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### Plutarch reading Plato: Interpretation and Mythmaking in the Early Empire

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Plutarch reading Plato  
Interpretation and mythmaking in the early Empire

by

Collin Miles Hilton

May, 2020

Submitted to the Faculty of Bryn Mawr College  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies

# Plutarch reading Plato

## Interpretation and mythmaking in the early Empire

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## *Abstract*

Plutarch of Chaeronea, an eminent figure among the Platonists of the early Roman Empire, built his philosophy by continuously drawing frameworks and models from Plato's dialogues, both in his works dedicated solely to exegesis and his own lively philosophical dialogues. He both interprets Plato and adapts various models from the Platonic dialogues. Each philosopher was especially concerned with problems posed by myth, yet each also employed their own elaborate and imagistic narratives. In this study, I argue two main points. First, Plutarch's treatment of mythic narratives, in their dangers and their potential uses, is carefully modelled after Plato. Both are concerned not only about the educational ramifications of stories for the young, but also the problem of how unreal images can lead the audience to reality. Plutarch nevertheless develops his myths, especially in the dialogues *De sera numinis vindicta* and *De facie in orbe lunae*, to fulfill similar functions as Plato's, whether to emphasize a predominate ethical point in the rest of the dialogue, such as in the myth of Er, or to provide a teleological sketch for how the arrangement of the world might be good, such as in the *Timaeus*. Imagistic narratives such as these, for Plutarch as for Plato, do not transcend the reach of rational discourse, as much of the scholarship holds, however, but rather form likely accounts. Second, I argue that Plutarch constructs his own Platonic mythmaking as a distinctive kind of discourse that acts in parallel to dialectic interpretation. Whether interpreting traditional religious material, such as from the cults of Delphi and Isis, or explaining the complicated meanings of Plato's *Timaeus* through appeal to the other dialogues, these dialectical discourses also yield likely accounts. Given the epistemic difficulties posed by both theology and physics, for different reasons, Plutarch cannot transcend beyond such accounts. The complementary use of these two modes of discourse, dialectical exegesis and imagistic mythmaking, illuminates some central workings of Plutarch's Platonism.

## *Introduction. Plato's treatments of the problems of myth*

Plato is notorious in scholarship, both ancient and modern, for his proposal to banish poets from the ideal city so that children will be raised without potential harm from the traditional myths. Heraclitus the Allegorist, for example, aims his work against Plato and Epicurus together as the most prominent detractors of Homer.<sup>1</sup> Plato's critique has shaped the discourse of English criticism to such an extent that both Sir Philip Sidney's 1595 "The Defense of Poesy" and Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1821 "A Defense of Poetry" go to great lengths to confront and incorporate Plato into their poetics.<sup>2</sup> His real aim, however, is myth rather than poetry.<sup>3</sup> In the *Respublica*, Socrates is evidently prepared to coerce artisans and old women, the

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<sup>1</sup> "Toss out Plato, the flatterer and slanderer of Homer, sending him off as a famous exile from his private city wreathed with white wool and dripping with costly oil from his brow. Nor let there be esteem for Epicurus among us, that farmer of ignoble pleasure in his private gardens, purifying all poetry together as a baleful enticement of myths" (ἐρρίφθω δὲ Πλάτων ὁ κόλαξ καὶ Ὀμήρου συκοφάντης, ἔνδοξον ἀπὸ τῆς ἰδίας πολιτείας τὸν φυγάδα προπέμπων λευκοῖς ἐρίοις ἀνεστεμμένον καὶ πολυτελεῖ μύρω τὴν κεφαλὴν διάβροχον. οὐδ' Ἐπικούρου φροντίς ἡμῖν, ὃς τῆς ἀσέμνου περὶ τοὺς ἰδίους κήπους ἡδονῆς γεωργός ἐστιν, ἅπασαν ὁμοῦ ποιητικὴν ὥσπερ ὀλέθριον μύθων δέλεαρ ἀφοσιούμενος; §4.1-2). See further §4.3-5, and on just Plato, §17.4-8.1. This polemic is so central to Heraclitus' defense of Homer that he even concludes the work with further denunciations of Plato (§76.6-9.1) and Epicurus (§79.2-13). Asmis (1995) compares a similar pairing of Epicurus and Plato in Athenaeus V.187c (16n4).

<sup>2</sup> Sidney, as printed in Shepherd & Maslen (2002): "Plato found fault that the poets of his time filled the world with wrong opinions of the gods, making light tales of that unspotted essence, and therefore would not have the youth depraved with such opinions. Herein may much be said; let this suffice: the poets did not induce such opinions, but imitate those opinions already induced... So as Plato, banishing the abuse, not the thing – not banishing it, but giving due honor unto it – shall be our patron and not our adversary" (107; cf. 84-5); Shelley in Reiman & Fraistat (2002): "The distinction between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error. The distinction between philosophers and poets has been anticipated. Plato was essentially a poet—the truth and splendor of his imagery and the melody of his language is the most intense that it is possible to conceive. He rejected the measure of the epic, dramatic, and lyrical forms, because he sought to kindle a harmony in thoughts divested of shape and action..." (514). While Shelley is dismissive of moral poetry (517-8), Sidney pokes at what he takes as the immorality of the Greek philosophers: "as likewise one should do that should bid one read *Phaedrus* or *Symposium* in Plato, or the discourse of love of Plutarch, and see whether any poet do authorize abominable filthiness, as they do" (106). Sidney is apparently referring to Plutarch's *Amat.*, as he refers to various works of the *Mor.* (especially 107-8), while Shelley classes Plutarch with Herodotus and Livy as "all of the great historians" (515). See also Else (1986): "In the *Laws* Plato writes as a poet as well as a philosopher. Because he alone can claim to be both, he alone can claim to represent the truth with sufficient clarity to supplant the traditional poetry of Greece" (64). Cf. Hegel in Knox (1975: 21-2). Cf. Verdenius (1949), who hopes that Plato's critique can help ward off "a superficial cult of formal beauty as well as... an overstrained desire of originality" (36). Murray (2011) emphasizes Socrates' objections to lamentation in particular and suggests that it is motivated by a greater aversion to the feminine.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Socrates in *Phd.* 61b: "if someone is to be a poet, they ought to make myths and not speeches" (εἴτερ μέλλοι ποιητῆς εἶναι, ποιεῖν μύθους ἀλλ' οὐ λόγους).

other traditional purveyors of tales, as well as poets, to produce the right kind of stories.<sup>4</sup> His motivation, particularly in the extended treatment of the early books, is the ethical problems posed by education. Children particularly are young and liable to harm if myths depict impious or otherwise disturbing things, such as the Hesiodic succession myth, even if it were true. Less explicitly, however, he offers at least two potential justifications for the use of narratives in education, despite his ethical concerns. For traditional myths, there is the possibility of allegorical interpretation, since it allows for the right sort of reader to find a more substantial truth behind the scandalous appearance of the story.<sup>5</sup> Second, if myth has, for Plato, a great potential for evil, perhaps it conversely has a great potential for good as well, hence why he evidently elaborated his own form of myth from traditional material for many of his dialogues.<sup>6</sup> In refashioning this traditional material, Plato fashions an alternative corpus of myth.<sup>7</sup> He strips myths of their disturbing content and repurposes them for philosophical education.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Thrasymachus in I.350e.

