

The meaning of Madness in ancient Greek culture from Homer to Hippocrates and Plato

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Abstract. The period of time from the Greek Middle Ages to that which has been defined as the Greek Enlightenment of the fifth century, to which both Hippocrates and Plato belong, already encompasses, as far as the meaning of madness is concerned, both the irrational aspects expressed in a variety of ways by the culture of that society, and from a general point of view, the assumptions and rational conclusions reached by today's neuroscience and philosophy of mind. Regarding the irrational aspects, their attribution to the sacred and their narration in myths was the first of the solutions adopted, later evolving, as far as beliefs, evaluations, judgements, prejudices and behaviours were concerned, into a subsequent division between the sacred and the magical that still persists even today, with a distinction between positive madness which is that of the saints and clairvoyants and negative madness attributed instead to demons or evil. Regarding the rational aspects in the interpretation of madness, common to both yesterday and today, it is the reference to the more general problem of the mind (soul) – body relationship with dualism and monism that still has valid supporters. The examples quoted are texts from Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Hippocrates's *On The Sacred Disease* and Plato's *Phaedrus*, *Ion* and *Timaeus*.

Key words: Folly or Madness, Homer, Hippocrates, Plato

The term madness in its present-day meaning, although in many aspects generic and vague, is alien to the Greek culture of which Homer is the most important representative.

The term *mania*, when expressed, does in fact refer more to the irrational rather than the pathological and has an extremely wide connotation. It includes passionate manifestations of feelings and emotions, disturbances of the conscience, different modalities of perception and thought, behaviours sustained or imposed from an exterior source, and projection mechanisms of the interpretation of reality.

Classifying them as pathological, however, is unthinkable because in order to understand them we must have as reference pre-rational or even irrational thinking in that very culture that has, as its characteristic, the interpretation of reality with myths.

Furthermore, these manifestations lack the reference to a centre that unifies them and gives them

coherence, because it will only be a few centuries later, with Plato that the *psyche* is to become the soul, and Hippocratic Naturalism will give the brain as a genetic reference for them.

The *psyche* was, initially, only the breath, that breath of life that leaves man's body when he dies and goes to Hades, the kingdom of darkness and the dead and there was insufficient knowledge of that which we today consider to be mental functions.

The seat of sentiments, emotions, passions and behavioural control (the *thymòs* and the *phrén*) was considered to be the retrosternal, the heart and diaphragm, while the seat of mental representation (the *nòs*) was the head.

In this archaic thought, therefore, no contraposition exists for the understanding of the manifestations referred to, between the rational and irrational, reality and unreality, neither between normality and abnormality. As was stated by Calasso, and noted by

Enzo Novara (1, 2) «Homer ignores madness (as we know it) simply because it is everywhere,» ..in explosions of fury, in the hallucinatory apparitions of divine figures, in inner voices, split personalities, and, affirms Novara that these were phenomena quite common in the psychological experience of the listener and reader of Homeric poems, therefore the description of an almost physical proximity of the divinity to the characters narrated was anything but unnatural. They were phenomena that we, today, ascribe to the vast nosographical field of schizophrenia, but that, according to Dodds, in the Greek world were absolutely commonplace, since they were linked to a psychic structure completely different to ours, that is to say, a specific predisposition of the primitive or archaic mind to hallucinations, to give reality to images produced by the brain, projecting them in fact onto divine figures (3).

In which century the Homeric works or part of them should be placed, remains an unanswered question. The hypothetical timeframe for an oral phase of various chapters or part of them, presented separately, is placed in the so-called Greek Medieval, between the XII and IX Century B.C.

The first complete edition of the Iliad and the Odyssey in written form, according to Cicerone, dates back to the VI Century and are by Pisistratus (4).

Without, however, entering into the Homeric question, what is important to note is that, in the following centuries, while popular tradition maintains the conceptual definition described, of a madness not separated from normality as an expression of pre-rational and rational aspects of the same, in the philosophical and naturalistic setting the meaning gradually modifies with formulations that are increasingly more rational than those in Plato or Hippocrates, two of the most important exponents of that which has been defined as the Greek Enlightenment of the V Century, finding completion, clarity and consistency.

Considerations on the evolution of the meaning of this term during the period indicated, should not become a linguistic research but rather a comparison, to underline the modernity, between the themes and solutions proposed in that distant past and their similarity to the content of existing debates and conclusions reached today by philosophy of the mind and neurosciences.

The rational and irrational aspects of thinking and the realistic and unreal aspects in normal and pathological mental activity, were in fact topics of consideration for Eugène Minkowski, phenomenological psychiatrist of the last century, that valorises unreality and irrationality, attributing them to a role that is just as important as that of reality and rationality for a good psychic equilibrium.(5)

These are also topics held dearly by Thomas Szasz and Franco Basaglia. According to Szasz «mental illness is myth» (6) and irrationality, even in psychotic forms is none other than a normality that has been denied the right of expression.

