the author like this: “In fact, pederasty is fundamental to Greek *paideia*. Pederasty and education intertwine: the boy receives his education in *synousia* - in the multiple meaning of the term - with the adult men”⁶. What does Svenbro mean?, in fact what he tells us! He tells us that writing is a way to seduce, not to insult, that reading is a way to seduce, not to insult. Socrates does not write, for Plato it is hard to stop writing and then, in Plato’s dialogues, the characters actually read (*Parmenides*, 127c-d; *Theaitetos*, 143b-c; *Phaedrus*, 231a-234e, among others). And the book (*biblion*) is kept by *eromenos* under the mantle. Writing and reading enroll in the register of what Derrida called *phármakon*. Basically, it’s about a writer *erastes* and a lecturer *eromenos* and in both situations the one who loves gains in terms of purpose: the one who is loved gives into the writing because he wants to learn something, then “the teacher has a great pleasure when he *hears the boy reading*. The voice that reads is the first card of his lover. To make

⁴ Vladimir Jankélévitch (1989). *Le paradoxe de la morale*. Romanian translation (1997): *Paradoxul moralei*. Cluj-Napoca: Echinox Publishing House, pp. 60-61.

⁵ Jesper Svenbro (1988). *Phrasikleia: anthropologie de la lecture en Grèce ancienne*. Romanian translation (2004): *Phrasikleia. Antropologia lecturii în Grecia antică*. Bucharest: Symposion Publishing House, pp. 255-294; especially the pages that explicitly deal with the dialogue *Phaedrus* (269-294)

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 266.

him read: it means to act on the boy's body, to constrain him to follow the written sign. This manipulation of the student's body causes the teacher an immense pleasure"⁷. In an epigram of Straton, it is said: "Blessed are you, little book, I am not jealous of you [this means: even if you deserve for me to be]: being read, a boy will touch you, taking you under his cheek or pressing his lips onto you, or holding you on his young thighs, Oh, thou, the most blessed among books! Many times you will get under his shirt, or, thrown on the chair, you will dare to touch those parts (*keîna*) without fear. You will talk much, only with him. But I beg you, little book, talk to him occasionally about us"⁸.

This is the lecturer (*eromenos*) that the writer imagines - *erastes*. Phaedrus the character is has "the little book" of the *erastes* besides his own body, although in this case, Socrates is not in the position of *erastes*, but Lysias. However, for *Phaedrus*, the reading of the discourse is providing a great pleasure and which he tries, clumsily, to dissimulate (*Phaedrus*, 228c).

The erotic delirium, the erotic madness, can transform recklessness (excess) in moderation (chastity), i.e. the productions so-called "delirious" become, from a philosophical point of view, acceptable after being subjected to dialectics. This is possible because Plato does not choose, as we might have expected, between *aphrosyne* and *sophrosyne*; he does not choose, but separates between the two kinds of madness - that caused by illness and the one that is a result of a divine call. Significantly is the fact that *sophrosyne* remains somewhere in the middle, between two kinds of madness, but the "value" of the divine delirium is "greater than the one given to the notion of *sophrosyne*"⁹.

I want to follow something that Yvon Brès notifies regarding the number of "follies" from *Phaedrus* if we look at the problem in terms of logic. Stesichoros' speech, him being a poet, does not intend, nor would it have been normal otherwise!, but the divine aspect of madness. He lists the prophetic madness, the Teleste one, the poetical one and the madness of love (*Phaedrus*, 244a-245c, the first three madness; 249d-250b - erotic madness). Socrates recaps them and makes the observation according to which he is in love with the

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 267.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 268.

