

Plato on Madness and the Good Life¹

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What is madness? When does one enter a state of madness? Is it when obsessions, compulsions, moods, or addictions take possession of your motivations, and you no longer decide what you do? Viewed that way, madness is a state that is to be avoided, a state that is irrational in a highly undesirable way: it comes with lack of agency, and thus with a lack of freedom. And yet you might find it boring to be asked to be ‘rational.’ Excited and enthusiastic about something, you might insist that a certain kind of craziness leads to the best things in life: love, philosophy, art, science, and so on. You find fault with the instinct to draw a line between rationality and madness. Is not some kind of madness a powerful ingredient of a good life, as one might rationally pursue it?

These questions frame Plato’s views on madness. It would be naive to consider all madness bad, or to consider madness a remote phenomenon, absent from the lives of most of us. Madness is deeply connected to rationality and to irrationality. Plato’s approach has much to recommend it: it addresses madness from the point of view of agents who aim to lead a good life. From this perspective, the relationships between rationality, irrationality, and madness are crucially important. We do not want to lapse into kinds of madness that impede our lives, taking us captive to obsessions,

¹ I am grateful to William Harris for inviting me to present this paper at a conference on *Mental Illness in Antiquity*, and to the conference participants for lively discussion. Jens Haas read several drafts of the paper and offered most helpful comments.

compulsions, mood disorders, and the like. We also do not want to miss out on forms of madness that make life richer and more interesting.

I shall discuss three phenomena – phenomena that, for Plato, all count in one way or another as madness: rational madness (1), god-given madness (2), and disordered desiderative states or mental illness (3). (1) and (2) are beneficial; they increase our powers of agency. (3) is destructive; these conditions are serious impediments to agency. The surface of Plato's discussions, populated by gods and Muses, might appear alien to us. Metaphors aside, Plato in effect discusses criteria similar to those scientists employ today, and arguably he offers detail that can help us formulate these criteria in particularly compelling ways.²

Most fundamentally, Plato's criteria concern themselves with desire, or, in other terms, with the question of what kinds of things look good – or bad – to agents in a given condition. Throughout many of his dialogues, Plato explores an idea that is known as a Socratic Paradox: everyone desires the good. In being motivated to perform such-and-such an action, one sees the action (or something relating to it, such as its outcome) as good. Otherwise one would not be moved to act. In comparing Plato's accounts of (1) rational madness, (2) god-given madness, and (3) mental illness, I shall pursue the

² Psychiatrists are working with philosophers to advance definitions of central concepts such as autonomy, in the hopes of applying them in court and in other contexts where much hangs on whether a person is assessed as mentally disturbed or not (cf. Bernard Gert's consultant work for the revision of 3rd edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III-R)* of the American Psychiatric Association, 1987; see also <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/jun/29/mental-health-patients-decisions>>).

general question of how these conditions fit in with the general directionality of motivation toward the good. (1) and (2) enhance the pursuit of the good; though they add complexity to the theory, they fit perfectly into the general claim that motivation is for the good. (3) raises difficult questions. First, there is the question of whether someone who, say, sees the relief a compulsive action promises as good, is motivated toward the good, even though she herself might be aware that she pursues something harmful. Plato discusses this kind of issue in terms of conflicts between different motivational powers, each with its good. Second, there is the question of what should be said about an agent who no longer pursues the good of any motivational power typically relevant to human action: reason, spirit, and desire. Suppose that a power could grow in an agent that is even lower than desire, and suppose the agent became motivated by the good of that power – a power than Plato characterizes as monstrous. Would there still be a sense in which the agent pursues *her* good, given that the monster is arguably not who she used to be, and that she is inhabited by a force that is alien to the typical patterns of human motivation?

I shall refer to several dialogues – the *Ion*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Philebus* – as making distinct proposals. But I shall not emphasize the differences between these texts. Instead, I am trying to put together a sketch of those states and conditions that Plato associates with madness. My approach should not be mistaken for the view that there is one Platonic theory of madness, re-iterated or re-dressed in various dialogues (or even worse, for the view that the dialogues need not be studied as self-standing texts). On the

contrary, I assume that Plato thinks through several ways in which the relevant phenomena could be explained. I take these differences, even where they are subtle, to be of great interest. However, I shall focus on an idea that appears to me to be present in dialogues that otherwise differ importantly from each other: the idea that we think about madness in the context of wanting our lives to go well.

