

**THE MOTIF OF “SECRECY” OF PHILOSOPHICAL MESSAGE  
IN THE VII LETTER OF PLATO. MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE OF THE TRUTH AS  
AN ELEMENT OF PHILOSOPHICAL COGNITION**

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ABSTRACT. The paper deals with the topic of secrecy of the philosophical message in the *VII Letter* of Plato. The theme suggests spiritual contexts close to the Greek Mysteries, because the secrecy was one of the key elements of Greek Mysteries, especially Eleusinian and Orphic ones, which played a special role in the formation of Greek philosophy.

KEYWORDS: Plato, Secrecy, Mystery, Mysteries, *VII Letter*, *Phaedrus*.

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**Introduction. The secrecy in the Greek Mysteries**

Secrecy was one of the important elements of the Greek Mysteries, especially the Eleusinian ones, and played a special role in them. As Meyer writes, “The word *mystery* (*mysterion* in Greek) derives from the Greek verb *myein*, ‘to close’, referring to the closing of the lips or the eyes. This ‘closed’ character of the mysteries may be interpreted in two ways. First of all, an initiate, or *mystes* into the *mysterion* was required to keep his or her lips closed and not divulge the secret that was revealed at the private ceremony. Vows of silence were meant to ensure that the initiate would keep the holy secret from being revealed to outsiders. A second way to interpret the ‘closed’ nature of the mysteries relates to the closing and the opening of the eyes. Closed eyes brought darkness to the prospective initiate both literally and metaphorically, and the opening of the eyes was an act of enlightenment”.<sup>1</sup> In his book on the Eleusinian Mysteries, Mylonas writes on this subject: “One of the requirements of the cult, apparently very strictly enforced, was the secrecy imposed upon its initiates. They had to keep silent forever about the things they witnessed and heard during the celebration. That obligation was jealously enforced by Athenian State and the transgressors was severely punished.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Meyer 1987, 4.

Divulging the secrets of the cult was considered comparable to the destruction of democracy”.<sup>2</sup> Turchi writes similarly on this subject.<sup>3</sup>

In a word, the initiates were not allowed to reveal the secrets of the Mysteries. And it was not solely about hiding these secrets from the uninitiated people, although it might have been of certain importance here (for this reason alone, that the uninitiated were not able to comprehend various aspects of these Mysteries, especially the mystical ones). However, the secrecy of the Mysteries most probably had a much deeper meaning. As one might guess, it was above all a reflection, but at the same time also an allegory of the great mystery of human existence, and a human being, namely the mystery of divinity, incomprehensible in purely rational categories. In the light of these initiations, a man is not only a rational, intelligent animal, as his biological organism, indistinguishable from the animals' ones, seems to imply. The initiations reveal that in his innermost and deepest spiritual structures he is a god, related to the Supreme God. This is the greatest mystery revealed through the Mysteries to the initiates, although not revealed in a manner resembling a “scientific” lecture or a rational disquisition, rather through putting the initiates in a state that would enable them to experience this mystery in a personal way. The Mysteries explain to them the uncanny and almost permanent sense of atopy or even estrangement from their own carnality, or the matter present in this world in general, as well as the no less strange and mysterious feeling of longing which have been accompanying them since always, trying to pull them out of this carnality and out of “this world,” and send them somewhere out there, where gods reside. As written by Aristotle, the essence of initiations consisted in a real experience of divinity (Aristotle, Fr. 15 Ross).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mylonas 1961, 224.