Likewise Basaglia in his *Conferenze Brasiliane (Brazilians conferences)*: «I said that I do not know what madness is. It can be all or nothing. It's a human condition. Madness exists in all of us and is present the same as reason» (7).

However, while, according to Basaglia, «dominant reason» does not include madness and marginalizes it, trying to eliminate it, in myth and ancient cultures, such as that expressed by Homer, it is, instead, precisely irrationality or pre-rationality that are dominant.

Another modern theme, in a very rational area which had already become relevant in Greece in the V Century, is that of monism or dualism in the mind – body relationship with a theoretical development, in the naturalist context, well expressed by Hippocrates, who had a cultural background in naturalism and empiricism from the Ionic School of Mileto, Talete, Anassimandro and Anassimene, and in the philosophical context by Plato with the elaboration of concepts already in part present in Orphic-Pythagorean thought.

All psychic activities are thus traced back to a unity, the *psyche*, that gives them coherence that, on the one hand, with Hippocrates, valorises as a reference not only the normal but also the pathological aspects of the brain, while in Plato, by means of a redefinition of its meaning, it becomes an immortal soul, the very essence of man, his inner self, in whose passions may also nestle the possibility of madness. Monism and dualism are also present day terms. After the secular domination of Cartesian dualism that proposes in rational and philosophical terms, with Neo-Platonic solutions, a problem that had for centuries remained the competence of theology, it was above all during

the second half of the twentieth century that monistic hypothesis reappeared and regained momentum with a re-elaboration, in neopositivism, of psychophysical materialism, with a deeper scientific knowledge of the brain and its mental activities, both normal and pathological, thanks to the development of neurosciences and cybernetics.

The greatest present day expression of dualism is the *interactionist dualism or trialism* by Popper and Eccles (8), who having exorcised the references to the Cartesian substances elaborate conceptualizations, which have as reference evolutionism and the neo emergentism and they hypothesize the mind – body relationship as emerging processes and phenomena defined “almost substances”, with the causal agents being the physical world, the mental world and the cultural world.

For Popper and Eccles not only is the mind not the product of cerebral activity, but because it is spiritual, it is in fact the engine.

Monism, on the other hand, has as a fundamental assumption the idea that the mind is not a spiritual organ ontologically and substantially different from the body, but rather a *function* of the brain delegated to perception, comprehension and interaction with the reality that is external to it and the regulation of some somatic functions.

Its most advanced expression is *connectionism*, the evolution of *functionalism* by J.A. Fodor, author of “*The modular theory of mind*”, hypothesized as a series of fundamental structures, or *modules*. Their task is the analysis divided by domains (sight, hearing, internal states, emotions, etc.) of input coming from an outside reality or from internal states and their transformation into representations. These would then be entrusted to a *central system* for a more complex elaboration and it is in these that thought is organised, consciousness is formed and language is developed.

Connectionism modifies the computational hypothesis substituting it with a theory of neural networks that are units of simple elaborations organised in networks in which the elaboration of information instead of being *serial*, that is to say one after the other, as in computers and the conscience, evolves instead in *parallel*, that is with fragments of it elaborated simultaneously on several tracks, with considerable improvement to the function and above all the speed.

Connectionism is the result of the work done by a group of researchers from MIT during the eighties, coordinated by the psychologists D.E. Rumelhart (9) and J.L. McClelland (10).

After this somewhat long introduction I’ll go back to the proposed theme remembering that Erasmus had already placed madness in those ancient Greek myths, when speaking about his own lineage and homeland:

«And because it is not alike known to all from what stock I am sprung, with the Muses’ good leave I’ll do my endeavour to satisfy you. But yet neither the first Chaos, Orcus, Saturn, or Japhet, nor any of those threadbare, musty gods were my father, but Plutus, Riches; that only he, that is, in spite of Hesiod, Homer, nay and Jupiter himself, divum pater atque hominum rex, the father of gods and men, [...] Nor did he produce me from his brain, as Jupiter that sour and ill-looking Pallas; but of that lovely nymph called Youth, the most beautiful and galliard of all the rest. Nor was I, like that limping blacksmith, begot in the sad and irksome bonds of matrimony.[...] And as to the place of my birth, forasmuch as nowadays that is looked upon as a main point of nobility, it was neither, like Apollo’s, in the floating Delos, nor Venus-like on the rolling sea, nor in any of blind Homer’s as blind caves: but in the Fortunate Islands, where all things grew without ploughing or sowing; where neither labour, nor old age, nor disease [...]» (11). This is the self-presentation of madness. Now, a more specific in-depth study of the theme. A particularly good analysis of madness in Homer’s work was made by Enzo Novara in an aforementioned publication (1). Novara, citing Pohlenz says: « (in Homer) madness of the soul is missing; it is rather a madness “without soul”: not a degenerative state of the psyche, not an illness, least of all a definitive state, but always only a momentary state that affects a specific part of the animated body, one of the many in which man finds himself. Basically a transitory mutation of psychic “energy” [...] The individual is a sum of different impulses and partial psychic-physical organs that produce sensations and thoughts, emotions and actions, following each other, not necessarily in relationship to one another. [...] In all these phenomena emotions and passions take up a central position: *ménis* (anger, fury), the word which opens the Iliad, *chilos* (indignation), *àchos* (pain), *phòbos*

