

## On the Madness of Plato's Apollodorus

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"Among the ancients, the heroes in philosophy as well as those in war and patriotism have a grandeur and force of sentiment which astonishes our narrow souls, and is rashly rejected as extravagant and supernatural."—Hume

It has often been observed that the content or teaching of a Platonic dialogue cannot be understood apart from its formal, literary aspects.<sup>1</sup> Thus one must seriously consider its setting, characters, and, in general, its action (*ergon*) as well as the dialogue (*logos*) proper. The present paper attempts to comprehend Apollodorus, the narrator of the *Symposium*, in this light. For, according to the dialogue, it was not its author, Plato, but his creation, Apollodorus, who heard it from Aristodemus and Socrates and revealed it to his friends and to us (*Symposium* 173A8–9).

If considerations of character are essential parts of a dialogue's substance, must we not ask whether Plato's choice of a narrator permits one to regard the *Symposium* as a serious philosophic work?<sup>2</sup> Why have confidence in the philosophic capacities of Apollodorus? Perhaps he is by nature unfit to speak on philosophic themes. Indeed, Plato's choice of Apollodorus as narrator

<sup>1</sup> On the importance of the literary or "existential" aspects of the dialogues, see P. Friedländer, *Plato I*<sup>2</sup> (New York 1958) 108–25, 154–70; P. Merlan, "Form and Content in Plato's Philosophy," *JHI* 8 (1947) 406–30; R. S. Brumbaugh, *Plato on the One* (New Haven 1961) 14, 26–32; J. Klein, *A Commentary on Plato's Meno* (Chapel Hill 1965) 3–31; G. Krüger, *Einsicht und Leidenschaft*<sup>2</sup> (Frankfurt am Main 1948) 67–73, 143–45; W. Jaeger, *Paideia II* (New York 1943) 36–37; H. Sinaiko, *Love, Knowledge, and Discourse in Plato* (Chicago 1965) 1–21, 284–88.

It is of course possible that Plato regarded this aspect of his dialogues as a complement to, or even subordinate to, their objective, doctrinal aspect. This is maintained by L. Edelstein, "Platonic Anonymity," *AJP* 83 (1962) 20–22. On the problem of Plato's intention, see my article "Diotima's Concept of Love," *AJP* 86 (1965) 34–37.

<sup>2</sup> Brumbaugh (above, note 1) asks this question concerning Cephalus, the narrator of the *Parmenides*.

has been regarded as one reason for doubting that the deepest insight of Platonism is available in the *Symposium*.<sup>3</sup>

Apollodorus, it is charged, was a crazy fellow, an enthusiast whose inability to control his emotions rendered him incapable of genuine philosophy. Instead of loving philosophy Apollodorus is said to love Socrates, its greatest representative. Unable to think for himself, he can philosophize only in the shadow of his master.<sup>4</sup> If these charges were well founded, one could hardly view Apollodorus as a serious thinker. Yet, not only has he been characterized as a philosopher, but as a "mask" for Plato himself.<sup>5</sup> The present paper defends this evaluation of Apollodorus against those viewing him as un-Socratic. It will try to show that he may indeed be a "mask" for Plato, if Plato was moved by the philosophic spirit imputed by him to Socrates.

We turn first to the claim that Apollodorus was incapable of independent thought. This accusation is contradicted by his own words, for he regards himself as "no mere disciple, but an exponent of philosophy":<sup>6</sup> "τινας περὶ φιλοσοφίας λόγους . . . αὐτὸς ποιῶμαι" (173c3-4). Of course, one need not take his word for it, since the dialogue contains no systematic philosophizing by him. Might he not be deceiving himself or even lying? In the absence of proof either way, it would be difficult to settle the matter. However, the usual arguments against his philosophic acumen are, in my opinion, not valid. Although his respect for Socrates borders on veneration (*Symposium* 173d1-e3), there is nothing indicating that this passion is not subordinated to his dedication to philosophy.