Though the relevant dialogues are the subject of an extensive secondary literature, scholars have not focused on this idea. Indeed, as far as I can see, it is not even discussed. Perhaps this is because the intuition that madness is close to home for all of us was unpalatable to a long tradition of scholarship. Perhaps it is also related to the fact that Romanticism embraced the idea that artists are inspired by genius; god-given madness, accordingly, appeared to be a topic exclusively for aesthetics, rather than being interpreted in the larger context of Plato's theory of motivation.³ Finally, it might also be because in a sense I am saying something obvious. However, I take it that the obvious is often what is hardest to get clear about.

1. Rational Madness

There is an everyday notion of rationality according to which the rational person is the sober-minded person. "Be rational" means "don't be such a dreamer," "don't be overly enthusiastic," and so on. Importantly, this is not Plato's notion of rationality. Human rationality includes enthusiasm – it includes a motivational force that is so strong that it is

³ Cf. Asmis 1992.

plausibly associated with a god. Typically, human beings desire their own happiness with such fervor that they are, metaphorically speaking, like Eros: hunters who crave their trophy, and who will go to great lengths to get it. Accordingly, rational madness is no oxymoron. A conception of reason that makes no room for positive phenomena of enthusiasm and crazed-ness is too simple.

The *Symposium* contains an account of human motivation that explores this idea.⁴ According to Socrates' (and Diotima's) speech, love is not primarily about relationships. More fundamentally, love (*erôs*) is a pervasive motivational force. Love is what drives us in our pursuit of happiness. It motivates the kinds of activities – having children, taking up a craft, engaging in politics, and so on – that typically structure human lives, and that we associate with happiness (199-208).⁵ In these pursuits, we strive for 'goods' (*agatha*). For example, in having a family, we aim to see our children grow up and flourish; in engaging in politics, we aim to establish improved laws; and so on. To achieve and 'possess' these goods is to be happy. Accordingly, these goods are the principal object of love (205a-206a). Indeed, the desire for these goods – and for being happy – is said to be the greatest and most violent love for everyone (205d).

⁴ Only few scholars read the *Symposium* in this way. Generally, scholars tend to focus on love in the ordinary sense – that is, love for other persons or for ideas, but not love as a general motivational force in the pursuit of a good life. Some contributions relevant to my topic are: Wedgwood 2009; Kahn 1987; Richardson-Lear 2006; Kraut 2008.

⁵ On the range of typical human pursuits, cf. 208c-209e and 205d.

This proposal contains an under-appreciated idea about human striving for happiness.

Love, as the motivator behind this striving, is thought of as a *violent* force. The way we pursue happiness is not measured and sober. On the contrary, it is as if we were love-sick for happiness. We go to great lengths for our children, for political change, and so on.

Diotima goes so far as to say that, if one did not understand the nature of human love for happiness – and this includes ideas beyond the scope of this paper, ideas about beauty and immortality – we would have to be puzzled by its *alogia* (208c4). *Alogia*, here, refers to an apparent irrationality. Without an account of love for happiness at our disposal, human behavior would be inexplicable to the observer.

Consider an example. Apollodorus, who reports the conversation of the *Symposium*, is an adherent of Socrates, infected with philosophy as with an illness. He was given the name “*to malakos*” on account of following Socrates and pursuing philosophy (173d7). The standard English translation calls him “crazy.” Literally, “*to malakos*” corresponds to derogative epithets that, perhaps, children might use when teasing each other, saying that someone is ‘weak-minded’ or has gone ‘soft in the head.’ This, then, is the effect of having had a taste of philosophy by talking to Socrates. Once one begins to pursue philosophy, one is ‘sold.’ One recognizes how good it would be to gain insights, and accordingly one cannot rationally stop pursuing insights, though one realizes that great effort is needed and that one may never get there. Apollodorus accepts the designation as *malakos*, admitting that he is mad (*mainomai*) (173e2-3, an expression that connotes Bacchic frenzy) and infatuated (*parapaiō*).

His state, however, is a rational kind of madness. Devotion to philosophy is rational, insofar as it reflects the basic structure of human desire for happiness; something good – in this case, knowledge – is associated with happiness and pursued. At the same time, it is a kind of infatuation: philosophers tend to be much like Apollodorus, driven in a way that looks ridiculous to others. Philosophy is just one of the pursuits taken up by people in their quests for a good life. Having children, politics, crafts, and so on, are structurally similar. Something is recognized as good and its pursuit is associated with happiness. It is then aimed at with great fervor.