(fear), *acheo* (torment). Homer's hero always moves either acting on fate or his emotions, passing from one to the other without any solutions for continuity, he does not stop to reflect, but reacts immediately to stimuli» (12). And likewise should be read, in examples taken from the Iliad, the anger of Achilles, his rapid transition, restrained by Pallas Athena, from sentiments of aggression and violence towards Agamemnon which were manifested with fiery words, to a state of frustration, depression and tears in which inwardness is expressed not as an internal dialogue but as a heartfelt appeal to his mother, the divine Thetis, immediately rushing to her for consolation and help, and the warrior fury of Diomedes who also involves the gods.

«As he pondered this [the pain and the anger] in his mind, his great sword half-unsheathed, Athene descended from the sky, sent by Hera, the white armed goddess, who loved and cared for both the lords alike. Athene, standing behind the son of Peleus, tugged at his golden hair, so that only he could see her, no one else. Achilles, turning in surprise, knew Pallas Athene at once, so terrible were her flashing eyes» (13). «[...] but Achilles [after obeying Athena] withdrew from his men, weeping, and sat by the shore of the grey sea, gazing at the shadowy deep; and stretching out his arms, passionately, prayed to his dear mother: 'Since you bore me to but a brief span of life, Mother, surely Olympian Zeus the Thunderer ought to grant me honour, but he grants me none at all. I am disgraced indeed, by that son of Atreus, imperious Agamemnon, who in his arrogance has seized and holds my prize'(13). Earfully, he spoke, and his lady mother heard him, in the sea's depths, where she sat beside her aged father. Cloaked in mist she rose swiftly from the grey brine, and sitting by her weeping son caressed him with her hand, and spoke to him calling him by name: 'Child, why these tears? What pain grieves your heart? Don't hide your thoughts; speak, so I may share with them'(13). Homer's model of the hero, as described above, regards, to some extent, the same immortal gods, who are often directly involved in battle, with the same kind of passions.

In the V book of the Iliad that recounts the feats of Diomedes, it is Pallas Athena who fights with him against Ares, deflecting the rod that would have struck her and it is Pallas Athena who pushes Diomedes' rod into Ares' stomach thereby wounding him. [...] Then

the brazen Ares bellowed as loud as ten thousand warriors shout in battle, when they meet in the war-god's shadow. The Greek and Trojans trembled with fear at insatiable Ares' cry (14). And he, too, ran immediately to Olympus to his father, the almighty Zeus, to complain and denounce his sister Pallas Athena with harsh words. (Father Zeus). We are all at odds with you because you cursed world with that mad daughter of yours who is ever bent on lawlessness» (14).

Examples drawn from the Odyssey should also be interpreted in the same way as those from the Iliad, with events and behaviour of the heroes, only in part determined by their own will, because it is Destiny and the gods that establish them and the individual here, too, is only a sum of impulses, thoughts and passions that can also be interpreted separately and where links between them can also be extremely lax.

But while in the Iliad anger, wrath and warlike fury prevail, in the Odyssey, particularly in the events that preceded the return to Ithaca, other sentiments and passions are present, such as love, nostalgia, regret and most importantly, as far as Odysseus is concerned, curiosity, which for him would appear to be a vital necessity. As examples, also taking into account the psychological considerations that they promote, I have chosen the episodes involving two female figures, Circe and Calypso, divine characters with human passions, with whom Odysseus had relationships and with whom he demonstrated unusual aspects of his personality, with weaknesses, ambivalences and ambiguity. Circe is a sorceress; we could define her as a psychopathic nymphomaniac, who lives alone in a mansion surrounded by ferocious beasts and, with the use of drugs and wizardry, turns the men who happen to pass her way into swine.

Odysseus, who, thanks to an antidote procured from Hermes, manages to retain his human form, bargains with her for the freedom of his men and guarantees for himself, however he too is seduced, and remains with her for a year. In fact it wasn't Odysseus who wanted to leave but his companions who wanted to return home. She did not put any obstacles in their way; she even gave them some advice on how to get back home.

This is the seduction episode: «Come, sheathe your sword, and let us two go to my bed, so we may learn to trust one another by twining in love (...). I

have no desire to go to bed with you, goddess, unless you swear a solemn oath by the blessed gods not to try and harm me with your mischief. When I had done, she quickly swore an oath not to harm me, as I required. And when she had sworn the oath. I went with Circe to her fine bed» (15).

