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Plato’s cosmological medicine in the discourse of Eryximachus in the Symposium. The responsibility of a harmonic technê

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ABSTRACT

By comparing the role of harmony in Eryximachus’ discourse (specifically in Symposium 187 a 1-188 a 1) with other Platonic passages, especially from the Timaeus, this article aims to provide textual evidence concerning Plato’s conception of cosmological medicine as “harmonic technê”. The comparison with other dialogues will enable us to demonstrate how Eryximachus’ thesis is consistent with Plato’s cosmology — a cosmology which cannot be reduced to a physical conception of reality but represents the expression of a dialectical and erotic cosmos, characterized by the agreement of parts. Arguably, Eryximachus’ discourse is expression of the Platonic tendency to translate onto the philosophical plane the implications of a model peri physeôs. Harmonic technê is thus always linked to the theme of moral responsibility: the philosopher is also doctor, musician and demiurges in his harmonizing activity. The speech of Eryximachus can be approached as a Platonic step which is fundamental for establishing the need for a “medicine” to cure disorder, with a view to obtaining a cosmos ordered according to the harmonic principle.

Keywords : Plato’s Symposium; Eryximachus; harmony; cosmological medicine; technê; education.

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