The Platonic Socrates is himself not without respect for those able to assist others in their quest for knowledge. Although advising his friends to prefer truth to himself (*Phaedo* 91b8-c5, cf. *Symposium* 201c8-9), he is not unaware of the need for teachers both as guides to knowledge and as "magicians" skilled in exor-

<sup>3</sup> E.g. by L. Edelstein, "The Role of Eryximachus in Plato's *Symposium*," *TAPA* 76 (1945) 103. See also H. N. Fowler, *Plato I* (The Loeb Classical Library, 1914) 198.

<sup>4</sup> Krüger (above, note 1) 79.

<sup>5</sup> R. G. Bury, ed., *The Symposium of Plato* (Cambridge 1932) p. xvi, note 1; p. 4, note on 173c3-4; p. 149, note on 216e3-4. See also H. M. Wolff, *Plato* (Bern 1957) 130-31; J. Pieper, *Love and Inspiration* (London 1964) 4-5; "The Philosophical Act" in *Leisure: The Basis of Culture, and The Philosophical Act* (New York, Mentor Paperback, 1963) 76-78.

<sup>6</sup> Bury (above, note 5) 4, note on 173c3-4.

cizing fears destructive of philosophy (*Phaedo* 77E3–78A9). It might indeed be best to philosophize on one's own without depending on external help. However, this is perhaps too much to ask, even of most philosophers. Did not the Platonic Socrates benefit greatly from his teachers?<sup>7</sup> Did he not experience an almost religious awe concerning the venerable Parmenides (*Theaetetus* 183E3–184A1)? Some have regarded his respect as irony. But might it not have indicated an awareness of the immeasurable debt owed to one's philosophic mentors (cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1164B1–5)? Thus Aristotle's veneration for Plato did not prevent him from preferring the truth to his great friend and teacher.<sup>8</sup>

Might not Apollodorus' uncontrollable grief (*Phaedo* 117c5–d6) have arisen from the awareness that a teacher of Socrates' caliber would not be found again? An irreplaceable ally in his quest for truth was lost to him (cf. *Phaedo* 117c9–d1). Does this not constitute legitimate grounds for his great sorrow? However, it in no way means that he regarded Socrates as wisdom and justice itself and not merely as the wisest and most just of his contemporaries (cf. *Phaedo* 118A15–17).

Since Apollodorus denies any concern for non-philosophical matters, his enthusiasm would be open to criticism only if it were incompatible with philosophy. Whatever may be the case with non-Socratic philosophers, madness or enthusiasm is surely not inconsistent with the concept of philosophy championed by Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (228B6–7, 249B6–256B7). There Socrates describes his own passion for discourse as a kind of sickness. Philosophy—and indeed any passionate concern—is said to be madness. Only the teacher afflicted with this sickness will confer divine benefits on his beloved pupil. The pedagogy of those not subject to love's frenzy stunts the pupil's intellectual growth, generating in him the worldly moderation regarded as virtue by the masses (*Phaedrus* 256E3–257A2).

The gulf separating merely mortal sobriety from Socratic "mania" is apparent in Socrates' unsuccessful attempts to convert Alcibiades and Callicles to philosophy. Observing Callicles'

<sup>7</sup> On his debt to Parmenides, see H. G. Gadamer, "Zur Vorgeschichte der Metaphysik," *Anteile* (Frankfurt am Main 1950) 68–75.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096A11–18 and W. Jaeger, *Aristotle*<sup>2</sup> (New York, Oxford Paperback, 1962) 106–10.

disdain for those practicing arts designed merely to preserve life, Socrates notes that this attitude contradicts his insistence that one flatter the mob to avoid death. Similarly, Callicles' love of freedom and personal autonomy conflicts with his determination to curry favor with the masses despised by him. Appealing to this contempt and the noble aspirations implied by it, Socrates strives to effect a conversion. This argument is, in fact, the only one capable of touching the heart of the young aristocrat, although it cannot quite persuade him to abandon the popular view. The emotion governing the masses (τὸ τῶν πολλῶν πάθος) prevents his conversion.<sup>9</sup>