<sup>5</sup> The allegorical tradition stretches back to at least to Theagenes of Rhegium in the 6th century B.C.E. and particularly Socrates' contemporary Metrodorus of Lampsacus, as well as the author of the *Derveni Papyrus*. On the history of allegory, see Tate (1929), Lambertson (1986), (Dawson 1991) Brisson (2004), and Struck (2004). On etymology in particular, see Baxter (1992: 107-63). The allegories of the *Derveni Papyrus* are sometimes argued to be Stoic, but cf. Edmonds (2019). The poetry of Parmenides and Empedocles were thought in antiquity to contain intentional allegories, e.g. by [Menander Rhetor] I.337.5-7. See also the scholia to Eur. *Phoen.* 18: Ἐμπεδοκλῆς ὁ φυσικὸς ἀλληγορῶν... Cf. Murray (1925): "We must not think of allegory as a late post-classical phenomenon in Greece. It begins at least as early as Pythagoras and Heraclitus, perhaps as early as Hesiod; for Hesiod seems sometimes to be turning allegory back into myth" (72).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Socrates in Pl. *Cri.*: "Would only that the people were capable of doing the greatest of evils, Crito, then they would be able to do the greatest of goods as well!" (εἰ γὰρ ὄφελον, ὦ Κρίτων, οἷοί τ' εἶναι οἱ πολλοὶ τὰ μέγιστα κακὰ ἐργάζεσθαι, ἵνα οἷοί τ' ἦσαν καὶ ἀγαθὰ τὰ μέγιστα; 44d).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Else (1986): "Plato's radical condemnation of poetry... is rather a particular instance of his radical rejection of Greek culture as a whole. No Greek ever took so much of his own civilization into his heart and soul as Plato did, and none ever rejected it so completely" (3-4). See also Edmonds (2009: 169-71).

<sup>8</sup> In line with the criticisms of traditional myth in *Resp.* II-III, Plato either deemphasizes or banishes entirely any potential wrongdoing of the gods, such as in the concluding myth of the *Grg.* where the succession myth, the most dangerous of all, is gracefully passed over: "as Homer says, Zeus and Poseidon and Pluto divided the reign when they were taking it over from their father" (ὥσπερ γὰρ Ὅμηρος λέγει, διενείμαντο τὴν ἀρχὴν ὁ Ζεὺς καὶ ὁ Ποσειδῶν καὶ ὁ Πλούτων, ἐπειδὴ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς παρέλαβον; 523a). The *Politicus* myth goes even farther in removing divine conflict: Cronus retreats to his watching place (περιωπήν) *sua sponte* because an ordained number of births had been completed, without any violence or coercion (272d-e).

Plato's Socrates formulates a second criticism, however, that the form of myth is inherently fictive in that it must be conveyed through some sort of imitation (*mimêsis*), whether depicted in painting or poem. Myths pose ontological problems as well as ethical ones. In the second book of the *Respublica*, Socrates distinguishes two sorts of myths—"the one true and the other false"<sup>9</sup>—and concludes that both must be used in the education of the young: "don't you understand that we begin by telling stories to children? It is on the whole false, I suppose, but in one sense true as well."<sup>10</sup> Yet how can something with any falsity, such as a myth, lead to truth? This is especially problematic in light of Plato's arguments that imitations of true realities, the eternal and unchanging forms, are categorically removed from truth, especially since he considers all language to be imitation, as Socrates argues in the *Cratylus*, as well as anything in the sense-perceptible world, as emerges in the *Timaeus*, where the entire physical world is held to be the demiurge's imitation of the world of the forms. The latter provides a model for how this mode of discourse can serve an unique and positive function. Accord to Plato, it is impossible to gain certain knowledge about the physical world because it has no stability. Myth, however, can be used to form a "likely account," which manages—the best that humans can hope for when speculating about the world of change and becoming. As Timaeus, the Sicilian astronomer charged with explaining the workings of the sense-perceptible world in the eponymous dialogue, puts it after explaining this world's changing nature, "it is fitting to accept a likely myth about these sorts of things—seek nothing further!"<sup>11</sup> The sort of myth provided by Timaeus, it seems, is potentially less deceptive than an authoritative declaration, insofar as it emphasizes its

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<sup>9</sup> λόγων δὲ διττὸν εἶδος, τὸ μὲν ἀληθές, ψεῦδος δ' ἕτερον; (376e).

<sup>10</sup> οὐ μανθάνεις... ὅτι πρῶτον τοῖς παιδίοις μύθους λέγομεν; τοῦτο δὲ που ὡς τὸ ὅλον εἰπεῖν ψεῦδος, ἔνι δὲ καὶ ἀληθῆ (377a).

<sup>11</sup> ὥστε περὶ τούτων τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον ἀποδεχομένους πρέπει τούτου μηδὲν ἔτι πέρα ζητεῖν (29d).



hypothetical status and distances itself from claims of certainty; the presence of the Atlantis narrative that proceeds it adds further complications still to the category of myth.

In this introduction, I examine Plato’s ethical and metaphysical critiques of myth, then suggest how his own myths seem to meet these challenges. Following the ethical critique, therefore, I suggest that the myth of Er functions as a protreptic to reinforce the exhortation to philosophy in the rest of the dialogue; after the metaphysical critique of images as unreal, I suggest that Timaeus’ story is framed as “likely” because it is an account that emphasizes its own hypothetical status. But first, I survey the scholarship that addresses the function of these philosophical myths. While Plato’s critique of poetry and mimesis have each attracted substantial bodies of scholarship, his own use of myth has drawn another mass of criticism and investigation. This starts on the basic level of how to define a Platonic myth. His own use of the cognate term *muthos* is both helpful and yet insufficient. At several positions in the corpus, characters distinguish between a *logos* and a *muthos*. Three examples will suffice to draw out some similarities on how they are framed before briefly introducing the *status quaestionis*.<sup>12</sup> Protagoras begins his “great speech” in the eponymous dialogue by offering the audience a choice: “but first, should I explain it by telling a myth, as older men do to younger, or going through it in an account?”<sup>13</sup> The sophist opts to begin with a myth on the grounds that it will be more pleasant (*χαριέστερον*), but he eventually gives an account as well.<sup>14</sup> Plato has Socrates

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<sup>12</sup> See also *Leg.* I.644d-5c and X.903b-905b. On the latter, see Saunders (1973).