<sup>3</sup> Turchi 1987, 70: “E nei riguardi di quest’ azione liturgica l’obbligo del silenzio è stato sempre rigorosissimamente volute e mantenuto”. Evidence that this law was enforced very seriously are the trials of famous people like Alkibiades, Diagoras the Melian, Andokides, Aeschylus and Theodoros (cf. Bianchi 1975, 213; Burkert 2001, 162-163; Casel 1967, 4-17; Meyer 1987, 4; Mylonas 1961, 224-229, 298; Sattler 2013, 153-154, 159, 169-171; Sfameni Gasparro 2009, 139-160; Turchi 1987, 70). See also: Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, 1111 a 10 (Aristotle mentions Aeschylus's accusation of misappropriating the secret of Eleusis); Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, I 38, 7 (Pausanias writes here about the prohibition of disclosing what is inside the building).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gómez Iglesias 2016, 72: “I undertook to teach you what I have learned, not what I have experienced... the one is a matter for teaching, the other for mystical experience. The first comes to men by hearing, the second comes when reason itself has experienced illumination – which Aristotle described as mysterious and a kind to the Eleusinian rites (for in these he who was initiated into the mysteries was being molded, not being taught”. See also: Bernabé 2016, 34; Colli 1978, 29, 106-108; Dinkelaar 2020, 39; Mylonas

Similar feelings and longings will be characteristic of certain philosophers, especially Plato and his followers.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly true of the philosophers of Middle Platonism, such as Plutarch, Apuleius, Alcinous, or Maximus of Tyre, who read the philosophy of their master, Plato, in a clearly mystical convention,<sup>6</sup> and treat it as the most genuine spiritual initiations – initiations in the full sense of the word, although not because they acquaint the disciples of philosophy with

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1961, 228, 298-299. According to Bernabé, “given the lack of context, it is uncertain whether the philosopher (Aristotle – K.P.) refers to the Eleusinian, the Orphic, or what is more probable, to all the mysteries in general. In any case, what he argues can be applied to any of them: ‘Aristotle considers that those who become initiated should not learn anything, but rather experiment and change their mentalities, this is, achieve due preparation’” (Fr. 15 Ross, Bernabé 2016, 34). Similarly, Mylonas writes about „the statement attributed to Aristotle that they (initiates) suffered rather than learned“ (Mylonas 1961, 228). Turchi emphasizes this when writing: „Ai misteri, dice Aristotele ( Synes. *Dion*, 48), non si va per apprendere, ma per esperienza mistica vissuta in virtù dell’ azione liturgica, una profonda emozione religiosa.“ (Turchi 1987, 70). Regarding the secrecy of the Mysteries, Turchi writes: „È un segreto quindi riguardante non già un corpo di dottrine, nè lo scopo dell’iniziazione (noto a ciascuno e descritti ed esaltati già dall’inno omerico che narra la storia mitica di Eleusi e promette agli iniziati la concessione del <fine della vita> cioè il dono dell’immortalità beata mentre per i non iniziati è riservato l’Ade ma i mezzi mediante i quali viene assicurato ai mysti questo dono d’immortalità.“ (Turchi 1987, 69-70). So Dinkellar: “The mystery of Eleusis was thus not the bestowing of some secret knowledge or set of ideas, but a unique experience, an encounter with the divine itself”. (Dinkellar 2020, 50-51). Referring to both the Mysteries and Plato’s Philosophy, Dinkellar adds: „The aim of the *muesis*, in the Mysteries, is to remove any blemishes that might prevent the initiate from coming into contact with the *hiera*, the divine, and herein we may find Plato’s reason for using this religious metaphor: assimilating the *elenchos* to a purification emphasizes the importance to the philosopher of removing false beliefs and desires in preparing himself for true knowledge of the forms which she will relate thereafter”. (Dinkellar 2020, 51-52). Overall, divinity as such, in itself, is inexpressible and intangible in a cognitive sense. As a real being, though, it can be experienced spiritually, that is in a manner typical of people initiated in mysteries (just like material beings are experienced through senses in the act of sensual cognition). See also: Jaeger 2007, 150; Burkert 2001, 47; Kerényi 2004, 79-81, 132-138, 191-193.

