

The Limits of Psyche
A Perspective on Philosophy, Religion, Psychology, Psychiatry,
Anthropology and Phenomenology¹

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Abstract: *Hypothesis:* Beyond the limits of the unlimited psyche there is the limit imposed by the mind on the heart and by the heart on the mind. *Premises:* *psyche* is seen within the scientific psychology more (if not exclusively) as psychic rather than soul. Attempts are made in order to eliminate the term “soul”. I set on from this premise – with accents that are predominantly philosophical, anthropological, religious, psychological, phenomenological and towards the end, psychiatric – and I will try to define, out of my own perspective, the limit.

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First and foremost, I shall define psychology from the perspective of Siebert:²

Psychology is the science about the phenomena of the life of the soul that he describes and systematizes, researching their laws. Above all, psychology means the science about the soul. Its founder is Aristotle. It was given the name by Melanchthon and became popular through Wolff. Psychology, as science of the soul, has determined a part of metaphysics and tried to deduce the facts of the soul-life from the notion of the soul. This was the **metaphysical or speculative psychology**. As a reaction to this, there appears the **empirical psychology**, founded by J. Locke, who sets forth from the facts connected with the experience of the soul life. Empirical psychology is divided in its turn, in three directions, according to the research patterns: (a) associational psychology, founded by Hartley and Hume, which intends to reduce spiritual life to a mechanism of psychical processes which are supposed to associate among one another on the basis of mechanical necessity; (b) the psychology of the soul faculties, represented by Aristotle, Wolff and Tetens, which describes soul processes and systematizes them in terms of the three fundamental faculties: knowledge, sense and lust; (c) the apperceptional psychology, founded by Wundt, differing from the other two because it uses the notion of apperception in order to clarify some of the phenomena connected with the soul.

¹ Paper presented at the International Hungarian-Romanian Conference of Psychiatry “The limits of the unlimited psyche” (Győr, Hungary, 23rd–26th of January 2013.)

² Nicolae Terchilă, *Istoria filosofiei* (The history of philosophy) (Sibiu: Tiparul Tipografiei Arhiedeceazane, 1943), 432.



Aleksandra Chaushova, *After August, Before September*, 2012,
pencil on paper, 25 x 32,6 cm

Then, I shall call again upon the dialogue between Platon and Socrates, referring to the fact that everything that exists is divided into four genres: the infinite (*apeiron*), the limit (*peras*), the product resulted from their combination and, last but not

least, the cause for the combination¹. *To the infinite there belongs especially that which cannot stand still. Or, it is exactly the <<peras>>, the limit, which causes this uninterrupted movement to stop*². In terms of psychology, psychiatry, philosophy, religion/ theology, phenomenology, in order to have a limit, there must be a limit within the evolvement of the senses that can be developed or inhibited by the mind. In terms of the law, and possibly, of criminology, *the limitation of the infinite by means of the limit brings about the exact quantity, that particular order which is dear to the Greek spirit: to think means first and foremost, to conjure the irrationality of the unlimited, this lack of measure which must be controlled <<peras>>, dominating the infinite or the unlimited. Is it not actually Goddess Dike who, according to what Plato said, on seeing the universal dissemination of the lack of measure, issued the law and the order which draw the limit?*³.

Then, there is a third aspect: Hegel is the one who, in *The Principles of the Philosophy of the Law* (Preface) – builds that rationality which is capable to integrate the irrational⁴, therefore, a comprehensive rationality. Here, psychiatry considers that one should meditate more. The case of mental illnesses is a clear example. And the spiritual illnesses (meaning those of the spirit) are not far from this segment of perspective. In this respect, the limit comes as an *anti-metaphysical reason* since the idea of a positive mind has become essential in the Illuminist period. *The illuminist philosophers trust nothing else but facts. The domain that they explore <<ratio>> from the 18th century is that of phenomena, and this, more or less to the prejudice of its metaphysical function. Immanuel Kant is the marking figure of this period. He perfects the Illuminist current and transcends it. Reaching beyond the skeptic mind (Hume), he elaborates a <<Critique of the pure mind>>, research regarding the legitimate use of the mind, its extent and its limits.*⁵