The conversion of Alcibiades is also frustrated by the power of "the many" (*Alcibiades I* 135E6–8, cf. 110E2–3; *Symposium* 216A4–6). He is persuaded to doubt the common opinion rejecting the equation of the good (ἀγαθόν) or profitable (σύμφερον) and the noble (καλόν) or just (δίκαιον). The masses had taught him that all just things are noble, but just or noble things are not necessarily good for one.<sup>10</sup> Heroism in combat, for example, is noble, but may be unprofitable and therefore evil, if it results in wounds or death (*Alcibiades I* 115A13–B10). In order to undercut the force of this popular view, Socrates appeals "ad hominem" to his interlocutor's heroic aspirations: would not Alcibiades agree that cowardice is the worst of evils and courage the greatest good? And if courage is the greatest, and therefore most profitable, good, is not death preferable to cowardice? A hero's death to a craven life? Thus Alcibiades' daring spirit compels his assent to the unpopular, but Socratic, conviction that justice and nobility are good and profitable (115C9–116E1).

Alcibiades and Callicles—in this sense like Socrates—make the choice of Achilles, preferring death to dishonor. Whatever their differences,<sup>11</sup> the boldness common to them clashes with what

<sup>9</sup> *Gorgias* 513C4: Οὐκ οἶδ' ὅντινα μοι τρόπον δοκεῖς εὖ λέγειν, ὦ Σώκρατες, πέπονθα δὲ τὸ τῶν πολλῶν πάθος· οὐ πάνν σοι πείθομαι. Socrates' unfeigned affection for his young friend is apparent in his ὦ φίλη κεφαλὴ (513C2, cf. 481C5–482A2).

<sup>10</sup> On the popular and sophistic identification of the good and the useful, see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951) 184 and 197, note 28; Krüger (above, note 1) 157–200. Dodds and Krüger both note that Plato and Socrates share this common view. On Thucydides and Socrates in this regard, see my article "What is History? An Interpretation of Thucydides" (to be published in *Il Pensiero*).

<sup>11</sup> On the difference between Callicles and Alcibiades, see E. R. Dodds, ed., *Plato's Gorgias* (Oxford 1959) 14–15. Dodds discusses the difference between Callicles and Thrasymachus, whose views on this matter coincide with those of Alcibiades. Cf. A.

Callicles calls τὸ τῶν πολλῶν πάθος. Yet the force of this emotion in the two young men prevents their conversion to Socrates' way of life. Ultimately their souls cannot withstand the passion subordinating everything to the demands of self-preservation. While not immune to the philosophical "gadfly's" sting, they experience it as a thorn in the flesh, an "adder's bite" (*Symposium* 217E6–218A7) or a dangerously seductive "siren-song" (216A6–8).

The contempt for popular values experienced by a Callicles or an Alcibiades is merely the necessary condition for what Socrates regards as true greatness. Without the sufficient condition—attachment to philosophy—that contempt degenerates into mere snobbishness, or, at worst, arrogant insolence unable to convince itself of its own superiority except through lawlessness. According to Socrates, the timocratic or Spartan man is an example of this unfortunate type.<sup>12</sup> Doubtful of their own right to rule, timocrats are harsh to inferiors (*Republic* 549A1–2), incapable of treating them as natural aristocrats would (cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1124B19–30). Only devotion to philosophy can prevent gifted "madmen" from degenerating into timocrats or even tyrants (see above, note 12). The cure for their madness is not to eliminate it, but to make them aware of its real goal. For without "madness," Socratic philosophy is not possible. Thus Socrates can tell the potential tyrant, Callicles, that they both share an experience fundamental to the philosophic enterprise

E. Taylor, *Plato*<sup>6</sup> (New York, Meridian Paperback, 1960) 116; A. W. H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility* (Oxford 1960) 239, 270–78; G. B. Kerferd, "The Doctrine of Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*," *Durham University Journal* n.s. 9 (1947–48) 19–27. Unlike Thrasymachus or Alcibiades, Callicles never doubted that true justice is essentially good or beneficial.

On the likeness to Achilles, cf. *Apology* 38B5–D5 and B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind*<sup>2</sup> (New York, Harper Paperback, 1960) 186–87.

<sup>12</sup> J. Adam, ed., *The Republic of Plato* II<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge 1963) 215, on *Republic* 549A1–2. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1269A34–B12. In this regard, consider the remarks about Alcibiades made by Thucydides (6.15.2–5).