⁹ Yvon Brès (1968). *La psychologie de Platon*. Romanian translation (2000): *Psihologia lui Platon*. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, p. 331. See also Claude Calame (1992 / 2004), *op.cit.*, pp. 23-28, 139-141, 156-159, 200-203.

divisions and their opposites (266b), the reunifications, unity and plurality, and those who are capable of all these are the dialecticians. Following the laws of dialectics (whose basic rule is division, therefore a logical process), Socrates suggests, we could distinguish between an unhealthy madness and a divine one, which is happening. What should happen regards the following aspect: if divine madness is divided into four parts, then also the unhealthy madness should be divided in four parts as well, in which case we would be speaking of eight kinds of madness: four divine, four sublunary. Plato does not insist on this idea. It would have been difficult, as a matter of fact, to find out the correspondence of divine madness. However, I push such a correlation and its merit, if it has any, it's just that it's forced, no other one. Thus:

1. *the prophetic madness* (Apollo) is characterized by “enthusiasm” in the original and literal meaning of the term. Pythia, in a trance, became *entheos, plena deo*, which did not mean that the soul left the body; it simply means that the body has a god in it, that the god enters into it, and therefore the Delphic words of Apollo are in the first person, not the third¹⁰. I see the inferior madness and corresponding to the enthusiasm in what is “boredom” in Pascal and *tristitia* for Christians. The Pascalian feeling of fear for the endless depths of the universe is not given so infinite, but by the ascertainment that God is missing from it. And for this reason, boredom is doubled or compensated by the theory of entertainment;

2. *ritual madness* (or Teleste) responds to the Dionysian ecstasy. Inferior madness and corresponding to Dionysian ecstasy is alcoholic intoxication¹¹;

3. *poetic madness* (inspired by muses) is about the gift of the muses – the gift of true speaking (this is what Hesiod asks from muses, as Pindar). The words of muses are Delphic words, hence the older

¹⁰ E.R. Dodds, *op. cit.*, pp. 70, 83. *Entheos*, says Dodds detaching himself from Rohde, does not mean that the soul has left the body and that it is “in God”, but precisely that the body has the god in itself. See also Francis E. Peters (1967). *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon*. Romanian translation (1993): *Termenii filozofiei grecești*. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, pp. 90, 164-165. According to Mihail Nasta (1981), *Anatomia suferinței [The Anatomy of Suffering]*, Bucharest: Cartea Românească Publishing House, pp. 120, 139, 186, *en-theoi* are human beings where the god entered and *en-thusiasmus* is the ecstatic state of the one possessed by god (“engodded”).

¹¹ Yvon Brès, *op. cit.*, p. 332. See also Julius Evola (1983). *Eros and the Mysteries of Love: The Metaphysics of Sex*. Romanian translation (1994): *Metafizica sexului*. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, pp. 90-92.

analogy between poetry and prophecy. There is, however, a significant original difference: the muse, not the poet, plays the role of Pythia. The poet does not slip into ecstasy, is not possessed by the muses, *is not enthusiastic*, as in the case of prophetic madness; the poet is the simple interpreter of the muse fallen into a trance, the poet is the messenger of muses. In relation to Plato, this difference does not work; for Plato, the muse is within the poet and only for Plato the poet is, as well, enthusiastic. Cratylus tells Socrates: “muse dwells in you for a long time now, without you knowing it” (*Cratylus*, 428c). And in *Apology* (22c), we read: “after this brief research, I know the truth and about poets, that the works they create come from a gift of nature, from *enthusiasm* (italics mine) just like prophets and priests-prophets [...], only from wisdom not”. The prophets say many beautiful things, but do not know the truth they deal with. At the same way do poets, Socrates concludes¹². The sublunary madness that I suggest as correspondent for the poetic delirium is deceiving: the poet thinks (he is deceived) that everything he transmits is owed to him. Although masked, possessed, he believes that he masks, he possess;

4. *the erotic madness* I see it placed sublunary, not so much in prostitution, but in the drawbacks arising from it (*Gorgias*, 494e). For instance, the one who is prostituted (*peporneumenos*) could not be admitted among the nine archons, could not exercise the priesthood, nor the position of public defender; the prostitute could not exercise any magistracy in the citadel or outside it, especially an elective one (he could not to be treasurer, ambassador, he could not be accusatory, nor could express his opinions to the Board or to the people).