<sup>13</sup> ἀλλὰ πότερον ὑμῖν, ὡς πρεσβύτερος νεωτέροις, μῦθον λέγων ἐπιδείξω ἢ λόγῳ διεξελθὼν; (320c). On the debate over the authorship of the myth, whether to what extent it was Protagoras himself or Plato, see Van Riel (2012). See also Stewart (1905): “The myth told in the Symposium by Aristophanes, being told by Aristophanes, has a comic vein; similarly, the Myth put into the mouth of Protagoras is somewhat pompous and confused. None the less, these, I would contend, and the other non-Socratic Myths are true Platonic Myths” (221-2).

<sup>14</sup> “About this then, Socrates, I will no longer tell you a myth, but an account” (τούτου δὲ περὶ, ὃ Σώκρατες, οὐκέτι μῦθόν σοι ἐρῶ ἀλλὰ λόγον; 324d). The last outwardly narrative part of the myth, however, Zeus’ proclamation that all shall have a share in “reverence and justice” (αἰδῶ τε καὶ δίκην), ended a page earlier (322c-e), such that it is difficult to determine what distinguishes the interceding argumentation from the speech that follows. As Most (2012) notes that in any Platonic *muthos*, “by the laws of Greek grammar, what is involved is a form of *logos* involving *muthos*” (23).

present a similar dichotomy in the central speech of the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue laden with myth.<sup>15</sup> After a tersely argued proof for the immortality of the soul on the basis of its capacity for self-motion, Socrates proposes to change his mode of exposition:<sup>16</sup> “the sort of thing it is, this seems to be an entirely divine and long narrative, but that to which it is like, a human and a lesser one; let us speak in this way: let it be like to the united power of a winged pair of horses and a charioteer.”<sup>17</sup> Socrates later deems the speech a “mythic hymn” to Eros and allows that it, “an account not entirely implausible,” may have touched on the truth, although it was composed with play (παιδιᾶ πεπαῖσθαι).<sup>18</sup> Finally, in the *Politicus*, the Eleatic Stranger interrupts the initial discussion to proceed down another road, one that will “I dare say mix in some play; we should use a long part of a great myth in our discussion and then continue as before.”<sup>19</sup> Young Socrates, the interlocutor, must listen to the myth “as children do” (καθάπερ παῖδες).

Plato’s myths, then, share some characteristics. They are told by the older to the younger, they are playful or pleasant, and they are shorter than discourses. They also at least touch on the

<sup>15</sup> *Phaedrus* begins the discussion by asking Socrates if he believes the myth of Oreithyia (229b-30a). Besides the central myth of the palinode, Socrates relates myths of the origins of cicadas (259b-d, cf. 230c) and the creation of writing by the Egyptian god Theuth (274c-5b), which *Phaedrus* mocks—“you can make whatever Egyptian accounts you want, Socrates” (ὦ Σώκρατες, ῥαδίως σὺ Αἰγυπτίους καὶ ὀποδαπούς ἂν ἐθέλης λόγους ποιεῖς). The scholarship on myth in the dialogue is fittingly immense. See generally Werner (2012). See also Ferrari (1990): “Platonic myth... is not the only possible medium; I have here, after all, been trying to say the same thing in unmythical prose. ... Saying this in unmythical prose is not saying it better; only differently. And just this, I believe, Plato’s point in ‘doing’ philosophy in this dialogue through the two distinct and strikingly juxtaposed verbal paths of myth and dialectic. He allows neither path to reach a satisfactory goal; rather, one leads to the other” (33).

<sup>16</sup> 245c-6a. He describes it as a “proof” (ἀποδείξεως; 245c). Analytically-minded scholars tend to identify the argument as fallacious. Moore (2014) even argues that it is “deliberatively fallacious” (179-80). It was rather influential, however, in antiquity. Cicero, for instance, has Scipio Africanus relate a Latin translation in the *Somn.* (§27-8) and repeats it as Plato’s belief (*ex quo illa ratio nata est Platonis*) in *Tusc.* I.22-3.53-4.

<sup>17</sup> οἷον μὲν ἐστὶ πάντη πάντως θείας εἶναι καὶ μακρᾶς διηγήσεως, ᾧ δὲ ἔοικεν, ἀνθρωπίνης τε καὶ ἐλάττονος· ταύτη οὖν λέγωμεν. εἰοικέτω δὴ συμφύτῳ δυνάμει ὑποπτέρου ζεύγους τε καὶ ἡνιόχου (246a). See also the comparison of duration in Socrates’ appeal to the gardens of Adonis (276b).

<sup>18</sup> “Perhaps we touched on a certain truth, or perhaps we carried ourselves too far afield, mixing together an account not entirely implausible, playing at a certain mythic hymn... (ἴσως μὲν ἀληθοῦς τινος ἐφαπτόμενοι, τάχα δ’ ἂν καὶ ἄλλοσε παραφερόμενοι, κεράσαντες οὐ παντάπασιν ἀπίθανον λόγον, μυθικόν τινα ὕμνον προσεπαισαμεν...; 265b-c). Cf. 264e-5a.

<sup>19</sup> πάλιν τοίνυν ἐξ ἄλλης ἀρχῆς δεῖ καθ’ ἑτέραν ὁδὸν πορευθῆναι τινα... σχεδὸν παιδιὰν ἐγκερασαμένους: συγχῶ γὰρ μέρει δεῖ μεγάλου μύθου προσχρήσασθαι, καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν δὴ, καθάπερ ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν (268d-e). The Stranger indicatively begins by appealing to names from traditional myth, Atreus and Thyestes (268e). Further on this myth, see *infra* pg. 169.

truth: as Socrates puts it at the end of the eschatological narrative in the *Phaedo*, although he cannot affirm it, we should believe the things of the myth or something like them, and chant (ἐπᾶδειν) them to ourselves.<sup>20</sup> Yet there are more difficult cases. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates insists that the account of the soul's fate after death is a *logos*, even if the petulant Callicles thinks it to be a *muthos*.<sup>21</sup> Plato's famous allegory of the cave in the *Respublica* is called an image (*eikôn*) and not a *mythos*; but myths are themselves a sort of image, or at least contain them, and the allegory can surely be read as a narrative.<sup>22</sup> The *Timaeus* presents particular difficulties because its central speech is called both a likely myth (*muthos*) and a likely account (*logos*).

There is, nevertheless, some broad agreement about what counts as a Platonic myth. John Alexander Stewart, a Neo-Kantian philosopher, published an edition entitled *The Myths of Plato*, which includes narratives from the *Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, *Respublica*, *Protagoras*, *Timaeus*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, and *Critias*.<sup>23</sup> Perceval Frutiger published a study twenty-five years later that both laid out clearer criteria and broadened the list, while arguing against the inclusion of passages proposed by others, such as the cave.<sup>24</sup> During the 1970's and 1980's, a series of young scholars began projects on Plato's conception of myth, and particularly his use of *muth-*

<sup>20</sup> See further *infra* pg. 256.