The event concerning the nymph, Calypso, however, is a totally different story. She was banished to the remote island of Ogygia as punishment from the gods for having sided with her father Atlas in the war of Zeus with the Titans. Her condemnation was to fall in love with handsome, heroic men brought there by Destiny, only to see them depart again. In this episode, both the figures Calypso and Odysseus have psychological characteristic traits while Odysseus also manifests psychopathological ones. Calypso is instinctive and tries to live and fulfil her sentiments, something which Destiny and Zeus deny her, and it is also a perfect example of the Greek woman in the society of those times: having a series of practical expertise, such as weaving, spinning, looking after the house, seeking fulfilment in marriage. Odysseus, on the other hand, unlike the way in which he is usually described, is listless, discouraged, depressed, and incapable of finding a way out of a situation he can no longer tolerate. The wind and waves of the sea had thrown him onto the beach of the island of Ogygia, the only survivor, having escaped the vortex of Charybdis. Calypso had saved him and fed him, wanting, according to the first verses of the *Odyssey*, “him to be her husband”. The *Odyssey* begins in the seventh year of Odysseus’ stay on the island. It cannot be said that for all these years he was Calypso’s prisoner but neither that he had remained of his own will.

When the story begins he was tired and depressed and “wanted to die”. He didn’t like or no longer liked Calypso who “enchanted him with tender, bewitching words”, that had also enfeebled him, he a man of action, after so many years of inertia. He spent his days on the promontory near the cave that was their home crying, “with moans and wails, breaking his heart”, looking out to sea and dreaming of Ithaca. Odysseus’ depression is a real depression and also serious because there is the desire to die.

The situation seems to crush him and holds no prospects. For him there is no way out. There is either the solution to stay, nor the solution to set sail again

because Poseidon is his enemy and wants to avenge the blinding of Polyphemus. He is also aware that alone, without help and without transportation he cannot succeed. However, his is not a psychotic depression, but rather a reactive form, in which some vital sentiments are still present. In dreaming of Ithaca there is not only nostalgia, but also desire and hope.

And Calypso? I would acquit her from being Odysseus’ gaoler. She is a goddess in love...extremely human. She isn’t happy with Zeus’s order because it destroys her dream, but she helps Odysseus to depart, as much as she can, both materially and psychologically. She helps him to find wood so that he can make a raft, she gives him the tools to built it, the sails, she provides him with supplies and instruments and, psychologically, she reassures Odysseus, who is still hesitant about facing the sea, she advises him on the route to take and even sends him a favourable and pleasant wind. These are her words that express her contrasting sentiments in their conversation after his departure had been decided: «Be sad no longer, unhappy man, don’t waste your life in pining: I am ready and willing to send you on your way [...] Son of Laertes, scion of Zeus, Odysseus of many resources, must you leave, like this, so soon? Still, let fortune go with you. Though if your heart knew the depths of anguish you are fated to suffer before you reach home, you would stay and make your home with me, and be immortal [...] » (16).

Episodes of madness concerning Homeric characters but not present in Homer, are those of the feigned madness of Odysseus, reported in *Palamedes* by Aeschylus and in Sophocles’ *Ajax*. The first recounts that Odysseus, to avoid going to the Trojan war, from which, according to the oracle, he would return only twenty years later, feigns madness, by doing foolish things, such as ploughing the sand and sowing seeds along the seashore, but his plan was foiled by Palamedes. The second, on the other hand, narrates the story of the attribution of Achilles’ weapons after his death. Odysseus was judged to be the worthier of the two, which enrages Ajax who seeks retaliation but is driven to madness by Pallas Athena. As he thought that the Atreus, Agamemnon and Menelaus were responsible for this decision he lunges at a flock of sheep and slaughters them. Returning to his senses, in shame and dishonour he kills himself. Achilles’ weapons, however,

are returned to Ajax. The myth recounts that it was the sea that finally tore them from Odysseus' ship, and laid them on the tomb of Ajax. Foscolo also speaks about this in "Sepolcri" dedicated to Pindemonte: «Lucky you, Ippolito, who in your youth did sail across the kingdom of the winds! And if the steersman managed your ship beyond the Aegean islands, then for sure you might have heard the shores of Hellespontus resound the clamour of the ancient deeds, the tide roar, bringing back Achilles' weapons over Ajax's bones» (17).

However, returning to considerations a little more anthropological even though they do have literary references, it is possible to say that, since the beginning of time, madness in culture and society has, due to the fact that it is incomprehensible and empathetically unreachable, been ascribed to the sacred, but like other, dangerous aspects of nature, it is intriguing. Being sacred it was respected and protected from taboo, but it was also isolated and considered untouchable. In myth it became, in demotic opinion, an enactment of evil gods such as Lyssa, Mania or the Erinyes: Alecto who represents fury, Megaera anger and jealousy, Tisphone revenge. They took over the body of the madman and pursued him with sorcery, spells and witchcraft. Madness is considered a punishment for a transgression or crime, it can be, in fact in many cases is, only temporary and there can be a remedy for it with a catharsis.

This scheme is also used by the great tragedians Aeschylus and Sophocles, examples of which are the *Oresteia* and the *Oedipus*. Besides the rituals or purifications practiced in the temples, medicine was, in those times, a sacerdotal medicine; even then, however, more often than not the treatment was left in the hands of persons who Hippocrates well describes in *On the Sacred Disease* referring to epilepsy, but it was also practised for madness and for those diseases for which the cause was considered to be sacred, a consequence of divine intervention.