The madness of desiring happiness is a central component of human motivation toward the good; indeed, it is the greatest motivator in human life, and it is directed toward the good. It is rational in the following sense. First, human beings strive for a good life according to the structures of *human* motivation, and that is, motivation that reflects at once the mortality of human agents and the fact that a person's motivational perspective is not limited to one particular finite life. Second, and relatedly, love for happiness is a general feature of human motivation, rather than an aberration; this is how we rationally respond to what we see as good. Third, it is rational insofar as it is a good feature of human motivation. Love of happiness – associated with the demi-god Eros – makes us better, not worse agents: it drives us into high-gear, and fuels the kinds of pursuits we

associate with a life lived to its fullest.⁶ What, then, is left of the idea that it is a kind of madness? Only so much: the motivational force of love is a kind of driven-ness and crazed-ness.

2. God-given Madness

In my reconstruction of rational madness in the *Symposium*, I employed an intuitive notion of madness. Aided by the expressions that Apollodorus and Diotima use, I suggested that madness has something to do with the following states: being in ‘high gear’ or in a mode of high activity; being ‘crazed’ or ‘driven’; being ‘infected’ or infatuated with something that one has tasted and now wants more of. Clearly, there can be good and bad versions of such states. And clearly, if rational madness is a general feature of human motivation, it counts as madness only in a relatively thin sense. According to another everyday intuition about madness, madness is an extraordinary state. This applies to love only insofar as it is, within everyone’s life, the most violent motivation. More robust forms of madness will have to be conditions that are extraordinary in a literal sense, conditions that are rarely found.

⁶ Notably, this need not mean that one lives a life of excitement, a life where one is emotionally in high gear. Socrates, devoted to philosophy and driven by its pursuit, is at the same time a rather cool and calm person. In a review of Susan Wolf (2010), Joseph Raz (2010) finds – in my view rightly – fault with Wolf’s account of the meaning of life (a topic not unrelated to the *Symposium*’s concern with motivation for a good life). As he sees it, Wolf makes it seem as if only the excited could lead a meaningful life. This is not the idea I suggest we ascribe to the Plato of the *Symposium*.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato distinguishes between two such kinds of madness (*mania*), god-given madness on the one hand, and madness as human disease or mental disorder on the other. I shall employ Plato's account of god-given madness in order to generate a list of features of madness, and assign names to them. The features on my list (for which I claim no completeness, and which are closely interrelated) are by themselves neither good nor bad. In god-given madness, they manifest themselves in positive ways; in mental disorder, they manifest themselves negatively.

Throughout the *Phaedrus*, Plato uses two conspicuous expressions for madness: *to aphron* and *paranoia*. Madness is an absence of the usual functioning of the mind (*to aphron*; *Phaedrus* 236a1, 265e4). The mad person is beside herself; what goes on in her mind is past comprehension; or it runs alongside the ordinary functions of the mind. Madness thus is, literally, *paranoia* (266a3), *para* having all these meanings: beside, past, along, beyond, and so on. Moreover, an agent in the relevant kind of state is 'moved' or agitated (*kekinêmenos*, 245b4). Madness is a volatile state.

APHRON Madness is a kind of absence or bracketing off of the regular powers of reason.

PARANOIA The cognitive activities that come with madness can run alongside regular cognitive activities, or go beyond them.

ACTIVITY Madness is an agitated state, a state with a high level of activity.⁷

Plato does not describe god-given madness as a loss of health (265a9-10). Instead, it is a shifting out of the ordinary and customary (*exallagês tôn eiôthotôn nominôm*), effected through divinity (265a10-11). What is removed is the condition we are used to, and that we associate with ordinary ways of doing things. This is an important point. Madness is not, qua madness, immediately a disease. At bottom, madness is a state that differs from what we are used to. Here, then, is a fourth characteristic of madness:

CUSTOM Madness is not primarily the opposite of health, but of ordinary states and customary ways of doing things.

God-given madness is, like motivational love as discussed in the *Symposium*, a good phenomenon. Divine inspiration figures in the greatest achievements: creation of poems, healing of diseases, rescue from disaster, philosophical insight. In the phrase that is the ancestor of ‘enthusiastic,’ Plato says that in such conditions, a god is in the agent – the agent is *enthousiazôn* (*Phaedrus* 241e, 249e, 253a, 263d). Alternatively, the agent is inspired – a ‘spirit’ (*daimon*) is ‘in’ her. It is hard to assess how literal Plato wants us to take these formulations. Is he seriously suggesting that a divine being inhabits a human agent’s mind?