So, the hypothesis that I set forth from is the following: beyond the limits of the unlimited psyche there is the limit imposed by the mind on the heart and by the heart on the mind. The premise is that the *psyche* is seen within psychology more (if not almost exclusively) as psychic rather than soul.⁶ Attempts are made in order to eliminate the term “soul”: “Since it is desired to tackle upon the same problems as the Church, one tries the elimination of the word **soul** from the vocabulary of the new sciences of the psyche [(and a- n.a.) of the soul]: still, *psychotherapists have more denominations for the <<soul>> than the Eskimos have for <<snow>>. These are some of the terms: mind, heart, psyche, inner self, subjectivity, the “I”, the bio-psycho-social pattern, self, conscience, personality, psychical energy, identity, essence, thoughts, feelings and inner being*”. The footnote attached here speaks about the observation of the Western biblical scholars who have discovered that the term “soul” (psyche) was stripped of the other

¹ Anne Baudart et. al., *Istoria filosofiei 1: Gândirile fondatoare* (The history of philosophy I. Foundational ideas) (Bucharest: Universul Enciclopedic, 2000), 15.

² Ibid., 15.

³ Ibid., 15.

⁴ Anne Baudart et. al., *Istoria filosofiei 3: Triumful rațiunii* (The triumph of reason) (Bucharest: Universul Enciclopedic, 2000), 8.

⁵ Ibid., 7-8.

⁶ Jeffrey H. Boyd, “An Insider's Effort to Blow Up Psychiatry”, *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 10 (2004), 28-48.

meaning; in other words, it was no longer used with its dual meaning (of psyche and soul at the same time), being eliminated from several vehicles. If in the King James Version of the Bible, the term “soul” was used 558 times, in the Living Bible version, for instance, it was only used 88 times.

I set forth from this hypothesis and this premise – with accents that are predominantly philosophical, anthropological, religious, psychological, phenomenological and towards the end, psychiatric – and I will try to define, out of my own perspective, the limit.

The limit = the identification of a border where my soul/psyche could reach the X level of apogee but could no longer move forward. Let me explain this in detail.

What does it mean, that “my soul/psychic has reached the X level of apogee”? It means, that in terms of the genetic structure and based on the experiences in my life, I was propelled (the phenomenon of the expropriation of pulsion) to launch and to dive into that what I succeeded to understand in a subjective manner as representing life and, at the same time, the phenomenon/the process of death. In order to understand and to decode significations for what is happening to me, I need an inner language which I can access at any time by means of memory, intuition, images, etc. It is one thing to do this by means of a primary education, which may also be precarious and it is another thing to be able to realize that the meanings become more diverse once one moves forward towards a logical, self-centered congruency. Education plays here an extremely important, if not decisive part. Education is the one that helps me interpret one or the other stimulus or event in my life in a way that is less limited or narrow. A Romanian author, Nicolae Steinhardt used to say about journeys what I shall extrapolate in the case of education: *It opens our minds, it reveals the immensity of the possible number of solutions and this way it cleanses our minds, raises us from our littleness and limitations*¹. Even by means of this approach, we have reached a limit for that which we set forth to express. But due to the fact that education helps us, we can move to a more profound level of comprehension.

Let us take the second part of the hypotheses: “the limit imposed by the mind on the heart”. In order to reach an apogee of states, of axiological ontology, of emotions, knowledge, the heart or the burst given by our inner, spiritual state (so, that of the soul) is the twin of the mind for service purposes. One cannot climb a mountain otherwise than physically climb it. Its peak, metaphorically speaking, is our mind. In order to reach that peak, again subjectively and individually, we need specialized equipment.

For reaching the peak of something physical, one needs something material. The equipment that is necessary in this case shall be a concrete one. In exchange, in order to conquer a mind by reaching an apogee, one needs something immaterial. The burst given by the heart, not by the physical one, but by the metaphysical one, belongs to the domain of the immaterial. To climb up an Everest is a matter of superior mind, you concentrate on the metaphysic; you leave the physics and the physical behind, but not in the form of invisible traces, but as helpers for the final purpose: the unlimited from between the limits. This is a paradox, isn't it? Yes, when the mind imposes upon the soul or upon the metaphysical heart the foulness given, for instance, by education, we are prone to stopping at the first psychological failure: the mental/spiritual illness. This is a

¹ Nicolae Steinhardt, *Primejdia mărturisirii* (The danger of confession) (Iași: Polirom, 2009), 93.

step which could be more than just a first step. But one thing is certain: for a human being, the psychological personal relation with one's own self starts to be affected. Therefore, a first part of my answer is here, but still uncovered by you yet.