<sup>21</sup> "Hear, then, a beautiful account, which you may consider a myth, I suspect, but I an account" (ἄκουε δὴ... μάλα καλοῦ λόγου, ὃν σὺ μὲν ἠγήση μῦθον, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ἐγὼ δὲ λόγον; 523a). Towards the end of his speech, he anticipates that it will be scoffed at as a "myth like an old woman's" (μῦθος... ὥσπερ γραῶς; 527). For the eschatological system of this myth, see *infra* pg. 243. Zaslavsky (1981), on the basis of Socrates' distinction, denies that this is, in fact, a myth (12-3 and 195-8). Most, however, do not take Socrates so strictly at his word.

<sup>22</sup> "You describe a strange image and strange prisoners," he said. 'Like us,' I said ("ἄτοπον," ἔφη, "λέγεις εἰκόνα καὶ δεσμώτας ἀτόπους." "ὁμοίους ἡμῖν," ἦν δ' ἐγώ; VII.515a). Socrates later refers to it again as an image (εἰκόνα; 517a). On the range of meanings of the word image (εἰκόν) for Plato, see Pender (2000: 37-43).

<sup>23</sup> 1905. He distinguishes between myths that focus on "the Individual's Ideals and Categories" (of Kant) and those that relate to "Nations" rather than individuals—namely the myths of the metallic races in the *Resp.* and of Atlantis in the *Ti.* and *Criti.* (451). For Stewart, the rest belong to the former category. The selection in Partenie (2004) is similar, but the allegory of the cave is included (51-6) while the metallic races are not

<sup>24</sup> "L'allégorie est immobile comme un tableau" (101). Cf. Hack (1935): "M. Frutiger's treatment of Plato's myths... is a refreshing contrast to the Kantian cloudiness of Stewart and to the total eclipse of sense in Reinhardt's recent work on the same subject" (270).

terminology, some of which were eventually published as monographs.<sup>25</sup> Luc Brisson, in *Platon, les mots et les mythes*, translated into English with the more poetic title *Plato the Myth Maker*, analyzed both Plato's terminology for myths and his presentation of oral transmission.<sup>26</sup> Glenn Most proposes a structural schema, based on principles such that the speaker usually disclaims authority, which excludes some narratives usually held to be myths, such as the birth of the cicadas in the *Phaedrus* or the rendition of the myth of the metallic races in the *Respublica*.<sup>27</sup> These accounts, nevertheless, provide a firmer basis for defining the corpus of Platonic myths.

The myths have attracted much broader attention, both positive and negative, from various sorts of modern theorists and philosophers as well.<sup>28</sup> Freidrich Hegel argues in *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* that myth inherently belongs to the childhood of humanity and so muddies Plato's thought.<sup>29</sup> This tendency becomes widespread in Analytic philosophy. The myths, and particularly the eschatological narrative that concludes the *Gorgias*,

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<sup>25</sup> E.g. Zaslavsky (1981), Brisson (1998 [1982]), and Moors (1982). Zaslavsky is detail-oriented but emphasizes unexpected instances, such as the use of *παρεμυθεῖτο* in *Ep.* VII.329d and 345e (29-48). Cf. Stewart (1989): "instead of trying to determine the criterion by which Plato demarcated myth, Zaslavsky attempts instead to acquire the definition of myth by mere ostention, i.e. he attempts to define Platonic myth by merely pointing to its various instances. But this is analogous to that method of definition that is repeatedly rejected by Plato..." (261).

<sup>26</sup> 1998 [1982].

<sup>27</sup> 2012: "Platonic myths go back to older, explicitly indicated or implied, real or fictional oral sources... And many of the figures and narrative schemes in Plato's myths, even the probably invented ones, are familiar from the customary Greek repertoire of traditional legends and popular tales" (17). This is his third of eight principles.

<sup>28</sup> Moors (1982: 1-33) and Elias (1984: 75-118) provide useful surveys of the scholarship on Platonic myth. See also Pender (2000: 76-86).

<sup>29</sup> As translated by Haldane & Simson (1894): "The myth is always a mode of representation which, as belonging to an earlier stage, introduces sensuous images, which are directed to imagination, not to thought; in this, however, the activity of thought is suspended, it cannot yet establish itself by its own power, and so is not yet free. The myth belongs to the pedagogic stage of the human race, since it entices and allures men to occupy themselves with the content; but as it takes away from the purity of thought through sensuous forms, it cannot express the meaning of Thought. When the Notion attains its full development, it has no more need of the myth. Plato often says that it is difficult to express one's thoughts on such and such a subject, and he therefore will employ a myth; no doubt this is easier" (20). Schopenhauer (1819), at one point Hegel's colleague, was much more positive about the mythic aspect of Plato's thought: "Jenes non plus ultra mythischer Darstellung haben daher schon Pythagoras und Plato mit Bewunderung aufgefaßt, von Indien, oder Aegypten, herübergenommen, verehrt, angewandt und, wir wissen nicht wie weit, selbst geglaubt" (513). The Hegelianizing treatment by Friedländer (1969), however, finds the unfolding of history shot throughout the myths, which he schematizes into three levels (207-10), culminating in the Atlantis narrative (203).

have haunted the “Socratic” scholarship which Gregory Vlastos initiated, for instance.<sup>30</sup> Among political philosophers, the idea of a “noble lie” in the *Respublica* deeply inspired Leo Strauss while provoking a comparable degree of disgust in Karl Popper.<sup>31</sup> In a very different philosophical realm, Plato looms large in Marcel Detienne’s deconstructionist monograph on Greek mythology.<sup>32</sup> In the past decade, the myths have gained broader attention from classicists, as represented especially by two collected volumes.<sup>33</sup>

There is extensive debate about the function of Plato’s myths. There are three broad trends.<sup>34</sup> First, some argue that the myths allow the audience to grasp a transcendental truth that is inaccessible to their reason. Stewart’s Neo-Kantian analysis appeals to “Transcendental Feeling,” the objects of which “are not given in articulate language which the scientific