⁷ Plato does not seem to think of mood disorders that come with motivational inertia.

A deflationary reading, which sees talk about divine inspiration as metaphorical, would have to capture the following ideas. First, in order to be in agreement with Plato's core theological commitment, reference to divine inspiration must mean that something positive influences an agent's mind. This is Plato's most central claim about god or the gods: that he or they are good.⁸ That is, where Plato refers to divine intervention, he means to suggest that the relevant phenomenon is – at least in important respects – good. Second, insofar as Plato, though he rejects much of traditional religiosity, consistently expresses reverence for the divine, it means that something takes place that is superior to ordinary events. Third, something goes on in the mind that is typically experienced as not deriving from the agent's own thought-processes. The relevant experience might be that of the cognizer herself: she does not know how she arrived at a given idea, and thus sees it as something that was put into her mind. Alternatively, it might also be the experience of on-lookers. Suppose a poem is found to be deep and beautiful. The poet, however, is found to be silly and unable to say anything coherent about the poem. In response, one might be tempted to say that the poem must derive from cognitive powers beyond the poet's own.⁹

⁸ Cf. *Republic* II, 379a-b. Cf. Bordt 2006.

⁹ This seems to be Plato's attitude in the *Ion*. The protagonist Ion, a professional reciter and interpreter of Homeric poetry. At the end of the dialogue, Socrates says "you must be divine" (542b). This pronouncement is a response to Ion's proposal that the Athenians should hire him as military leader for their next war: qua Homeric expert, he is an expert on everything Homer writes about, and accordingly he is a military expert. Quite likely, Socrates makes fun of Ion in calling him divine. Ion greatly prefers this idea to Socrates' earlier claim that he is out of his mind (535d). The implication, throughout the dialogue, is that Ion is ignorant in a baffling way: though able to recite Homer and to talk about Homer, he understands nothing – neither any of the topics that come up in Homer, nor his own thought-processes.

I shall not argue for this deflationary reading; this would lead to questions too far afield from the topic of this paper. Given that Plato does not hold traditional theological views – for which his core premise “god is good” serves as sufficient evidence – it is unlikely that his talk about divine intervention fits into a conventional, religious perspective.

Admittedly, more would have to be said. For present purposes, however, focus on the impression that a superior power adds something to a cognizer’s thought processes is legitimate. The question of whether this impression is well-interpreted by literal reference to divine intervention can be left open.

In sum, the proposal seems to be that there is a *positive* version of finding oneself with cognitive activity that does not appear to result from one’s ordinary thought-processes. In these states, human beings can accomplish something extraordinarily good (244a): they can make predictions, find cures, create poetry, and be philosophical lovers of the Forms. These agents are mad without being irrational. For example, the poet comes up with verses the meaning of which might be obscure to her. Someone or something else seems to think through the agent. And yet, the cognitive powers of the poet are not diminished or otherwise negatively affected. Though the production of poetic verse happens in the heightened mode, she is herself when she turns back to mundane tasks. Here is, accordingly, a fifth features of madness.

**ALIEN In madness, something alien to the agent's own mind is experienced
as affecting cognitive activity.**

Consider Socrates' claim that sometimes a divine spirit warns him.¹⁰ For example, he wants to step into a river, but has a premonition, one that he does not perceive as originating in his own mind, but rather ascribes to a good demon; the premonition makes him stop in his tracks (*Phaedrus* 242b8-d2). Why does this qualify as a positive case of having one's reason overruled? First, that which overrules one's reason is better rather than worse than one's reason. It is divine reason, not one's desires; it is a good spirit who warns Socrates, not a bad spirit. Second, while one's reason is overruled, it is not inhibited in its activities. Socrates retains his cognitive powers. He appropriates the divine sign as something for him to take into consideration. Socrates' condition is not one of madness, but it displays one aspect of god-given madness: he finds himself with thoughts that he ascribes not to himself, but to a higher being. Socrates' divine sign appears to be at the end of a spectrum of cases, some of which might go significantly further. A human agent's reason might be altered in a way that cannot be integrated into ordinary reasoning. The foreign element can 'take over,' so much so that the agent is out of her mind, and therefore in a more literal sense mad.¹¹

¹⁰ Cf. Long 2006. Long's discussion is in the spirit of my paper. He takes seriously that Socrates, otherwise known for his commitment to reason (in a sense that excludes 'mad' phenomena) takes the voice of his *daimon* seriously, and considers it a positive force.