<sup>5</sup> Casel 1967, 28-50, 111-157. Many researches have written about religious and Orphic aspects of Plato’s Philosophy. See: Natorp 1921, 508, 509; Albert 1980, 68 and passim; Fink 1970, 54-56; Wili 1944, 61-105 (Wili is convinced that Plato attained the Orphic initiation and it had determined his metaphysical thought). See also: Jaeger 2007, 149; Reale 1987, 443-456.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Barra-Pannuti 1962, 81-141 (83); Casel 1967, 86-95; Mantenero 1970, 63-11; Pawłowski 2013, 327-336.

the intricacies of various philosophical theories, but due to the fact that they initiate them (in a way it happens during Mysteries, that is existentially, equal to mystical experience) into the deepest mystery of the human soul, as well as the mystery of the world (and both “mysteries” are revealed in one experience, which serves as an entrance to the world of God, and at the same time to the realm of the human soul – it is, in fact, one world, but definitely not the same one). It can be said that these philosophers treat the disciples of the philosophy of Plato as “mystae”, who are eager to learn and experience the absolute Truth – the Truth which lays the grounds for all metaphysical truths, but, above all, reveals all mysteries of human existence, and of the world in general. Plutarch of Chaeronea openly compares philosophy to religious initiations (Plutarch, *De profectibus in virtute*, 10).<sup>7</sup>

### The “Secrecy” of philosophical Message in the *VII Letter of Plato*<sup>8</sup>

The secrets which were supposed to remain concealed from the uninitiated were shrouded in mystery. Those initiated in Mysteries strictly abided by this rule.<sup>9</sup> That is why these mysteries were celebrated in hiding, unlike the rituals of an established religion which were performed in front of all people present, in the open air by a temple.<sup>10</sup> Secrecy was an integral, even an essential, element of Mysteries, as it touched, if it can be called that way, the greatest mystery that concerns a man and his whole existence, also after his death. And this element seemed to be taken over by Plato and his philosophy, at least to some extent, although not necessarily for the same reasons. Despite these reasons it was not easy

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<sup>7</sup> References to the theme of silence and mystery can be found in the works of Plutarch in many places. See: *Consolatio ad uxorem*, 10; *De E apud Delphos*, 2; *De Pythiae oraculis*, 25; *De Iside et Osiride*, 77, 382 d (here, Plutarch compares the philosophical ‘noesis’ (of transcendent ‘intelligibles’), referring to Plato (*Symposium*, 210 a) and Aristotle, to the Eleusinian “*opopeteia*”). Cf. Casel 1967, 86-93.

<sup>8</sup> I do not wish to delve into the issue of authenticity of *Letter VII*. Admittedly, there are scholars who have certain doubts about it but as aptly noted by Michael Erler “there have been no decisive arguments given so far.” (Erler 2015, 49). And as Szlezák rightly writes, it is impossible to prove the authenticity of a literary text, except by showing that there is no reason to consider it spurious. (Szlezák 1985, 386-405). See also: Forcignano 2016, 153-156; Isnardi Parente 1970, 49; Pili 2011, 258-259; Reale 1998, 116-117; Trabattini 1994, 26-30, 200.

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 2, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Meyer 1987, 4: “Unlike the official religions, in which a person was expected to show outward, public allegiance to the local gods of the polis or the state, the mysteries emphasized an inwardness and privacy of worship within closed groups.”

to access the Platonic Academy. The demands that the Academy placed for the candidates were high, among the requirements were not only mental faculties or skills like the knowledge of geometry, but also (and it was kind of a novelty) spiritual and moral predispositions:

...but if his nature is bad—and, in fact, the condition of most men's souls in respect of learning and of what are termed “morals” is either naturally bad or else corrupted, — then not even Lynkeus himself could make such folk see. In one word, neither receptivity nor memory will ever produce knowledge in him who has no affinity with the object, since it does not germinate to start with in alien states of mind; consequently neither those who have no natural connection or affinity with things just, and all else that is fair, although they are both receptive and retentive in various ways of other things, nor yet those who possess such affinity but are unreceptive and unretentive—none, I say, of these will ever learn to the utmost possible extent the truth of virtue nor yet of vice. (Plato, *Epistulae*, VII 343 e - 344 b).<sup>11</sup>

The “secrecy” of the philosophical message itself is inscribed in this “mysteriousness” of Plato’s philosophy (which above all flows from one of its goals being the understanding of human existence in its spiritual dimension), which seems completely natural, as the subject matter connected with this message flees any attempt at being described with words. It seems that this is exactly what Plato had in mind when writing down the intriguing words in the *VII Letter*:

There does not exist, nor will there ever exist, any treatise of mine dealing therewith. For it does not at all admit of verbal expression like other studies, but, as a result of continued application to the subject itself and communion therewith, it is brought to birth in the soul on a sudden, as light that is kindled by a leaping spark, and thereafter it nourishes itself. (Plato, *Epistulae*, VII 341 c-d).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Trans. R.G. Bury.