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<sup>30</sup> Vlastos most prominently took up a project of finding the historical Socrates, whom he paints as a sort of martyr for rationalistic moralism. Only in some of the dialogues, such as the *Apologia* and the *Euthyphro*, “the early dialogues,” are sufficiently elenctic, non-dogmatic, and strictly focused on ethics, as Vlastos saw it, to accurately represent the “Socrates” that is more clearly apparent from the works of Xenophon and Aristotle. There argue two “Socrates” in Plato, he argues: “They are so diverse in content and method that they contrast as sharply with one another as with any third philosophy you care to mention, beginning with Aristotle’s” (46). It is only after Plato’s metaphysical wings begin to sprout that he writes the “middle dialogues,” such as the *Phd.* and all the books of the *Resp.* after the first, according to Vlastos (46-9). Myth emerges as a problem because Vlastos places the *Gorgias*, which contains an eschatological narrative not dissimilar from the myth of Er and the others, in the category of “early dialogues,” arguing that it is simply a morality tale, which does not imply the un-Socratic belief in the immortality of the soul that would emerge in the “Platonic dialogues.” Another Socratic scholar, McPherran, accepts the *Gorgias* as “Socratic,” but rejects the myth, with its strong implication that the soul is immortal, as a Platonic interpolation. Smith and Woodruff, however, argue that not only is the conception of the soul in the *Gorgias* myth “Socratic,” but that it even corresponds to that of the *Apologia*, that most quintessentially “Socratic” of all the dialogues. These sorts of issues viviate much of the interest in the chronology of the dialogues. Kahn (1996) is on sounder ground, however, by adhering rigorously to the stylometric studies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (42-8). Plutarch at least considered the *Criti.* to be late given its unfinished state (*Sol.* 32.1-2). This sort of developmentalistic argumentation, however, is prevalent in the scholarship on Plutarch’s philosophy as well, although this is less convincing. See *infra* pg. 74. There is a prevalent assumption that the dialogues devoted to ethics are necessarily “earlier,” but cf. Porph. *Plot.* §6 and Denyer (2001: 20-4).

<sup>31</sup> See *Resp.* III.414-5d, Popper (2013 [1945]), and Strauss (1987 [1963]). On Strauss and the study of Plato, see especially Ferrari (1997).

<sup>32</sup> 1986 [1981]. The book does not analyze much text besides that of Plato, although there is a sort of allegorization of the odd use of *muthietai* in Anacreon: “Myth is a subversive word, a rebellious voice, seditious, but less in content that is empty than in the form others bestow on it from the outside” (45-6). Brisson (1998 [1994]) criticizes him at length (135-9). See also Derrida (1981 [1972]), which treats the myth of Theuth in the *Phdr.* (especially 67-75).

<sup>33</sup> Partenie (2009) and Destrée, Gonzalez, & Collobert (2012). Recent volumes on Plato and poetry—Destrée & Herrmann (2011)—and images—Destrée & Edmonds (2017)—are also relevant, as is the volume on Hesiod and Plato—Boys-Stones & Haubold (2000).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Latona (2004).

understanding can interpret; they come as dreams, and must be received as dreams, without thought of doctrinal interpretation.” Humans only reach this unity with “Universal Nature,” Stewart argued, when they transcend reason, as they do when the irrational parts of their souls hear myth or philosophical poetry, which scientific inquiry cannot comprehend.<sup>35</sup> Some Christian scholars have argued that the myths are meaningfully inspired, partaking in a sort of foreshadowing of Christian revelation.<sup>36</sup> While theologically motivated scholars tend to emphasize the eschatological myths, a few Analytic philosophers have proposed another category of myth. Julius Elias, for instance, proposes a “weak defense” and a “strong defense” of poetry for Plato. The former is fulfilled as long as poetry is purified of unethical ideas, meaning that it conveys ethically acceptable ideas that could also be communicated through in dialectic; the latter needs to find a unique function for myth, namely providing the first principles for deductive inquiry.<sup>37</sup> Elias finds the latter in what he calls “methodological” myths.<sup>38</sup> These include the movement in the *Republica* from the analogy of the sun to the allegory of the cave, which are purported to provide the first principles for philosophical deduction that cannot be

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<sup>35</sup> 1905: 21-2.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Shorey (1933): “... unwilling to forego any sanction of right conduct, Plato rises from the region of dialectic demonstration to the world of faith, aspiration, and trust, and offers us in place of the rejected gross material paradise of Hesiod and the Orphic poets one of those beautiful tales of the after-judgment and retribution in what Martineau, their best interpreter, finds a genuine if somewhat melancholy and uncertain anticipation of triumphant Christian hope” (251). For a more systematic and philosophical treatment in this vein, see Pieper (1965).

<sup>37</sup> 1984. Hence he at one point calls them “‘duplicates’ of dialectical arguments... [which] Plato is sometimes disposed to repeat in poetic form” (119).

<sup>38</sup> These are myths which do not deal with the “content” of Plato’s thought (i.e. most of what most everyone agrees are myths), but rather with “the structure of knowledge” (185). Elias categorizes “the whole theory of forms” as a myth (185), as well as passages on anamnesis (*Phd.* 72e-6e, *Meno* 85c-6b), the sun-line-cave movement, and Diotima’s ladder (*Symp.* 210a-2a) under this heading. He has rhapsodic moments, however, such as in the conclusion to his discussion of Findlay: “The whole book is a beautiful myth about Plato, written in a spirit close to the original. But as little as I trust my mind, my heart I trust not at all” (118).

derived from reason. Robert Stewart, extending Elias' analysis, even argues that the only meaningful myth for Plato is the analogy of the sun.<sup>39</sup>

Against this transcendentalist approach, however, there is the idea that myths are aimed specifically at either the lower parts of the soul or unphilosophical audiences, under the assumption that not everyone can become a philosopher. Ludwig Edelstein, for instance, identifies seven Platonic myth and divides them into two categories, those about the early history of the universe or humanity—*Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Politicus*—and those about the soul before and after life—*Phaedo*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus*, *Respublica*. He argues that each serves a different purpose and has different epistemic statuses, in that the former contain knowledge about the world of becoming (in which no sure knowledge is possible); these are therefore essentially extrinsic to philosophy.<sup>40</sup> Luc Brisson argues that myths are, for Plato, most appropriate for subjects which are unverifiable, particularly including the distant past, such as in the Atlantis myth, or world of disembodied souls;<sup>41</sup> he argues that the mythic form is aimed at either a unphilosophical audience or the lower parts of our souls. Janet Smith stresses, however, the roles that Platonic myths play for both sorts of audience.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, there is a more recent trend of treating Platonic myths as images that emphasize their own status as images. This is particularly plausible with regard to the speeches of *Critias* in

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<sup>39</sup> 1989. The only Platonic myth which fulfills what he believes to be of the more significant sort is the “allegory of the cave,” which “because it is a full blown story, attains full status as a myth” (276). His reasoning is that it is “Plato's most explicit - indeed only explicit - treatment of the nature of the Good itself” and therefore the only candidate for a myth which could serve to provide first principles. Zaslavsky (1981) presents a Straussian take on this idea, which he reveals with his mention of studying under Benardete (200n22).