¹¹ Cf. Bortolotti (2010) on the question of integration. For example, it is a sign of serious disturbance if a delusional belief is not reflected in one's actions – say, someone thought "I am dead," but continued to go through ordinary activities. Bortolotti argues for a point that is related to this paper: that such rather extreme cases are on a continuous spectrum with more ordinary cases of irrationality.

In the *Phaedrus*, god-given madness is discussed in celebratory terms. In an earlier discussion of inspiration and poetry, in the *Ion*, Plato makes fun of the poets. Their lack of comprehension tends to come with presumptions: when they utter grand and beautiful sentences, they feel as if they ‘owned’ them, or, in other words, as if the poetic verses were their thoughts, and as such, were transparent to them.¹² A singer like Ion, who does not create poetry, but recites and interprets it, greatly misunderstands his own expertise. He sees himself an expert on all topics that figure in Homer’s epic poetry (and that is, virtually everything, from chariot-building to speech-making to medicine to military strategy).

Poets and rhapsodes can fail to realize that in fact the poetic verses they formulate are not their thoughts. It is not a failure of rationality to be divinely possessed, and in this sense out of one’s mind. But it is a failure of rationality not to be able to distinguish between the divine influence and one’s own cognitive activities. Scholars have sometimes suggested that the *Phaedrus* and the *Ion* offer substantially different outlooks on inspiration.¹³ But in spite of the many differences between the two dialogues, it would seem that the point from the early dialogue *Ion* could survive in later Platonic philosophy. Divine inspiration is a good thing insofar as its results are concerned. When it comes to

¹² Though Ion does not think of himself as the author of the thought, he thinks of himself as owning it: as having come to think it as one of his thoughts. Both authorship and ownership of thoughts are core things to get wrong in phenomena of irrationality and mental disorder.

¹³ See for example Pappas (2008).

assessing a particular agent's state of mind, it is good only if it is recognized for what it is.

¹⁴ The inspired person should be able to distinguish her own thoughts from the thoughts instilled in her by a superior power. We can thus derive a sixth feature of madness from the *Ion*.

LACK OF OWNERSHIP Mad cognitive activity is not properly 'owned' by the agent; the agent's thoughts are in some sense not her thoughts, and should be recognized for what they are.

God-given madness thus poses challenges to those who experience it. A cognizer should aim to assess correctly what goes on in her mind. On the whole, however, god-given madness is a positive phenomenon. It fits perfectly into the framing premise of Plato's theory of motivation, namely that it is for the good: in god-given madness, agents pursue the good with heightened powers.

3. Madness as Disease

Mental disorders, as I shall call the kinds of madness that are diseases, are not ascribed to superior powers, and they do not lead to good things. In discussing these phenomena, I

¹⁴ It is sometimes assumed that Plato, by not ascribing expertise to an artist, de-values poetry. However, it is important to keep apart the high regard for the results of god-given madness, and the assessment that those who voice a given poem lack knowledge. Indeed, the move to god-given madness enables Plato to hold artistic products in high esteem, and yet criticize the states of minds of artists. For an interpretation of the *Ion* that conflates the two issues, see Jannaway 1995, 14. A study of great influence is Scharper 1968; Scharper makes Plato the ancestor of Romantic aesthetics. For valid objections, see Stern-Gillet 2004.

shall continue to refer to the *Phaedrus*; additionally, I shall draw on the *Republic* and the *Philebus*. Most generally speaking, mental disorders, according to these dialogues, are messed-up motivational states, and they are destructive. They are largely the negative effect of indulgence in excessive pleasures; such pleasures infect the soul with madness (*Phil.* 63c and 45e-23).¹⁵

In Book IV of the *Republic*, Plato famously conceives of three motivational faculties. Motivational conflict, so the argument goes, can only be explained if the soul – that aspect of human beings associated with cognitive and desiderative capacities – has several such powers.¹⁶ Plato distinguishes between three sources of motivation: reason, spirit, and the appetites. Each of these motivational faculties has its good: each sees something as ‘good-for-it,’ desires it, and takes pleasure in it. Reason sees learning as its good, desires it, and takes pleasure in it; spirit sees honor as its good, desires it, and takes pleasure in it; the appetites see money and bodily pleasures as good, desire them, and take pleasure in them (*Rp.* IV; cf. IX, 580d-581c).