The third part: "the limit imposed by the heart on the mind": I shall set forth from an affirmation made by a Roman writer of the 2nd century, Tertullian, *mature thinker, having a consistent active contribution within the frame of the Christian doctrine*¹ – who declared that the soul is Christian by nature. In other words, the soul is entitled to – naturally and synergistically – its bodily innerness, longing for God. If we use our imagination, we can have the image of a rainbow before our eyes, where in the lower part there is the human soul, therefore, the human being, and in the top part, the pure, indescribable essence of Divinity. So, the human soul connects naturally to the clearly superior capacities originating from God (the creationist theory). Due to an education of the atheist type or which falls outside the religious precepts, the human being may end up not believing in something higher than itself; realizing that there is a He and acknowledging Him, but his/her (metaphysical) heart refusing to believe. And this is where we reach the answer that we skipped in the first part: faith. The human being chooses not to believe in God due to: experiences, the subjective internalization of events, pre-concepts, irrational life-beliefs, life and death philosophies etc. This is actually where the heart imposes a limit on the mind. Religious education, rigorous but not rigid, constant, practical and theoretical, genuine, concrete, then when it is not offered to a respective person, we have all the chances to call upon the limits. A genuine faith which is practiced at an "open stage" can bring us beyond our limits. Holiness is the limitless state, for instance; it is the state in which the limit was suppressed and suffocated by its own limits. But, within this context, of the unlimited limits, the unlimited human psychic – with the faith and education that are adequate to the essence of the soul –, is situated a lot farther from the illness, especially to that of the psychic or of the mind. In this context, not even the metaphysical heart would dare oppose the mind, not to mention, to oppose its mind.

Within a short conclusion, before the final one, I would dare state that beyond the limits of the unlimited psyche, there is the limit imposed by the mind on the heart and by the heart on the mind. On the other hand, beyond them, there is the faith itself, practiced at the level of the believer. We can call religious education as "the salt and pepper" that each heart and mind needs in order to fight mental illness.

In the end, I shall round things up by three ideas:

1. If in the case of mental diseases at the level of the rational (neurosis), as well as at the level of the irrational (psychosis), we can speak of a limitation of the psyche, but when the mental disease is absent and there is a certain *ne plus ultra* of that which was designated by the Greek term "psyche" (in terms of its dualism, not its synonymy, that is "soul" **and** "psyche", **not** "soul" **or** "psyche"), we can no longer speak of a limitation of the psyche; the act of holiness within the human being transcends all limits.
2. There are no illnesses, there are only ill people. This is actually, the humanist essence of the bio-psycho-social pattern.

¹ Tertullian, *Despre idolatrie și alte scrieri morale* (On idolatry and other moral writings) (Timișoara: Amarcord, 2001), 7.

3. It may be that the mental illness would become a myth, according to the title of the work of Philotheos Faros¹, if only we could understand that which an experienced (religious) father, Paisios Eznepidis, has shown: *Psychiatry clinics would be empty if Christians came clean in a clear, sincere, humble way, giving ear to an experienced priest, who might even be a little severe. Then, no one would have fears, problems and great temptations. You ought to know that everything stems from selfishness, disobedience and evil thoughts....*²

4. The great majority of illnesses, with the exception of anxiety and depression, of clearly somatic origin, are connected to a **mal de vivre**. The affirmation of J.-C. Larchet deserves to be brought to the fore: *If some of these illnesses (anxiety and depression – n. n.) are without any doubt, of somatic origin, justifying for this type of treatment, the majority, as it is generally acknowledged, are connected with a mal de vivre, meaning existential problems, before which the classical psychiatry remains entirely helpless. It is clear that these problems refer mostly to the spiritual sphere, which the Fathers keep referring to. Their spiritual science and the remedies they offer are worthy of being taken into consideration since, when overcoming the differences of social context and epoch, they reach to the universal side of human existence: the painful flounder of each person for the purpose of finding inner peace, of giving a meaning to one's life, of relating their being and deeds to the true values. And many psychiatrists and psychologists acknowledge that the disappearance of these values in our days contributes to an increase of the number of mental disorders and especially of anxiety and depression*³.

¹ Philotheos Faros, *Mitul bolii psihice* (The myth of psychic illness) (Egumenița: Cartea Ortodoxă, Galați: Alexandria, 2009).

² Faros, verso cover of *Mitul...*

³ Jean-Claude Larchet, verso cover of *Terapeutica bolilor mintale* (The therapy of mental illnesses) (Bucharest: Sophia, 2008).