« (...) person as the conjurors, purificators, mountebanks, and charlatans now are, who give themselves out for being excessively religious, and as knowing more than other people. Such persons, then, suing divinity as a pretext and screen of their own inability to afford any assistance (...) Adding suitable reasons for this opinion, they have instituted a mode of treatment which is safe for themselves, namely, by applying pu-

rifications and incantations, and enforcing abstinence from baths and many articles of food (...)» (18).

As part of these treatments a special place was given to exorcisms for which there were precise rituals that through formulae and magic practices were supposed to lead to the demons being evoked and then expelled or tamed. According to Guidozi, and reported by E. Novara, in Greece, unlike what happened in Jewish rituals, the demon was not driven away but tamed. On reading these pages concerning the popular interpretation of the aspects of negative madness and the way in which it was treated, often in the hands of magicians and charlatans, one would think that these cultural expressions of a primitive and archaic society only concern the distant past.

In reality this is not so. These interpretations and behaviours have passed through the entire history of medicine, psychiatry and we might even add culture, and they are still deeply rooted in the society of the First World like ours. Situations of psychological distress, anxiety, depression, psychotic thought alterations, or psychomotor manifestations associated or not to disturbances of the conscious are often considered to be a consequence of witchcraft or the evil eye or even conditions of spiritual possession and are entrusted to faith healers, charlatans or exorcists. And this is setting them apart from manifestations, in some aspects similar, of individual or collective trance, that are, instead, considered paranormal but not pathological states in certain social rituals, that are often of a religious nature. Exorcism is a practice, which is allowed even by the Catholic Church, it does, however, necessitate specific authorization and the use of established rites and formulae. *Charlataneria e Medicina (Quackery and medicine)* (19), by Giorgio Cosmacini, a book published several years ago, looks into these topics from both a general and psychiatric point of view with reference not only to past centuries but also to the situation today. *God's charlatans* (20) and *Country healers and city wizards* (20) are two chapters at the end of the book that conclude his overview on this aspect of culture that permeates as an expression of irrationality which has been deep rooted and persistent throughout the centuries, concerning topics of the body, mind, physical and mental health even in fields where scientific progress has provided rational explanations, without

obviously being able to give answers to the problems that science cannot settle or resolve, such as man's destiny and his place in the universe. In the second chapter cited he also refers to an investigation in *Tempo Medico* (21) of 1967 that quantifies the extent of the problem in some countries in Europe. France and Italy are the two countries that are the worst off, with about 40 thousand faith healers and magicians. But it was in fact as early as the V century B.C., in the Greek world that alongside irrational answers to problems of madness, as previously mentioned, came answers that were both rational and modern. These came from medicine, art and science in its early beginnings, and also from philosophy. Hippocrates or rather the Hippocratic School, in which the *Corpus Hippocraticus* reports doctrine and thoughts, represents the medical approach to madness. The *Corpus* is a collection of approximately seventy works that are attributed to Hippocrates and his disciples, written between the fifth and early third century B.C., an era in which they were probably assembled into a single collection by the Alexandria Library. The work which refers to madness with extreme clarity is *On the Sacred Disease* (or *Morbo Sacro*), a term used to indicate epilepsy, which Hippocrates also desecrated and traced back to brain dysfunction.

These are the most significant passages. From chapter fourteen, men ought to know that from nothing else but the brain come joys, delights laughter and sports, and sorrows, griefs, despondency, and lamentations. And by this, in an especial manner, we acquire wisdom and knowledge, and see and hear, and know what are foul and what are fair, what are bad and what are good, what are sweet, and what unsavoury; some we discriminate by habit, and some we perceive by their utility. By this we distinguish objects of relish and disrelish, according to the seasons; and the same things do not always please us. And by the same organ we become mad and delirious, and fears and terrors assail us, some by night, and some by day, and dreams and untimely wanderings, and cares that are not suitable, and ignorance of present circumstances, desuetude and unskillfulness. All these things we endure from the brain, when it is not healthy, but is more hot, more cold, more moist, or more dry than natural, or when it suffers any other preternatural and unusual affection (.....) (18). From chapter fifteen, as long as the brain