¹⁵ Another idea, equally important, focuses on directionality: towards what kinds of objects does the soul turn? Much of the *Republic*’s discussion of education is framed in terms of a turning (*peritropê*) of the soul, away from particulars and toward intelligible objects. Mathematics is a core and long-term aspect of education, precisely because it helps one develop the ability to engage with intelligible objects (cf. Burnyeat 2000). The positive development of *Republic*-style education has its negative corollary: decline is a turning toward perceptible particulars. The question of directionality and the question of which pleasures are sought out are intertwined. In turning, say, to the abstract objects of mathematics, one tastes and comes to appreciate the pleasures of reason.

¹⁶ On Platonic tripartition, cf. Cooper 1999, ch. 5. On the desiderative part of the soul, cf. Lorenz 2006; see also Moss 2006 and 2005.

Though the tripartite soul reappears in rather similar terms in the *Timaeus* (69c5-72d3), tripartition cannot be simply treated as a Platonic doctrine. Indeed, it is not even clear that Plato presents a unified account of tripartition in the *Republic*. Later divisions in this same dialogue (*Rp.* 602c-603a, 603e-605c) have been thought to differ from the Book IV account, or to explore further angles.¹⁷ The *Phaedrus* offers yet another version of the *Republic*'s trias: a charioteer drives a wagon with two horses, one of them noble, the other wild (246a-254e). The *Philebus* is devoted to a comparison between lives – the life of reason and the life of pleasure – and eventually to distinctions between different cognitive activities on the one hand, and kinds of pleasures on the other, as they figure in lives that go better or worse. For present purposes, we need not discuss the differences between these approaches. Instead, we can assume that Plato is interested in a range of related contrasts between reason and non-reasoning powers; between aspects of us that adhere to reason and others that cling to appearances; and between different kinds of pleasures associated with different parts of the soul. It is this set of intuitions that we need in order to put together a sketch of Platonic mental disease.

Mental disorders involve a failure by the agent's reason to assert power over her desires, and a failure to adopt desires that are good for her. Notably, this failure is not something for which Plato blames the agent. On the contrary, Plato thinks that much depends on

¹⁷ Cf. Moss 2008.

how one is brought up, and what kinds of pleasure are on offer in a given society.¹⁸

Insofar as blame is assigned, it goes to political systems.¹⁹ Perhaps even more importantly, it goes to the nature of pleasure itself. As Plato emphasizes in the *Philebus*, pleasure is a manifold (*poikilon*) phenomenon: pleasures differ deeply from each other (*Phil.* 12c4-8).²⁰ This multiplicity and many-facedness is a symptom of a dangerous nature. Figuratively speaking, one pleasure shall lead to the next. Once tasted, pleasures become easily the object of desire. This process is inherent in the nature of pleasure, rather than being a function of the presumed weaknesses of particular agents. It is a further fact about the workings of pleasure that relatively lowly pleasures are a kind of entry-path towards even lower and more dangerous pleasures. Plato thinks of agents living in societal contexts that are seductive, and having to ward off as best as they can what is, after all, a rather likely downhill development.

Education that shields one against these temptations must begin early. In his discussion of childhood education in the *Republic*, Plato makes an interesting proposal. Children ought

¹⁸ The story Plato tells about decline of one's motivations is a generational story (*Rp.* VIII-IX): he looks at young people growing up with parents of such-and-such a kind, and in a society with such-and-such values. The dynamic unfolds between children who object to their parents' way of life, fall victim to temptations offered by others who are ostensibly more successful (richer, more powerful) than their parents, and so on.

¹⁹ For a similar point on the relationship between an individual's psychology and the societal setting, cf. Lear 1998, 219-46.

²⁰ Pleasures are not, *qua* pleasures, essentially the same. Though all pleasure is pleasant, pleasures have particular properties that make them differ crucially from each other. A similar claim is made for cognitive activities; they come in rather different forms (*Philebus* 13d4-14a3). Pleasure and cognitive activity (*phronein*) are each one, and many (12c-19b). However, in the case of pleasure, Plato thinks of an inherently problematic multiplicity; in the case of our reasoning faculties, he simply proposes that there are several of them.

to be raised with stories, music, and athletic exercises. How do these components of education interrelate? A good physical condition, Plato says, does not make the soul good; but a good psychological condition shall eventually be reflected in a person's body. More care must go into the psychological than into the physiological aspects of raising a child: if a person has the right affective attitudes and well-trained cognitive faculties, she will be able to shape her physique accordingly (403d). However, before this can happen, childhood education must make sure that the body is well-configured (403e-404d).