<sup>12</sup> Trans. R.G. Bury. See also: *Epistulae*, II, 314 a-c: “Beware, however, lest these doctrines be ever divulged to uneducated people. For there are hardly any doctrines, I believe, which sound more absurd than these to the vulgar, or, on the other hand, more admirable and inspired to men of fine disposition. For it is through being repeated and listened to frequently for many years that these doctrines are refined at length, like gold, with prolonged labor. But listen now to the most remarkable result of all. Quite a number of men there are who have listened to these doctrines—men capable of learning and capable also of holding them in mind and judging them by all sorts of tests—and who have been hearers of mine for no less than thirty years and are now quite old; and these men now declare that the doctrines that they once held to be most incredible appear to them now the most credible, and what they then held most credible now appears the Opposite. So, bearing this in mind, have a care lest one day you should repent of what has now been divulged improperly. The greatest safeguard is to avoid writing and to

Plato claims that the most important ideas of his philosophy are nowhere to be found. But he quickly adds that those people who are predisposed to comprehend these crucial ideas, will manage to do it anyway, maybe through some spiritual experience, such as the mystical intuition. However, they will understand this only if they are true philosophers, that is, if they have the talents and abilities that Plato expects from philosophers. And Plato states clearly what dispositions they are (Plato, *Epistulae*, VII 343 e – 344 c). The first requirement is a sort of spiritual affinity a philosopher shall have with these values. The second one is moral sensitivity, and the third one – appropriate intellectual potential. In other words, an adept of philosophy shall be spiritually and morally sensitive, responsive to spiritual values, and noble in a moral sense of the word; furthermore, he ought to be exceptionally talented when it comes to intellectual abilities. Lacking any of these qualities, one is not fit to practice philosophy. Nevertheless, if all the requirements are met, the person will sooner or later reach a certain level of understanding of those crucial issues, possibly on the basis of a fairly mysterious sensation which Plato compares to a brainwave.

It appears that this is how the quotations from the *VII Letter* can be understood,<sup>13</sup> also in the context of a famous discussion on speech and writing in Plato's *Phaedrus* (Platon, *Phaedrus*, 274 c – 275 b).<sup>14</sup>

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learn by heart for it is not possible that what is written down should not get divulged. For this reason I myself have never yet written anything on these subjects, and no treatise by Plato exists or will exist, but those which now bear his name belong to a Socrates become fair and young". (Trans. R.G. Bury).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. G. Reale 1998, 115-117.

<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274 c – 275 b: "I heard, then, that at Naucratis, in Egypt, was one of the ancient gods of that country, the one whose sacred bird is called the ibis, and the name of the god himself was Theuth. He it was who invented numbers and arithmetic and geometry and astronomy, also draughts and dice, and, most important of all, letters. Now the king of all Egypt at that time was the god Thamus, who lived in the great city of the upper region, which the Greeks call the Egyptian Thebes, and they call the god himself Ammon. To him came Theuth to show his inventions, saying that they ought to be imparted to the other Egyptians. But Thamus asked what use there was in each, and as Theuth enumerated their uses, expressed praise or blame, according as he approved or disapproved. The story goes that Thamus said many things to Theuth in praise or blame of the various arts, which it would take too long to repeat; but when they came to the letters, "This invention, O king," said Theuth, "will make the Egyptians wiser and will improve their memories; for it is an elixir of memory and wisdom that I have discovered." But Thamus replied, "Most ingenious Theuth, one man has the ability to beget arts, but the ability to judge of their usefulness or harmfulness to their users belongs to another; and now you, who are the father of letters, have been led by your affection to ascribe to