<sup>40</sup> 1949: “The ethical myth, then, is an addition to rational knowledge; it does not take the place of rational knowledge, as do the historical and scientific myths. ... Is not the ethical myth even more superfluous than the cosmological and historical tales, since ethical knowledge is self-sufficient?” (473). He does, however, stress Platonic idea of *paidia*, “recreation from arguments concerning ideas,” (469), which, Edelstein argues, is just as necessary to the philosopher as seriousness or zeal (470-471).

<sup>41</sup> He particularly appeals to the idea of non-falsifiable discourse (91-111). Most's (2012) fourth criterion is similar (17).

<sup>42</sup> 1986. See also Smith (1985).

the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, which seem, as Katherine Morgan especially argues, to call attention to the epistemic status of the rest of the former dialogue. In *Critias*' two speeches, one of which precedes Timaeus' "likely myth" in the *Timaeus* while the other forms the bulk of the eponymous dialogue that follows, he relates an encounter, passed down to him through his ancestors, between Solon and an Egyptian priest at Saïs.<sup>43</sup> The latter criticizes various parts of the Greek mythic tradition, such as the flood narrative and Solon's genealogy, which must be rejected, while, according to Morgan, the Atlantis narrative represents a "noble lie" that the audience seems to accept; completing a tripartite schema, Timaeus' grand cosmological account then seems to be a distinctively philosophical myth. As a whole, the "*Timaeus* and the *Critias* present a series of nested levels of myth corresponding to varying levels of truth and usage."<sup>44</sup> I suggest that Plutarch's myths might similarly serve this function. They serve several significant philosophical functions—such as reinforcing ethical points elsewhere in the dialogue and allowing the construction of teleological accounts about the physical world—but they also call attention to their own hypothetical status as images. The subsequent sections of this introduction lay the foundation for the following chapters on Plutarch's Platonic interpretations and his own imitative mythmaking. The Chaeronean, I argue, shares both Plato's critiques of myth, each part of which he advances in his own analysis, and his conceptions of the function of philosophical myths, both as ethical exhortations and teleological accounts. Plutarch, moreover, uses myth in parallel with his dialectical arguments, just as Plato does.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Ti.* 21d-3a.

<sup>44</sup> 2000: 278. See also Hooper (2010). On the Atlantis myth cf. Gill (2017).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Johansen (1998): "Some of the philosophical writings are intended for a wider public, others are more technical. Most of them move subtly back and forth between a rational and a symbolic mythical level. To Plutarch these two modes of expression are in fact two sides of the same issue" (533).



*Persuasion, deception, and education*

The Greek mythic tradition, particularly embodied in the poetry of Homer and Hesiod, reflects multiple coherent but competing ethical worldviews. Hesiod's *Opera et dies*, for example, presents Zeus' reign as superlatively just, if in some respects harsh:<sup>46</sup> the virtuous enjoy peace, prosperity, and security, while thrice ten thousand *daemones*, "garbed in mist" (ἠέρα ἐσσάμενοι), are said to watch over the earth to ensure none of the wicked escape punishment;<sup>47</sup> some might think that they can overcome the maiden Dike and give wicked judgements, but in the end they only bring about their own ruin.<sup>48</sup> Hesiod's *Theogonia*, which expounds the formation of Zeus' reign, however, attributes malevolent envy and brutal violence in the divine family—most shockingly, between father and son. Uranus conspires to oppress his children, until he is castrated by his son Cronus; the victorious Titan, in turn, attempts to suppress his children by swallowing them, but he is undone by the trickery of his wife Rhea and the might of his son Zeus, who victoriously enchains most of the previous generations in gloomy Tartarus.<sup>49</sup> The Hesiodic corpus provides both the fundamentals for what would become traditional morality and

<sup>46</sup> In a short fable (αἶνον), a hawk snatches a nightingale, berating it as it weeps (202-6): "only a fool wants to fight against those that are stronger; he is both deprived victory and suffers pain in addition to shame" (ἄφρων δ' ὅς κ' ἐθέλη πρὸς κρείσσονας ἀντιφερίζειν· / νίκης τε στέρεται πρὸς τ' αἴσχεσιν ἄλγεα πάσχει; 210-1). While the poem hymns justice at length, the fable seems to preempt the Athenian conceit in Thucydides' Melian dialogue: "justice is reckoned in human understanding when there is equal force, but the strong do what is in their power and the weak suffer" (δίκαια μὲν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρωπείῳ λόγῳ ἀπὸ τῆς ἴσης ἀνάγκης κρίνεται, δυνατὰ δὲ οἱ προύχοντες πράσσοσι καὶ οἱ ἀσθενεῖς ξυγχωροῦσιν; V.89).

<sup>47</sup> Prosperity: 225-37; *daemones*: 248-55. The "eye of Zeus" (Διὸς ὀφθαλμὸς) is also said to "see all" (πάντα ἰδὼν; 267).

<sup>48</sup> "But there is the maiden Justice, daughter of Zeus, glorious and revered among the gods, and whenever anyone should harm her or crookedly slander her, immediately she sits beside her father Zeus, son of Cronus, and divulges the unjust mind of men..." (ἦ δε τε παρθένος ἐστὶ Δίκη, Διὸς ἐκγεγαυία, / κυδρὴ τ' αἰδοίη τε θεῶν, οἱ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσιν, / καὶ ῥ' ὅπῳ τ' ἄν τις μιν βλάβη σκολιῶς ὀνοτάζων / αὐτίκα παρ Διὶ πατρὶ καθεζομένη Κρονίωνι / γηρύετ' ἀνθρώπων ἄδικον νόον...; 256-62). See further 220-4 and Plu. *Quomodo adul.* 36a-b. Cf. Socrates in Pl. *Grg.*: "it is bad to suffer injustice, but worse to do injustice" (μεῖζον μὲν φαμεν κακὸν τὸ ἀδικεῖν, ἔλαττον δὲ τὸ ἀδικεῖσθαι; 509c).

<sup>49</sup> Uranus and Cronus: 156-93; Cronus and Zeus: 459-506.

the source of the greatest shame for philosophers who wish to attribute nothing evil to the gods.<sup>50</sup> Homer, in turn, presents further scandals amongst the gods, such as the adulterous tryst of Aphrodite and Ares.<sup>51</sup>

These scandalous elements drew moral criticism as early as Xenophanes in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., who laments, “everything Homer and Hesiod attribute to the gods is everything that brings blame and shame among men—resorting to theft, adultery, and cheating one another.”<sup>52</sup> By the time of Socrates and the sweep of sophists through Athens, there seems to have been an anxiety that these myths could provide justification for human wickedness. The sophistic Unjust Argument in Aristophanes’ *Nubae* attempts to exploit exactly these stories in his refutation of the naïve Just Argument: “How could there be Justice, if Zeus did not perish when he chained his own father?”<sup>53</sup> Socrates’ eponymous interlocutor in Plato’s *Euthyphro*, an evidently serious man defending the prosecution of his own father as impious, similarly appeals to the example of the succession myth: “these men consider Zeus to be the best and most just of the gods, and they admit that he bound his own father in justice because he unjustly swallowed

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<sup>50</sup> Both Hesiodic poems, however, include the scandalous narrative of Prometheus’ theft of fire and attempt to deceive Zeus (*Op.* 47-105 and *Th.* 510-616). Lloyd-Jones (1971), while distinguishing the divine justice of the *Il.* and the *Od.*, presents the Hesiodic epics as coherent on this issue (32-6). Plutarch considered Hesiod such a moral authority that, according to Proclus’ commentary, apparent immorality in the *Op.* justifies “throwing out the lines” (τούτους στίχους ἐκβάλλει) as “unworthy of Hesiod’s judgement concerning justice and injustice” (ὡς ἀναξίους τῆς Ἡσιόδου περὶ δικαίων καὶ ἀδικῶν κρίσεως; *ad* 268).