Though Plato's discussion of athletics qua physical education is short, movement receives great attention as a part of the education that addresses the soul. Musical education is, to a significant extent, concerned with dances and games (*Rp.* 376c8 f.). According to Plato, a child needs to develop love for the good (and that includes a directionality toward the right pleasures), and she can do this only if she listens to the right songs and stories, and plays the right games, moving her body in ways that induce order, discipline, beauty, and gracefulness (*euschêmosunê*). *Euschêmosunê* is, literally, a 'well-configured state': in part through the right kind of movement, the soul is shaped and formed well.²¹ Plato casts this process as a kind of feeding (*trophê*): our bodies and souls need to taste the right things, and to digest the right things, for us to become attuned to pleasures that are good for us. Interestingly, exercise is here not understood as sports; it is understood as something we

²¹ I agree with Burnyeat that, in the early books on education of the *Republic*, gracefulness is presented as the core virtue (1997, 220). Burnyeat's focus is on the musical part of early education; as I see it, Plato is serious about the role of physical movement. On the importance of education for shaping motivation, cf. also Burnyeat 2000.

must do for our psychological balance and well-being. Plato conceives of the structured movements of games as something that directly translates into the states and attitudes of the soul. What we might think of as physical education, for him, is immediately and primarily about the shaping of our motivations.

In the later books of the *Republic*, then, Plato is concerned with mental disorder as a condition into which a young adult or grown-up person may gradually slide. For the agent who is trying to lead a good life, it is imperative to avoid settings in which destructive pleasures are tasted, and become newly-acquired predilections. A central feature of Plato's account of psychological decline is the following: the worst pleasures, those that derange and enslave us, do not follow the patterns of 'regular' tripartite motivation. They belong to an aspect of human beings that need not figure in ordinary action, and that most people succeed to banish from their waking lives.

Notably, even a person who pursues the good of the appetites leads a relatively stable life (551a and 553b-c). As lover of wealth, this kind of person is careful not to acquire expensive tastes. She sees how costly everything is, and she wants to keep her money. Accordingly, though she is ruled by lowly desires, her desires do not spiral out of control. In making this point, Plato distinguishes between necessary and non-necessary pleasures. The stingy person has a piece of cheese and a glass of water for dinner, returning to work the next morning without a hang-over. In being so motivated, she pursues wealth, one of

the goods of the appetites. This person may not lead the kind of life Plato admires, and her soul is not well-ordered. But she is not in a state of mental disease.

Someone else shall engage in non-necessary pleasures, buying expensive wines and imported delicacies (55d-560a). This person too is ruled by her appetites, but by another aspect of them: by their pursuit of bodily pleasure. Due to the nature of bodily pleasure, this agent crosses a line. Bodily pleasures, if there is no self-imposed discipline, lead toward increasingly intense and violent desires. A person who develops such desires shall be in temporary states of madness. In the *Philebus*, Plato says that the greatest bodily pleasures come with a kind of madness: at least for some intense moments, they make people ‘freak out,’ leaping and kicking, with distorted features (*Phil.* 47a-b).²² In the *Republic*, unrestrained pursuit of such pleasures is associated with liberty (*eleutheria*, *Rp.* 562b12). Liberty here is a kind of chaos, a lack of discrimination with respect to which pleasures are sought (564a4-5). A person who leads this life is, in a way, motivated by her appetites; but she is not guided by appetites that are in their unadulterated state. Rather, she is ruled by appetites that have been enlarged, through a kind of growth that involves

²² Bodily pleasures, Plato argues, come with pain and a semblance of pleasure, rather than real pleasure. From the point of view of bodily pain, the removal of pain looks like pleasure. This is a perspectival mistake: when you are in pain, then relief from it appears so desirable that you falsely consider it pleasure (*Rp.* 583b-585a, cf. *Phil.* 51a and 42a-b on perspectival mistakes). But it is only the relief from physical pain, not yet pleasure. Bodily pleasures and pleasures of anticipation are merely perceived pleasures; really, they are the cessation of pain. There is a better kind of pleasure, namely pleasure which is not the cessation of pain, so-called ‘pure pleasure,’ and that is, the pleasure of reason. This argument involves a three-stage model of pain and pleasure, the third stage being a neutral, in-between stage. Plato defends the three-stage model in *Philebus* 43d f., where he ascribes a two-stage model – pleasure is the removal of pain – to harsh people who have an inordinate hatred against the power of pleasure and do not acknowledge anything healthy in it (44c5-d1).