As Carlotta Capuccino writes in her paper:

“Nel Fedro troviamo la celebre critica della scrittura, pratica condannata per tre gravi difetti che costituiscono altrettanti pericoli per il lettore e per l'autore: (i) in primo luogo il suo carattere di *phármakon*: parola ambivalente che in greco può significare sia farmaco nel senso di rimedio, sia veleno. La scrittura, prodigiosa invenzione presentata come il rimedio alla debolezza costitutiva della memoria umana, destinata a cedere il passo all'oblio, secondo Platone è invece un potente veleno che, impedendo a chi legge di esercitare la propria facoltà mnemonica – perché se può ogni volta rileggere non ha bisogno di ricordare – con il tempo porta inesorabilmente la memoria ad atrofizzarsi, come qualcosa di morto che si sostituisce a qualcosa di vivo. (ii) In secondo luogo la scrittura è muta o ripetitiva, cioè se interrogata non risponde oppure risponde dicendo sempre la stessa cosa; da questo punto di vista potremmo dire quindi che non è un buon sostituto del dialogo orale. (iii) Terzo, in mano a chiunque non sa difendersi dai fraintendimenti: avrebbe bisogno del soccorso del “padre”, cioè del suo autore, che però non sempre o non per sempre può accorrere in suo aiuto.”<sup>15</sup>

The problem was not new at all in the times of Plato. The role of a written word with its relation to spoken language had been already given a lot of thought in Greece at that time. And in *Phaedrus* Plato responds to some of the theses put forward by the supporters of writing.<sup>16</sup> There were luminaries of the Athenian En-

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them a power the opposite of that which they really possess. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practise their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise.” (Trans. H. Fowler).

<sup>15</sup> Capuccino 2013, 87. See also: Cerri 1991, 77-92; Erler 1991, 69-122; Gaiser 1990, 41-45; Reale 1998, 111-114; Szlezák 1997, 52-60; Szlezák 1985, 7-23; Trabattoni 1994, 21-25; 59-73; Trabattoni 2005, 86-98; Vegetti 1989, 201-227; Yunis 2015, 101-125.

<sup>16</sup> As Yunis writes, *Phaedrus* was composed between 380 and 360 before Chr. “At that time, the Athenians had, astonishingly, largely recovered from the devastating events at the end of the fifth century—the defeat in the Peloponnesian War and the bloody civil war that immediately followed.” (Cf. Yunis 2005, 106). These were also times of great and influential sophists, such as Gorgias, Protagoras and Trasymachus, whose rhetoric enjoyed great success especially in the world of politics. In spite of this, Plato in *Phaedrus* proclaims the superiority of philosophy over rhetoric. (Cf. Yunis 2005, 105-109). “For clearly it is the philosopher who seeks to gratify the gods while it is the traditional rhetor who in Plato’s view seeks to gratify his fellow men.” (Yunis 2005: 105). According to

lightenment, such as Gorgias and Euripides, who treated writing as a remedy for forgetting. Aeschylus perceived writing in a similar way in his *Prometheus Bound*, in which writing is presented as one of the most valued gifts offered by Prometheus. According to Aeschylus, writing serves as a great memory aid. Plato, as if arguing with this opinion, states in *Phaedrus* (using a mythical story about inventing writing by the Egyptian deity Thoth), that the invention of writing did not support memory at all, but rather weakened it instead, as people confided in writing and as a result stopped working on improving their memory. Apart from that, writing itself cannot function on its own without any verbal explanation of its meaning given by its author. Therefore, it can be said that it is not writing which supports a spoken word but the other way round – a “living” spoken word supports “dead” writing. A written word was criticised in the same tone by Isocrates and Alcidas. They both considered it a kind of play as compared to spoken language. Written words are not perceived as reliable, as they are detached from the person speaking. Besides, they are not as effective as a spoken word. They keep “saying” the same, regardless of circumstances and person they address, while a “living” speaker adapts to the situation and person he speaks to. Writing turns out to be a kind of play. The motif of writing treated as a kind of play appears also in Plato’s *Phaedrus* in the form of “the gardens of Adonis”, which, in accordance with tradition, are sown by farmers once in a blue moon, partly in order to check the quality of seeds, partly for entertainment (Plato, *Phaedrus*,