<sup>51</sup> *Od.* VIII.266-366. Cf. *Resp.* III.390c.

<sup>52</sup> πάντα θεοῖσ’ ἀνέθηκαν Ὀμηρός θ’ Ἡσιόδός τε, / ὅσσα παρ’ ἀνθρώποισιν ὀνειδέα καὶ ψόγος ἐστίν, / κλέπτειν μοιχεύειν τε καὶ ἀλλήλους ἀπατεύειν (frg. B10 Diels). This is especially dangerous because, as Xenophanes quips, “from the beginning all learned from Homer” (ἐξ ἀρχῆς καθ’ Ὀμηρον, ἐπεὶ μεμαθήκασιν πάντες; frg. B9). The list of the most unholy of acts (ἀθεμίστια ἔργα) is repeated in B11. This sort of critique—and that of the physical absurdity of anthropomorphism, see *infra*—was apparently prominent in his poetry. Diogenes Laertius characterizes his work as “written in epic, elegy, and iambic against Hesiod and Homer, to criticize what they have said about the gods” (γέγραφε δὲ ἐν ἔπεσι καὶ ἐλεγείας καὶ ἰάμβους καθ’ Ἡσιόδου καὶ Ὀμήρου, ἐπικόπτων αὐτῶν τὰ περὶ θεῶν εἰρημένα; IX.18). He also quotes a line of Timon that deems Xenophanes a “Homer-trampling satirist” (Ὀμηραπάτην ἐπικόπτην).

<sup>53</sup> πῶς δῆτα Δίκης οὔσης ὁ Ζεὺς / οὐκ ἀπόλωλεν τὸν πατέρ’ αὐτοῦ / δήσας; (904-6). Aristophanes’ Unjust Argument also appeals to sexual stories, presumably such as Hera’s seduction of Zeus in *Il.* XIV: “since it turns back to Zeus, even he is bested by Eros and women. How are you, despite being a mere mortal, able to do better than a god?” (εἴτ’ εἰς τὸν Δί’ ἐπανενεγκεῖν, / κάκεῖνος ὡς ἦττων ἔρωτός ἐστι καὶ γυναικῶν / καίτοι σὺ θνητὸς ὢν θεοῦ πῶς μείζον ἂν δύναιο; 1080-2).

his sons, and that he, in turn, castrated his own father on similar grounds.”<sup>54</sup> Some contemporary sophists take a contrary approach, and seem to use mythic frames to ground their discourses in a sense of ethical rectitude—such as in Hippias’ dialogue between Nestor and Neoptolemus or Prodicus’ fable of Hercules at the crossroads<sup>55</sup>—and so, it seems, set out to improve upon the traditional myths. The scandalous stories, however, would continue to be a source of rebuke. Dionysius of Hallicarnassus praises the Romans for lacking myths that contain such divine outrages as the succession narrative, which Eusebius adapts to his own denouncement of Hellenic tradition.<sup>56</sup>

Plato, however, presents the first extant, systematic ethical critique of the mythic tradition. In the *Alcibiades I*, for instance, Socrates interprets both Homeric epics, at their core, as discourses on justice and injustice.<sup>57</sup> It is especially in the *Respublica*, however, where the

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<sup>54</sup> αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἱ ἄνθρωποι τυγγάνουσι νομίζοντες τὸν Δία τῶν θεῶν ἄριστον καὶ δικαιοτάτον, καὶ τοῦτον ὁμολογοῦσι τὸν αὐτοῦ πατέρα δῆσαι ὅτι τοὺς ὑεῖς κατέπινεν οὐκ ἐν δίκῃ, κάκεινόν γε αὖ τὸν αὐτοῦ πατέρα ἐκτεμεῖν δι’ ἕτερα τοιαῦτα (5e-6a). Free further 6b-c. Some scholars, such as Sikes (1931: 66-7) and Ledbetter (2003: 1), maintain a developmentalistic distinction between the treatment of poetry in the “Socratic” dialogues and the later works, given the treatment of inspiration. Cf. Else (1986: 8-9). This example of Euthyphro’s abuse of myths, suggests that there is an ethical concern about myth even in the so-called “early” dialogues. Cf. Sikes (1931: 73). On the identity of Euthyphro, in light of his treatment in Pl. *Crat.* especially, see Kahn (1997).

<sup>55</sup> Pl. *Hip. ma.* 286a-c, Xen. *Mem.* II.1.21-34. Cf. Gorgias’ *Encomium* and *Apologia*. In Xenophon’s *Symp.*, however, Niceratus’ Homeric education (III.6) is portrayed as practical rather than ethical—“wisest Homer wrote about nearly everything in human affairs, so whoever among you wants to become versed in landowning, politics, or generalship, or to become like Achilles, Ajax, Nestor, or Achilles, let him seek my favor!” (“Ὀμηρος ὁ σοφώτατος πεποίηκε σχεδὸν περὶ πάντων τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων. ὅστις ἂν οὖν ὑμῶν βούληται ἢ οἰκονομικὸς ἢ δημηγορικὸς ἢ στρατηγικὸς γενέσθαι ἢ ὅμοιος Ἀχιλλεῖ ἢ Αἴαντι ἢ Νέστορι ἢ Ὀδυσσεῖ, ἐμὲ θεραπευέτω; 4.6)—which is met with playful mockery (§6-9).