is at rest, the man enjoys his reason, but the depravement of the brain arises from phlegm and bile, either of which you may recognise in this manner: Those who are made from phlegm are quiet, and do not cry out nor make a noise, but those from bile are vociferous, malignant, and will not be quiet, but are always doing something improper. If madness be constant, these are the causes thereof. But if terrors and fears assail, they are connected with derangement of the brain, and derangement is owing to its being heated. And it is heated by bile when it is determined to the brain along the blood vessels running from the trunk; and fear is present until it returns again to the veins and trunk, when it ceases (18). Hippocrates is the author of the Temperament Theory that represents historically the first attempt at an etiological, naturalistic explanation of diseases. The temperaments hypothesized by Hippocrates are four: black bile, yellow bile, phlegm (the mucus produced inside the respiratory tracts) and blood. Madness would depend on the brain being corrupted by these temperaments. The prevalence of one of these over the others would also have a determining influence on temperament and character, thereby defining a person's personality: melancholy for an excess of black bile, choleric for an excess of yellow bile, phlegmatic for an excess of phlegm, sanguine (jovial, cheerful etc.) for an excess of blood. The term melancholy to indicate depression that is used even today as a derivation from the previously used word melancholia is in fact an exact translation of black bile (*melana cholé*). The meagre knowledge of anatomy, physiology and the brain justify the fanciful etiological hypothesis of mental illnesses that, in any case, even expressed in this way, represents a big step forward in the understanding of madness: his total desacralization and his explanation in naturalistic terms, indeed specifically medical, since it was concerned with specific pathologies. This approach had an important influence on medicine in the centuries to come and there are examples, to name but a few of the most significant, between the end of the fourth century B.C. and the beginning of the third, Erofilo, the founder of the great school of medicine in Alessandria and in Rome, Aulo Cornelio Celso (First Century A.D.) and especially Galeno (Second Century A.D.). It is in his monism, however, that Hippocrates really demonstrates

his modernity that attributes all activities both normal and pathological to the brain, thereby anticipating by some 2500 years that which is still a problem even today and where the development of neurosciences has in fact led to Hippocrates' own conclusions. It is interesting to note that the hypothesis of monism and dualism were already present in the fifth century B.C. because Hippocrates' monism was in contrast to Plato's dualism. Plato represents the philosophical response to the question of madness. He does this with a theory of the soul that resumes Orphic-Pythagorean calculations but which is much more thorough in its articulation and has a different approach to the soul-body relationship. Reality for Plato is divided into two parts: one is the visible world that through the senses gives us knowledge that is only approximate, the other is the intelligible world of eternal and unchangeable ideas, to which the soul, also immortal, belongs. Incarnated, as long as it remains linked to the body, the soul is subjected, however, to limitations and conditionings. Plato's soul, the *psyche*, is not, however, the mind as we know it. It is the vital tenet that dwells in the whole body, without which it would be nothing more than an inert object. The different localisation in the body, albeit in the context of its uniqueness, is differentiated, however, by characteristics and functions that Plato refers to as a tripartite: a logical part that is found in the brain, an irascible part in the cardiac region and a concupiscent part that is found in the digestive tract and the genitals. The soul's diverse functions or forms of being are expressed with forces represented by thrusts, instincts and passions, sometimes conflicting or even antithetic. These generate situations of disorder within which madness can also find its place. Plato came to these conclusions in his *Republic*, modifying an earlier hypothesis contained in *Phaedrus*, in which passions were ascribed, with negative connotations, to the body. Madness, consequently, became an illness of the soul. The theory of the soul's tripartite as seen above demonstrates an evident analogy to Freud's tripartite concerning the functions of the mind with an irrational Id, which dwells in the unconscious, a Superego that represents Rules and rationality and an Ego in the conscious that mediates between the other two which are often in conflict with one another.

Plato with the well-known Chariot Allegory exemplifies the different forces of the soul:

«Of the nature of the soul, through her true form be ever a theme of large and more than mortal discourse let me speak briefly, and in a figure. And let the figure be composite—a pair of winged horses and a charioteer. Now the winged horses and the charioteers of the gods are all of them noble and of noble descent, but those of other races are mixed; the human charioteer drives his in a pair; and one of them is noble and of noble breed, and the other is ignoble and of ignoble breed; and the driving of them of necessity gives a great deal of trouble to him» (22). Disorder determined by the emerging forces from the varying parts of the soul, even if it also causes madness, does not always, however, have a negative significance. There can be destructive follies deriving from a lack of control of the passions and creative follies that go beyond reality, towards new horizons of knowledge and do not detract but rather add something to man. This type of madness affirms Plato: «Is the madness to a sane mind (*sophrosune*) for the one is only of human, but the other of divine origin» (22).

And further on: «And of madness there were two kinds; one produced by human infirmity, the other was a divine release of the soul from the yoke of custom and convention» [...]. The divine madness was subdivided into four kinds, prophetic, initiatory, poetic, erotic, having four gods presiding over them; the first was the inspiration of Apollo, the second that of Dionysus, the third that of the Muses, the fourth that of Aphrodite and Eros» (22).

