

BOOK REVIEW

*Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas. The history of the adage from
Homer to Tarski*

Anton Adămuț

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This book by Anton Adămuț can only be read in a kaleidoscopic way: several levels and problems intersect, partially overlap, and mutually problematize their formulations. On one hand, as the introduction states, it is about catching the integrative value of contradictions. Constantin Noica had already made a theme, in his *ontology*, of the difference between unilateral and bilateral contradictions. The latter are logical and sanction an opposition; instead, the former are dialectical to the effect that if a term contradicts the other, the latter does not contradict the former, but it integrates it, it reconstitutes it on a superior level. The parable of the prodigal son, playing between the brother's ethical 'somnambulism of the principle' and the prodigal son's vivid repudiation, is an example of the confrontation between the two contradictions. Anton Adămuț recalls the parable, discusses about it, however, he repositions it from the absolute of its meanings into a historical horizon. In the problem of contradiction, Greek philosophy unites, over the centuries, with German philosophy, arguing - sometimes ironically - about solutions.

Hence, the second level of the book: the historical one. This is a reading of the history of philosophy, starting from the way in which it places itself with respect to the 'proverb' that has become a common ground: 'Amicus Plato sed magis amica veritas'. He is a reveller or, sometimes, even a testifier to the way in which various authors understand to talk about truth and life, about the relationship with the other, or about learning. The historical analysis that, in Anton Adămuț's book, dwells on Greeks, Medieval thinkers, and the 19th-century Germans is always contextual. The place in the *Republic* 595 b-c makes reference to *Phaedo*, or *Lysis*, the same way as the *Nicomachean Ethics* requires to be read through the *Metaphysics*, or *Politics*. To what purpose all this crisscross reading? In order to evaluate the meaning, the nuance, and the force of that 'sed' from the proverb in question. Where do friendship and knowledge meet and how do they get separated? What does leaving the master on one's way to knowledge mean in the end? Or, to put it in a Hegelian manner, how does the spirit's speculative moment gain autonomy from the negativity in which it originates? Anton Adămuț does not come up with a 'certified' answer to these

questions; his method is to suggest, in a rhetorical manner, a way to illuminate a solution. In philosophy, answers are what matters least and the author knows it too well. The labour of the question, together with the temptations of the road taken by the thought, actually wears out the ‘philosophical’ exercise. Therefore, the book is a roadmap to the issue of ‘sed’, which acutely demands an interpretative exercise. The condemnation of the poets in Plato, for instance, is a ‘common ground’. Nevertheless, the philological and historical studies show that, for example, Homer himself (the target, in fact, of the discussion in the *Republic*) is not an undisputable character. The allegory surrounding his blindness, the mist dominating his biography is such that even the Platonic condemnation is not certain. The poetic inspiration, about which the dialogue *Ion* speaks too, complicates, in its turn, the meaning of the proverb.

Christendom comes to shake up the ancient trust in the power of ‘sed’. What happens when, as Kierkegaard noticed, and later on, Gabriel Marcel, or Michel Henry, the truth itself is a man? The change of Simon’s name into Peter, something Anton Adămuț speaks about on several pages, is an essential moment of the debate: this change dislocates the destiny of that fisherman who was to become the rock God’s church would be built on. His identity is rewritten (like in Plato’s case afterwards) and embodies the very testimony to truth. The ancient proverb finds a new life and can be read as prevention from Pharisees and scribes, from dead scholarship, compared with the living truth of those who authentically bear witness to it. Here also comes in the emphasis laid by Cicero in *Tusculanae Disputationes*, when he makes his interlocutor say, as if in a prefiguration of the new tidings that would come: “I had rather, so help me Hercules! be mistaken with Plato, whom I know how much you esteem and whom I admire myself from what you say of him, than be in the right with those others (...)”.

This book by Anton Adămuț is centred around the Christian moment of the ancient proverb, the speculative stakes of which are captured by an anecdote that puts together Bonaventura and Thomas (p. 162-163). The former is reticent about invoking philosophers in support of the Christian truth, saying that it meant mixing water and the pure wine of the word of God. The latter replied, inspired by his reading of the Gospel, that it didn’t mean mixing water and wine, but rather changing water into wine. For a Christian the truth is a being like light, not like rock. The contradiction is alien to him or her, at least the bilateral contradiction that Constantin Noica talked about. The tender and live embrace of the other, with his or her concrete nature, with his or her unmistakable face, would rather lie in the logic of their way of being. Perhaps, that is the reason why this book by Anton Adămuț ends by invoking the ‘myth’ of the golden fleece – not really a myth, the author warns us, giving historical information too – which speculatively wraps up the story of the proverb: “and the Light that gives light to Truth it is to me that it gives light and it cannot turn me into an enemy of Truth just as Truth cannot become my enemy” (p. 189). On the road to knowledge, as a spiritual self-founding, not merely as an intellectual exercise or a pursuit among others, truth is embodied by persons, books, events

and testifying to it means the discreet embrace of the other in your own light. The same happens with the proverb under discussion, which, in its history, gradually tones down its strength of ‘sed’ so as to speculatively change into a paradoxical move towards integration. Anton Adămuț tells the story of this transformation in this book, detecting its pith, rhythm and dangers that modelled its trajectory.

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