diversification. In a well-known metaphor, Plato thinks that, in this degenerative process, one's appetites become a many-headed monster, with ever more heads (588c). This monster was raised and fed by the agent. It makes a value-judgment: it regards liberty, or lack of restraint and excessive variety, as good. On her downhill path, the agent develops ever more disastrous desires. Wild and excessive pleasures come to control her. If these pleasures are tasted and cultivated, they persistently rob a person of her agency: there is no sense in which *she* is still in control. These pleasures, which Plato describes as lawless (*paranomoi*, 571b6), are tyrants (577b-580c).

The lawless pleasures are not strictly speaking alien to our natures. Plato proposes that they have an echo in everyone's psychological make-up: it is not outside of the realm of human motivation to have dreams in which tabus are violated, even for those who would never seriously entertain such thoughts when awake, and are disgusted by having such a dream (571b-572b). But in the perverted life that we are imagining now, lawless pleasures are available. On her downward spiral, the agent is set up for tasting them, and coming to depend on them. Lawless pleasures are the domain of serious mental disorder (*mania*, cf. 573a-c). The agent lives as if in an on-going dream – the kind of dream that breaks tabus and vividly presents actions that, for any ordinary person, are unthinkable (576b).

Plato proposes that this dimension of ours, shared by everyone, need not and ordinarily does not figure in motivation. It can be banned from our waking lives, and perhaps even

extirpated from one's sleeping mind (571b-572b). Tripartite motivation does not draw on this source of desire: ordinary agents pursue the good of reason, of spirit, and of the appetites, without accessing this sub-region of motivation. The mentally ill agent, however, whose waking life has the quality of a nightmare, is in a no-man's land of motivation, neither directed by reason, nor by spirit, nor by a recognizable version of the appetites. The monster-heads that have grown out of a tamer set of desires are not literally foreign to our natures, and yet they are an alien force. In a slightly altered metaphor, one might say that the relevant sub-region of motivation houses a monster that, if things go well, is asleep. If it is woken up, it shows itself to be unmanageable: it takes over one's whole being. What does this mean for the basic assumption about human motivation, namely that agents are motivated by what they see as good? Mentally ill motivation, according to Plato's proposal, still fits the pattern of pursuing the good. However, it is no longer the agent, or her regular motivational powers, who pursue the good. It is a sub-agential force in the agent that pursues its good.

Mental illness, thus, displays negative versions of the features discussed above. The agent's life is bare of rationality (APHRON). The agent is 'beside' herself (PARANOIA), or in other words, has lost her former, rational self. Hers is a driven way of life, she is constantly in 'high gear' (ACTIVITY). Her behavior violates all customs and ordinary ways of life (CUSTOM). What rules her is alien to her insofar as it resides below her tripartite soul (ALIEN). The agent finds herself with thoughts and desires that do not originate in either of the regular three motivational powers; instead, they originate in a

sub-region of motivation, that does not properly represent a human agent (LACK OF OWNERSHIP).

4. Conclusion

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates cites the Delphic injunction “know yourself” (229e5-6) and explains that it is a core aspect of his quest for self-knowledge to find out whether he is a monster (229e6-230a8). Socrates worries whether he is a wild animal, worse even than Typhon, a monster with a hundred dragon-heads. He would like to be a tamer and simpler animal, one that naturally has some divine part to it. As of yet, he does not know which kind of being he is. This passage highlights that, for Plato, the worry whether one might be a mad person is central to the quest for a good life. In dealing with ourselves, we want to make sure that our life is not ruled by a monster, a monster that, in effect, would be ‘who we are’ if it ruled us. The fact that even Socrates has to worry about this, not being sure whether he is tame, reminds us that the danger of becoming a monster is real for everyone.

Plato explores madness from the point of view of a person who aims to lead her life well, and who aims to be well. Rational madness is an essential part of the good life – the pursuit of happiness is, when adequate, not engaged in with an attitude of thorough soberness. But since irrational madness is dangerous, it is imperative for us to keep things apart; importantly, this involves that we understand the manifold nature of pleasure. Because these matters are so central to our lives, it is essential to define the boundaries

between rational and irrational madness. These boundaries are difficult to understand, a point which reflects the fact that madness is deeply related both to rationality and to irrationality.

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