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Yunis, “Plato’s purpose is to confront the entire rhetorical establishment on its own terms, and he does so in two senses. First, while bracketing rhetoric’s political and ethical consequences—issues that concern him elsewhere—Plato puts at the center of his inquiry the very question that lies at the heart of the rhetoricians’ own enterprise, namely, how discourse persuades and how an understanding of persuasion can be implemented by art. Second, addressing the rhetoricians by their chosen means (rhetoric) rather than by his (dialectic), he composes a speech that demonstrates the efficacy of his rhetorical art.” (Yunis 2005, 108). See also: Kołakowska 2010, 43-50; Dinkelaar 2020, 36-61. According to Dinkelaar, “*Phaedrus* is similarly structured in terms of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The dialogue takes place on the banks of the river Ilissos near Agrai, which is the site of the Lesser Mysteries. Socrates relates Agrai to a myth concerning the ravishment of a nymph by Boreas: the Lesser Mysteries are believed to be celebrated in honour of Kore, who was kidnapped by Hades and whose reunion with Demeter was celebrated at Eleusis. It is evident, then, that Plato wants his listeners to connect the dialogue with the Eleusinian Mysteries. *Phaedrus*’ subsequent suggestion to walk in the ‘pure’ (καθαρά) river (entering the river is suggested as part of the purification rituals at the Lesser Mysteries), hints that Socrates and *Phaedrus* are about to participate in the mysteries themselves.” (Dinkelaar 2020, 52). See also: Gómez Iglesias 2016, 61-64, 70-78; Kerényi 2004, 79-87; Mylonas 1961, 239-243; Pawłowski 2020, 425-428.



276 b).<sup>17</sup> Plato opts for a spoken word. Why is it so? Because philosophy can be entrusted only to spoken language, and certainly not to any random one, but such that is – filled with genuine light – able to tug at the most secret strings of a philosopher’s soul and open it to the world of supernatural values, to all things truly Beautiful, Just, and Good:

„But the man who thinks that in the written word there is necessarily much that is playful, and that no written discourse, whether in metre or in prose, deserves to be treated very seriously (and this applies also to the recitations of the rhapsodes, delivered to sway people’s minds, without opportunity for questioning and teaching), but that the best of them really serve only to remind us of what we know; and who thinks that only in words about justice and beauty and goodness spoken by teachers for the sake of instruction and really written in a soul is clearness and perfection and serious value, that such words should be considered the speaker’s own legitimate offspring, first the word within himself, if it be found there, and secondly its descendants or brothers which may have sprung up in worthy manner in the souls of others, and who pays no attention to the other words, that man, Phaedrus, is likely to be such as you and I might pray that we ourselves may become.” (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 277e - 278b).<sup>18</sup>

In a word, for Plato philosophy constitutes spiritual output that should be inscribed in the soul and not on paper. Antisthenes, another disciple of Socrates, represented a similar point of view, as suggested by Diogenes Laertios (Diogenes Laertios, VI, 1,5). And if it is a dialogue, then a dialogue of the soul with itself, as Plato writes in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*.<sup>19</sup>

This fits well with the quoted words from the *VII Letter*. Returning to this quote, it looks as if Plato wanted to shield his philosophy with a veil of mystery, or