The categories of positive madness, a gift of the gods, according to Plato should also be interpreted, perhaps above all, as a reference to social realities that, for the most part, no longer exist or in any case have radically changed. Prophetic madness, widespread in Greece during that period even with wandering prophets not attached to temples, had culminated in the realisation of some temples of Apollo. The most famous of these was Delphi with the Pythia (which in Greek means priestess) who uttered her oracles according to a precise ritual. And a few, although not very many, Pythias or Sibyls had become well known not only in countries neighbouring Greece, but also in others much further afield such as the Cumaean Sibyl, already mentioned by Heraclitus or, on the other side of the Mediterranean, a Libyan Sibyl,

also referred to several centuries later by Varrone. They were Apollo's priestesses and among these, should also be remembered Cassandra, a Homeric character who, while in the *Iliad* has only a marginal role in which her prophetic powers are not mentioned, they are, however, referred to in Euripides' *Trojan Women* and in Virgil's *Aeneid*. A prophet is he who foresees the future and predicts it or also etymologically can speak on behalf of others. Nowadays the great monotheist religions consider revelation of this kind, at least in as far as man's relationship with God is concerned, to be concluded. Including and excluding these, however, there are still those who claim to be 'seers' and more often than not find followers, admirers and recruits. In some of these "prophetic madness" is also associated with "mystic madness". This for Plato is the second type of positive madness attributed to Dionysus. In Greek mythology, Dionysus represents what is instinctive and irrational in life, our energy source, as Freud would say.

Dionysian rituals, which Euripides fully describes in the *Bacchae*, are a type of revenge of the irrational over the rational, a type of ritual madness with expressions of enthusiasm, fury and trance that, exploiting the irrational, a trait of human nature, by ritualizing it in some way, they exorcise it and control it.

Individual mystic experiences, while they should be ascribed to irrationality, even though they are not an expression of instincts, are on the other hand those with special relationships with God or more generically with the divine, that are expressed with states of ecstasy, deep meditation or trance in which the individual detaches himself from his body and experiences a kind of "life of the soul". These are transcultural expressions present and widespread not only in ancient Greece but even today both in the West and in other cultures and concern both individual and collective mystic experiences. Important examples of the latter, although considerably different one from the other, even with the achievement of states of trance and ecstasy, are the ritual dances of the Sufis in the Islamic world, particularly the Sunni, and the Voodoo rites in Africa and Latin America. The third positive madness is the poetic and comes from the Muses.

As in Plato's *Ion*: «For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. (...) for they

tell us that they bring songs from honeyed fountains, culling them out of the gardens and dells of the Muses; they, like the bees, winging their way from flower to flower. And this is true. For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles» (23). And finally the madness that comes from Eros and Aphrodite. A particularly adept indication to understand what exactly this means is given by Umberto Galimberti (24). Love, sustains Galimberti, is man's boundary between the speakable and the unspeakable, between reason and madness.

«Looking at the "things of love", or as the Greek text says *ta aphrodisia*, Plato wonders what the soul manages or does not manage to say with this. And where the saying stops and the rule is insufficient to bring the word to expression there opens up the darkness of omen and enigma. Love belongs to enigma and enigma to madness.» But Plato, when concerned with negative madness, also ventures into descriptive aspects and etiological considerations that on the one hand recall hypothesis close to the popular culture even of today, for example intemperance, particularly sexual, as a cause of disorders of the soul, but on the other with themes, such as predisposition and somatic diseases as a cause of psychic disorders which have a much more solid scientific foundation. Also extremely relevant even today is the introduction that he makes to social matters involving the family and society both as a causal factor and as the preventive role, which they can also undertake.

This is expressed in a chapter of *Timaeus*: «[...] Such is the manner in which diseases of the body arise; the disorders of the soul, which depend upon the body, originate as follows. We must acknowledge disease of the mind to be a want of intelligence; and of this there are two kinds; to wit, madness and ignorance. In whatever state of mind a man experiences either of them, that state may be called disease; and excessive pains and pleasures are justly to be regarded as the greatest diseases to which the soul is liable. For a man who is in great joy or in great pain, in his unseasonable eagerness to attain the one and to avoid the other, is not able to see or hear anything rightly; but he is mad, and is at

the time utterly incapable of any participation in reason. He who has the seed about the spinal marrow too plentiful and overflowing, like a tree overladen with fruit, has many throes, and also obtains many pleasures in his desires and their offspring, and is for the most part of his life deranged, because his pleasures and pains are so very great; his soul is rendered foolish and disordered by his body; yet he is regarded not as one diseased, but as one who is voluntarily bad, which is a mistake. The truth is that the intemperance of love is a disease of the soul due chiefly to the moisture and fluidity, which is produced in one of the elements by the loose consistency of the bones. And in general, all that which is termed incontinence of pleasure and is deemed a reproach under the idea that the wicked voluntary do wrong is not justly a matter for reproach. For no man is voluntarily bad; but the bad become bad for a reason of an ill disposition of the body and bad education, things which are hateful to every man and happen to him against his will. And in the case of pain too in like manner the soul suffers much evil from the body. For where the acid and briny phlegm and other bitter and bilious humours wander about in the body, and find no exit or escape, but are pent up within and mingle their own vapours with the motions of the soul, and are blended with them, they produce all sorts of diseases more or fewer, and in every degree of intensity; and being carried to the three places of the soul, whichever they may severely assail, they create infinite varieties of ill-temper and melancholy, of rashness and cowardice, and also of forgetfulness and stupidity. Further, when to this evil constitution of body evil forms of government are added and evil discourses are uttered in private as well as in public, and no sort of instruction is given in youth to cure these evils, then all of us who are bad become bad from two causes which are entirely beyond our control. In such cases the planters are to blame rather than the plants, the educators rather than the educated. But however that may be, we should endeavour as far as we can by education and studies, and learning to avoid vice and attain virtue; this however, is part of another subject» (1).