I left from the number 4 and reached number 8. The thought brings me to *Parmenides*, the last part, which deals with One and other than

¹² This theory is developed in *Ion*, 533d ff. and *Phaedrus*, 244a ff. See also E.R. Dodds, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-79, 95. It is interesting that the poet's divine delirium is transmitted to the Middle Ages as common place, although the Medieval did not know the dialogue *Phaedrus*! The same late Antiquity. A few examples: Horace believed to be the victim of a pleasant madness (*amabilis insania*) and that the poet is delirious (*vesanus poeta*); Statius expresses the state of divine delirium through the word *entheus* and the phrase *perium oestrum*; according to Pliny, poets are allowed to be crazy - *poetis furere concessum est*; Claudian speaks of *furor divinus sive poeticus* and Isidore of Seville derives *carmen* from *carere mente* (to be mindless); Modoin, poet in the Carolingian period, speaks of *insanire poetas*, and Ligurinus uses the topos *vatis dementia*. See E. R. Curtius (1948). *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter*. Romanian translation (1970): *Literatura Europeană și Evul Mediu Latin*. Bucharest: Univers Publishing House, pp. 546-547).

One. In *Parmenides* we see four consequences that derive from the assumption – “if One is” and other four from the assumption – “if One is not” (137c-160b)§ totally, eight consequences. There is between *Phaedrus* and *Parmenides* a matter of similar technique and each time it is left in the middle. In *Phaedrus*, there are presented four types of madness, although eight are suggested; in *Parmenides* there are eight consequences of the double hypothesis presented before although, for the scheme to be complete and symmetrical, the analysis should include another eight theses (from the corresponding hypothesis) and to present them in parallel:

- if One is one / if Multiple is multiple;
- if One is not one / if Multiple is not multiple;
- if One is / if Multiple is;
- if One is not / if Multiple is not.

Each hypothesis has two consequences, in total 16. Plato, nor in *Phaedrus* or in *Parmenides*, does not complete the exercise that he puts in progress. He completely suspends it in *Phaedrus* and leaves it in *Parmenides* to continue the research with his own hypothesis (that of the One¹³) in the homonym dialogue. In conclusion, “Plato does not reject only relativism and inconsistency, but also diversity”¹⁴ and Plato is, from this point of view, consistently in excess.

Eros is, ultimately, a bridge builder, a *pontifex*, the Roman people kept the tradition after the real name of the Eternal City should be read in “pontifical” manner, i.e. the way in which one passes the bridge only from right to left. Read so, (the name) *Roma* becomes *Amor*, and so did the Albigenses read it, as an anagram or the opposite of Rome, “the capital of Catholicism that they hated (it is about the name of the capital – *m.n.*), stating about it that it overthrew the real meaning of Christian teaching that was founded on love, *amor* in Latin [...]. It is true that, in the Middle Ages, Catholics used the term *caritas* instead of *amor*, because it corresponds to the Greek *eros* (not *agapé*), signifying rather physical love”¹⁵. The idea is to be found in Denis de

¹³ Constantin Noica (1983). “Note despre structura dialogului” [“Notes on the Structure of the Dialogue”], in Platon, *Opere* [Works], IV. Bucharest: Scientific Publishing House, pp. 74-75.

¹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre (1981). *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Romanian translation (1998): *Tratat de Morală. După virtute*. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, p. 157.

¹⁵ Constantin Daniel (1985). *Cultura spirituală a Egiptului antic* [The Spiritual Culture of the Ancient Egypt]. Bucharest: Cartea Românească Publishing House, p.

Rougemont who says about Cathars that, while condemning marriage, they establish a “Church of Love” which is opposed to the Roman one exactly in the way that the “word Amor opposes the word Rome. The heretics condemned the Catholic Church because it changed the very name of Deity which is Love”¹⁶.

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111. The same idea is to be found in Constantin Daniel and Vasile Văleanu (1977). *Psihosomatica feminină [The Feminine Psychosomatic]*. Bucharest: Medical Publishing House, p. 151.

¹⁶ Denis de Rougemont (1939). *L'Amour et l'Occident*. Romanian translation (1987): *Iubirea și Occidentul*. Bucharest: Univers Publishing House, note 107, p. 120.

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