On philosophy's capacity to prevent the worst crimes, see Aristotle, *Politics* 1267A6–16; Plato, *Gorgias* 525E5–527E7; *Alcibiades I* 104E6–106A1; *Republic* 495A4–C6; E. Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle* (Baton Rouge 1957) 127: "The *Eros tyrannos* (*Republic* 573B; D) is the satanic double of the Socratic Eros. The *enthousiasmos* of the Socratic Eros is the positive force which carries the soul beyond itself to the Agathon. The *Eros tyrannos* is winged like the good Eros but parasitical (the Drone); he has no productive *enthousiasmos* but a sting which insatiably drives to waste the substance. Nevertheless, both Erotes are modes of *mania*. The desire which turns the soul toward the Good and the desire which succumbs to the fascination of Evil are intimately related. . . ."

(*Gorgias* 481c5–6): since both are in love, neither can contradict those loved by them.

Both men are in love with particular persons (Socrates with Alcibiades; Callicles with Demos, the son of Pyrilampes) and with a more universal object (Callicles with the Athenian “*dêmos*”; Socrates with philosophy). While the constancy of Socrates’ greatest love, philosophy, saves him from the instability of Alcibiades, Callicles is not so fortunate in his madness. The Athenian “*dêmos*” is, if anything, perhaps even more fickle than Demos, the son of Pyrilampes.

Whatever the objects of their passion may be, lovers, according to Socrates, are wholly at its mercy. He can contradict philosophy as little as Callicles can refuse every whim of his beloved. Socrates often pictures himself as a slave of the truth revealed by the argument (*logos*): one should follow the best argument wherever it leads, even if it means one’s death.<sup>13</sup> Thus love’s madness makes the lover weak or “soft” in relation to his beloved to whom he surrenders unconditionally. In this context, “mad” (*μανικός*) is equivalent to “soft” (*μαλακός*). Either term aptly describes Apollodorus<sup>14</sup> or anyone motivated by what Socrates calls love (*eros*). The “softness” born of love is blameworthy, according to Socrates, only if one’s main object of love is not knowledge; the philosophic life is alone worth living.

The contempt felt by idealistic youth for mundane concerns is not, as such, un-Socratic (e.g., *Parmenides* 130c3–4). For the Platonic Socrates identified his real being with reason or the ideal realm rather than with his actual self. Appealing to Alcibiades’ and Callicles’ “madness,” their contempt for mere self-preservation, Socrates tries to make them alive to the implication of this contempt. If an overriding concern for mere life is ignoble, must there not be a standard of nobility permitting one to despise it? Socratic philosophy is the determination to comprehend that standard. All other pursuits are subordinate to this. But, to repeat, only “madmen” possessed by love’s frenzy can be persuaded to engage in the philosophic enterprise (cf. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1491–99). For they alone have ex-

<sup>13</sup> R. Levinson, *In Defense of Plato* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1953) 174; Edelstein (above, note 1) 16–18.

<sup>14</sup> On the problem of *μαλακός* (or *μανικός*) at *Symposium* 173d8, see Bury (above, note 5) 6; P. Friedländer, *Platon III*<sup>2</sup> (Berlin 1960) 431, note 5.

perienced what it means to surrender oneself completely to some object.

Condemned as weakness by merely mortal prudence,<sup>15</sup> the "softness" arising from love is, for Socrates, the greatest strength, if it is felt as enslavement to philosophy. Understood in this light, Apollodorus is surely a Socratic philosopher, not in spite of, but because of, his "madness" or his "softness" (*Symposium* 173D8). For unlike Alcibiades and Callicles, those immoderate sons of an immoderate Athens, Apollodorus is not enslaved to the passion informing "the many" (τὸ τῶν πολλῶν πάθος). Nor is there evidence of his loving Socrates more than philosophy. He obviously cherishes Socrates as the best guide to that absolute nobility divined in his "mad" contempt for lesser things. If this passion is not Socratic, what is?

<sup>15</sup> Bury (above, note 5) 5, aptly cites *Revelation* 3:17 in regard to *Symposium* 173D1-3.