The conclusions of this cultural journey into the early centuries of Greek civilisation, I have already partly anticipated in the introduction and during the discussion. Regarding its modernity: modernity is manifested

in the achievements reached in, and I say this in inverted commas “the scientific” sphere, and philosophical speculation but also in the anthropological field, if we think of madness with the meanings given to it by society, with its culture that includes knowledge, to some extent autonomous and independent from the scientific and philosophical, made up of beliefs, judgements, and prejudices, evaluations and behaviours. Compared to other aspects of man’s knowledge, as far as madness is concerned, science although having made great strides in this field has not yet reached and will never reach definitive conclusions nor unanimous adhesions or consensus. Neuroscience and a part of philosophy of mind propose opposing views. These are the monism and dualism that I have previously mentioned. For one it is a disease of the brain, for the other, at least in some concepts, it is a disease of the soul, considered, in any case, to be something completely different from the neurobiological substrate. And these were initially the hypotheses of Hippocrates and Plato. Naturally, the articulation and implementation of their ideas compared to nowadays is somewhat different due to many particular and albeit important conclusions, such as specifying the nature of the causes, certain classifications, and certain inclusions or exclusions, sometimes highly imaginative. However the reference framework, often certain descriptive aspects and, in Plato, not only modern but up to date evaluations and considerations concerning sociogenesis and sociotherapy are the same. And interesting to note, in this journey into Hellenic culture are the considerations concerning the pre-rational and irrational aspects of mental activity in which madness and normality become confused. Present day knowledge of science and philosophy of mind are the derivative of an evolution that started with the Cartesian theses, a later development in a mostly positivist context, and a subsequent contribution in the twentieth century which was a determining factor for a reconsideration of the references and a complete reevaluation of Psychoanalysis and Phenomenology.

The reconsideration mainly applies to the meaning of the pre-rational and irrational aspects present not only in madness but also in normal mental activities, which has led to a radical change in attitude towards those persons with these disturbances which have been defined as “the disposition of Listening to

the Otherness” (25). Noticeable analogies and similarities to today can be found even though the reference is cultural anthropology. In this regard there exist beliefs and behaviours that have been passed down through the centuries. They concern, albeit with diverse importance, the ascribing of madness to the sacred and magical compared to more rational evaluations, in greater evidence in archaic and primitive societies. That has led to a distinction between positive madness and I refer above all to the prophetic and mystic, and negative madness that was also interpreted by Plato. The madness of saints, clairvoyants, persons attributed with a particular relationship with the divinity (in Greek *entheoi*) are present in all societies. The same also applies to those “possessed” by evil deities or malefic spirits or more secularly “struck” by witchcraft, spells and curses. In today’s more secular world there is a greater tendency to ascribe madness to the magical, however this was already present in the Greek world. Yesterday and today, as previously mentioned, Hippocrates and Cosmacini are testimonies of this. Admissions to the sacred and magical have given greater validity to irrational solutions for resolving problems that are fundamentally irrational. This has emarginated and to some extent protected those who are mad. The rationalisation of madness, initiated by Hippocrates and Plato, represents the other aspect of culture that has also been an expression of societies throughout the passing of time. This has allowed madness to attain its rightful place in medicine, already in Greek and Roman times and then after a lengthy parenthesis, from the nineteenth century onwards. The application of medical methodology to madness has not, however, had only positive effects. Positive has been the different approach that, over time, has led to the possibility of a cure. Negative has been its objectification that has led, conversely, to the neglect of the patient as a person, while paying greater attention to the illness. According to Basaglia, this has meant the impossible attempt to rationalize the irrational, with the consequences that have brought about the creation and maintenance, in assessment and social behaviour, of negative prejudices, marginalization and exclusion. Correction came about when irrationality was again taken into consideration and it was understood that it lies in the unexplored depths of the mind where psychic life is born and that

it is a part of both normality and madness.

Regarding the inaccessibility of the mind’s boundaries Heraclitus had already expressed an opinion in the sixth century B.C. «Travelling on every path, you will not find the boundaries of the soul going (...)» (26).

The same concept is expressed, in a different way, by Ignacio Matte Blanco, a Chilean psychoanalyst and follower of Klein, in the second half of the twentieth century, who having overcome Freud’s enlightenment prospective (where the Id was to become Ego) defined the deep unconscious distinct from the psychoanalytic unconscious and considered unfathomable, “a set of infinities” (27), an unconscious which he also calls *structural unconscious* because it represents the very structure of the mind, that has as its characteristics *generalization*, where the part represents the whole, *symmetry* in relationships between mental representations, that annuls differences and distinctions, *the annullment of the principles of negation and non contradiction*, *the absence of categories of space and time*, an unconscious where *everything and nothing coincide*, and, mathematically, is in fact a set of infinities.

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