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Rational Madness: Philosophic *Mania* in Plato's *Phaedrus*

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato offers a taxonomy of four kinds of god-given *mania*: the madness of prophets, that of poets, that involved in the expiation of guilt, and that of lovers (244b-249e). Plato specifies that erotic *mania* occurs when one is reminded of beauty itself by earthly beauties; it is the lover's attraction to the forms, not his infatuation with the boy, which brings upon him the charge that he is mad. This suggests that the true manic lover of the *Phaedrus* is a species of philosopher. This is problematic for Plato, since it contradicts his criticism of *mania* in other dialogues, where he develops an opposition between philosophy as rational and *mania* as irrational. At the same time, it is clear that Plato does not take his treatment of philosophic *mania* in the *Phaedrus* to pose a difficulty: he praises it as the best form of divine inspiration (249e), and presents Socrates as increasingly inspired throughout his speech. In this paper, I suggest a solution to this problem, centered on an analysis of *mania* as a state of exiting the self.

Burnyeat attempts to resolve this tension by suggesting that Plato does not praise the other mad types, but only their products; the philosopher is inspired from within, while the others are possessed from without (unpublished). But then is Plato only speaking metaphorically in calling the philosophic lover mad? What is needed is a construal of *mania* which allows us both to classify the philosophic lover as mad, and to avoid rendering the philosophic lover irrational. Santas suggests that *mania* is irresistible desire; the philosophic lover is unique because his desire is for the forms (1988). However, this account cannot be applied to the other manic types. They are out of their minds and in a frenzied state, and therefore lack the agency required to desire anything. My positive proposal is that *mania* is a form of ecstasy, of exiting the self. The term "*enthousiasis*" literally means a state of divine possession. Plato calls poetic *mania* a possession from the muses, when they seize the poet's soul (245a); the philosophic lover, too, is no longer within himself, but is struck from his senses and divinely inspired (250a).

How are we to interpret the claim that the philosophic lover is outside of himself? I have four proposals. First, Plato metaphorically depicts the lover's recollection of the forms through the re-growth of wings; when the lover recollects the forms fully, he escapes embodiment. Thus, we might say that the lover is striving to leave behind his bodily self. Second, the philosophic lover is thought mad because he has no concern for earthly matters and his behavior is deeply unconventional - the lover exits his social context and, insofar as he is a social being, exits himself. Third, where the other manic types are possessed by the gods, the philosophic lover is wholly turned to objects outside of himself, the forms. Finally, in Plato's description of recollection, he emphasizes that only the rational part of the soul ever grasps the forms. The final sense in which the philosophic lover exits himself is that he turns away from the lower parts of his soul and devotes himself to contemplation.

There remains a substantial difficulty for my account. In the second half of the *Phaedrus*, Socrates proposes that *mania* is the *aphron* aspect of the mind and *paranoia*. This risks returning us to our original problem, that Plato is engaging in rampant self-refutation,

treating philosophy, rational contemplation of the forms, as a state of irrationality. The solution is to emphasize the literal sense of the terms *paranoia* and *to aphron* - being out of one's mind and mindlessness. If the philosopher's reason is striving to exit his body and grasp the forms, then we could say, quite literally, that his reason has left him and he is without reason. This only sounds odd because, for Plato, one is fundamentally one's rational element; it is one's bodily self and the lower parts of the soul that are coincidental accretions of mortality. Ordinarily, the expression "mindlessness" is taken to mean that the mind has left us, and we are what is left over; in the case of the philosopher, the separation is still in effect, but since he identifies with the mind, the result is a state of heightened rationality.