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<sup>17</sup> According to Trabattoni (Trabattoni 1994, 66-67): “Per chiarire la natura del discorso veramente efficace Socrate si serve, come in altri casi, di una metafora. Era costume degli ateniesi, durante le feste in onore di Adone che cadevano nel cuor dell’estate, far crescere in modo rapido quanto effimero delle pianticelle dentro vasi o cestini. Si trattava, evidentemente, di coltivazioni non destinate a produrre frutti duraturi. Orbene, prosegue Socrate, quale agricoltore spargerebbe la sua semente nei «giardinetti di Adone»? Poiché mira ovviamente a un raccolto di tutt’altra natura, il vero contadino spargerà il suo seme nel terreno adatto e secondo le regole dell’arte agricola. Allo stesso modo si comporterà anche chi ha conoscenza «del giusto, del bello e del buono». Se costui seminasse il suo sapere con l’inchiostro della scrittura sarebbe come se lo scrivesse sull’acqua, perché i suoi discorsi, incapaci di difendere se stessi, non sarebbero in grado di dare alcun frutto. Perciò la scrittura, proprio come l’effimera agricoltura dei «giardinetti di Adone», verrà coltivata solo per diletto, o al massimo per rinverdire durante la vecchiaia i ricordi della gioventù”. See also: Szlezák 1997, 55-57; Baudy 1986.

<sup>18</sup> Trans. H. Fowler.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 189c – 190a; *Sophist*, 264 a. See also: Capuccino 2013, 99.

at least the most important elements of it, as you can guess, the sphere of the absolute and supernatural.

### Conclusion. Mystical experience of the Truth as an element of philosophical cognition

One can say that a certain “secrecy” of Plato's philosophy results from the fact that it deeply penetrates spiritual, or even mystical, spheres. Philosophising in the Platonic sense is not limited to intellectual activity, it also involves spiritual living, which, as suggested by Plato in *Phaedo*, is continued, even more intensely, after a philosopher's death (cf. Plato, *Phaedo*, 66 e).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Plato states clearly that the whole truth cannot be reached during one's lifetime. It can be accessed only after death. Therefore, philosophy practised in the Platonic convention cannot be treated as a complete doctrinal system. And although doctrine undoubtedly makes one of its constituents, philosophy is a continuous and incessant process of approaching the Truth, a process which survives death. Thus, in its deepest sense, this philosophy is understood as spiritual output which initiates a philosopher into “supernatural” circles.

What is essential, this “absolute” Truth, so interesting for the adepts and “mystae” of the Platonic philosophy, is unknowable through rational cognition. In other words, this Truth cannot be “reasoned.” For it exists only in purely spiritual, non-physical sphere, inaccessible for the human mind with its rational categories and logical procedures. However, it is still available for the human soul, or human spiritual sensitivity (noesis).<sup>21</sup> It can be faced through spiritual (mystical) experi-

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<sup>20</sup> Earlier in the *Phaedo* (Plato, *Phaedo*, 62 b), Socrates refers to some “secret doctrine” (ὁ ἐν ἀπορρήτοις λεγόμενος λόγος). According to this “secret doctrine”, we men are in some kind of prison. In the *VII Letter*, Plato, writing about the immortality of the soul, refers to “the ancient and holy doctrines”: “But we ought always truly to believe “the ancient and holy doctrines” which declare to us that the soul is immortal and that it has judges and pays the greatest penalties, whensoever a man is released from his body” (Plato, *Epistulae*, VII 335 a, transl. G. Bury). Plato neither in the *Phaedo* or in the *VII Letter* does not mention whose “doctrine” it is, but it is not difficult to guess. In the *Cratylus* he attributes it outright to Orphic poets (Plato, *Cratylus*, 400 c). According to Turchi, the *Phaedo* is an Orphic dialogue (Turchi 1987, 52). Ref. on “secret doctrine” see: Ferrari 2019, 34-35. Ref. on Orphism and the Orphic concept of the soul see: Bianchi 1975, 230-237; Colli 1977, 31-42, Vol. I, 118-189; Pawłowski 2021, 591-604; Reale 1987, 433-456; Sarri 1997, 71-83; Turchi 1987, 35-53.

<sup>21</sup> According to Casadesús, “Plato chose to introduce into his dialogues the language of Mystery religions to attempt to describe a reality that resisted explanation with other sort of language. Conditioned by the use of Mystery terminology, he therefore developed his philosophy in the image of the initiation process that characterized those religions.

ence, on the basis of mystical illumination.<sup>22</sup> In both cases, though, it does not mean facing “scientific truth” – that would explain all “rational” intricacies and laws of nature, as this is what “ordinary” scientific cognition is for – but instead a spiritual experience of the Mystery of the Truth (and the Beauty), which does not offer any answers (it would not be possible since this is an “irrational” sensation, transcending human “rationality”), yet still offers something that scientific cognition cannot – an existential feeling that life has a meaning. It also offers something which constitutes the essence of these “initiations” (and, in fact, what they serve for) – arouses and releases the hidden spiritual energies of the soul. Let us add here that it does not mean this mystical experience of the mystery of the Truth of man and of the world is verbalized into theories expected to solve or de-

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Consequently, he regarded the initiation in which the purification of the soul, by complying with specific precepts and rites, is a strict requirement” (Casadesús, 2016, 5).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Plato, *Epistulae*, VII 341 c-d; Plato, *Phaedrus*, 247 b – 250 d; *Symposium*, 210 e – 211 b; Alcinous, *Didaskalikos*, X 165, 27-34; Plutarch, *Amatorius*, 19. According to Gómez Iglesias, love was the most mystical and, at the same time, the most mysterial phenomenon in the Plato’s philosophy (Gómez Iglesias 2016, 64-99). “Without eros there is no philosophy” (Gómez Iglesias 2016, 99). Love is the final realization of man’s mystical longing for divinity. The mystical and mysterial meaning of love, very close to the one it carried in Greek mysteries, is presented by Plato in *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. In *Symposium* Plato speaks explicitly of “the mysteries of Eros”, into which Socrates was supposedly initiated by Diotima, a mysterious prophetess from Mantinea (Plato, *Symposium*, 201 d; cf. Gómez Iglesias 2016, 78-82; Sattler 2013, 151-190). Without getting into in-depth analyses, let us just say, that love therein turns out to be a path to God. While it is true that there is an erotic fascination with sensual beauty lying at the heart of it, its proper and actual goal, and the object of its mysterious amorous desire, felt by a philosopher’s soul, is God Himself, or Beauty in itself, eternal and unchanging. It will only become clear at the end of this love path surmounted by mystical ecstasy. It can be said that a philosopher’s natural sensitivity to beauty, in its various manifestations, leads to mystical and ecstatic vision of god as essential Beauty. A philosopher’s soul finds its alleviation and happiness in him, as he is the main and primordial object of this amorous desire felt by it. Equally mystical overtone can be found in the motif of love as “the madness of Eros” in *Phaedrus* (Plato, *Phaedrus*. 244 a-b, 245 a-c. Cf. Casadesús 2016, 12-14; Gaiser 1992, 66-75; Gómez Iglesias 2016, 61, 66-78), as well as the motif of love as a pursuit of beauty and goodness in *Symposium* (Plato, *Symposium*, 205 d – 207 d; Gómez Iglesias 2016, 78-82). A participant of these peculiar (as happening without any cult background) mysteries, described by Plato in both dialogues, is spiritually united with essential Beauty, the only Beauty in itself, eternal, unalloyed, pure, unchanging and immortal, as written by Plato in *Symposium* (Plato, *Symposium*, 211 E, cf Gómez Iglesias 2016, 67, 78-82). As a result of these experiences a philosopher becomes – as added further on by Plato – a true enthusiast of gods, and he is the only one who is allowed to dream about real immortality (Plato, *Symposium*, 212 A).

fine all matters of this world. It always remains the experience of the Mystery, which may give meaning to human life and help it reach an appropriate spiritual and moral level, yet never ceases to be the Mystery. A philosopher – and this needs to be stressed – does not become an omniscient sage as a result of this experience, and his philosophy does not turn into a theory of everything which answers all questions; it does not transform into ideology. After all, it would be contrary to the spirit and the nature of philosophical initiations (as well as initiations in general). The highest stadium of philosophy and philosophical life is to experience the Mystery of the Truth and Beauty in a spiritual way.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Casel 1967, 38-40; Gómez Iglesias 2016, 70-78. See also: Forcignano 2016, 165-176 (Forcignano rejects the “mystic” interpretation, according to which we have a non-logical access to the truth).

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