<sup>56</sup> “For, among the Romans, Uranus is not castrated by his own children, nor does Cronus do away with his own offspring out of fear lest they should attack him, nor does Zeus destroy the reign of Cronus and imprison his own father in Tartarus; nor still is there war, violence, imprisonment, or servitude of the gods among men” (οὔτε γὰρ Οὐρανὸς ἐκτεμνόμενος ὑπὸ τῶν ἑαυτοῦ παίδων παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις λέγεται οὔτε Κρόνος ἀφανίζων τὰς ἑαυτοῦ γονὰς φόβῳ τῆς ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπιθέσεως οὔτε Ζεὺς καταλύων τὴν Κρόνου δυναστείαν καὶ κατακλείων ἐν τῷ δεσμωτηρίῳ τοῦ Ταρτάρου τὸν ἑαυτοῦ πατέρα οὐδέ γε πόλεμοι καὶ τραύματα καὶ δεσμοὶ καὶ θητεῖαι θεῶν παρ’ ἀνθρώποις; *Ant. Rom.* II.19.1). Eusebius quotes the broader section that contains this passage as the conclusion to book II of *Praep. evang.* (§7), which constitutes his main polemic against Greek and Egyptian mythology.

<sup>57</sup> “Certainly, these poems are about the difference between the just and the unjust... and the battles and deaths that came about from this difference to the Achaeans, and to the others, the Trojans, and to the suitors of Penelope and Odysseus?” (οὐκοῦν ταῦτα ποιήματα ἐστὶ περὶ διαφορᾶς δικαίων τε καὶ ἀδίκων; ... καὶ αἱ μάχαι γε καὶ οἱ θάνατοι διὰ ταύτην τὴν διαφορὰν τοῖς τε Ἀχαιοῖς καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις Τρωσὶν ἐγένοντο, καὶ τοῖς μνηστήρσι τοῖς τῆς Πηνελόπης καὶ τῷ Ὀδυσσεῖ; 112b). The authenticity of the dialogue has often been doubted since Schleiermacher (1836 [1809]:

characters are concerned over education and the impact of stories on audiences too young to employ sound interpretation, that Plato develops his ethical critique of myths, both those conveyed in poetry and other media.<sup>58</sup> He gives a variety of arguments, some of which are practical—such as that the guardians-in-training must not hear stories about the underworld would make them terrified of dying in battle<sup>59</sup>—but his initial two objections to traditional myths are founded upon central theological assumptions.<sup>60</sup> The very first, and perhaps weightiest, is that the divine can only be the source of good for humans, never of evil, such that if stories contradict this manifest and irrefutable truth, no one should be allowed to either speak or hear them.<sup>61</sup> If the

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328-36), but the tide has been changing recently. See e.g. Denyer (2001: 14-26) and Jirsa (2009). Cf. Smith (2004). According to Diogenes Laertius, citing Favorinus, Anaxagoras preempted Plato in this ethical reading: “he seems to be the first... to declare the opinion that the poetry of Homer is about virtue and justice”

(δοκεῖ δὲ πρῶτος... τὴν Ὀμήρου ποιήσιν ἀποφύνασθαι εἶναι περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ δικαιοσύνης; II.11 = frg. A1 Diels). Hermias similarly draws attention to commonalities of the details of the myth of Er with his broader interpretation (ἀνάπτουξιν, *In Phdr.* 77.14) of the *Iliad* as the story of rational souls, represented by the Greeks, descending from the intelligible realm into materiality—some to return home because they prevail over matter, and others lost to it (77.13-8.12). Particularly, he compares the prophet in the myth of Er that announces cycles of a thousand years with Calchas pronouncing a return in ten years (78.5-9).

<sup>58</sup> E.g. Adeimantus: “in addition to these things, Socrates, examine yet another form of discourses about justice and injustice, spoken both in prose and by the poets” (πρὸς δὲ τούτοις σκέψαι, ὃ Σώκρατες, ἄλλο αὖ εἶδος λόγων περὶ δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ ἀδικίας ἰδίᾳ τε λεγόμενον καὶ ὑπὸ ποιητῶν; II.363e-4a). See also II.380c, III.392a (ποιηταὶ καὶ λογοποιοὶ), 392d (πάντα ὅσα ὑπὸ μυθολόγων ἢ ποιητῶν λέγεται). On Plato’s citations of poetry in the dialogue, see Halliwell (2000). The Athenian Stranger discusses the problem of poetry further in book VII of the *Leg.*, which fittingly sets out to describe the “rearing and education” of the young (τροφήν μὲν πού καὶ παιδείαν; 788a). See e.g. 801a-3d; see further Meyer (2011).

<sup>59</sup> “It seems, then, that we must exercise oversight over those who undertake to say myths such as these as well and compel them absolutely not to slander the things in the house of Hades, but rather to praise them, so that they do not say things that are both false and unbeneficial for those that are set to become warriors” (δεῖ δὴ, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἡμᾶς ἐπιστατεῖν καὶ περὶ τούτων τῶν μύθων τοῖς ἐπιχειροῦσι λέγειν, καὶ δεῖσθαι μὴ λοιδορεῖν ἀπλῶς οὕτως τὰ ἐν Ἅιδου, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ἐπαινεῖν, ὡς οὐτ’ ἀληθῆ λέγοντας οὐτ’ ὠφέλιμα τοῖς μέλλουσι μαίμοις ἔσσεσθαι; III.386b-c). Cf. 387b.

<sup>60</sup> After Socrates has concluded and summarized both arguments, Adeimantus gives the final words of book II with the proclamation, “I entirely accept these models and I would use them as laws” (παντάπασι... ἔγωγε τοὺς τύπους τούτους συγχωρῶ καὶ ὡς νόμοις ἂν χρῶμην; 383c). They seem to serve as an emphatic, discrete pairing.

<sup>61</sup> “It must be opposed in every way that someone says these things in his own city—for someone to say that god, being good, is responsible for evil—if it is to become a well-ordered city. Nor must anyone hear it, neither younger nor older, neither in meter or mythologized without. This is because if they are said, they would not be said piously, nor would they be beneficial to us nor consistent with themselves” (κακῶν δὲ αἴτιον φάναι θεόν τινα γίνεσθαι ἀγαθὸν ὄντα, διαμαχετέον παντὶ τρόπῳ μήτε τινὰ λέγειν ταῦτα ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ πόλει, εἰ μέλλει εὐνομέσεσθαι μήτε τινὰ ἀκούειν, μήτε νεώτερον μήτε πρεσβύτερον, μήτ’ ἐν μέτρῳ μήτε ἄνευ μέτρου μυθολογούντα, ὡς οὔτε ὅσα ἂν λεγόμενα, εἰ λέγοιτο, οὔτε ζύμφορα ἡμῖν οὔτε σύμφωνα αὐτὰ αὐτοῖς; 380b-c). This argument reappears fittingly following a discussion of Achilles (391d-e), whose image of two jars in *Il.* XXIV is a particularly famous example of attributing evil to Zeus. See also Hes. *Op.* 663-8. Socrates’ second argument is that it is silly to imagine that a god would change their form, such as in the myths of Proteus and Thetis (381d), because any such changes are unworthy of the sempiternal stability of the divine: “do you think that god is a sorcerer and the sort to treacherously appear in

traditional stories violate such central assumptions, there will be a need for new stories upon which to rear the guardians, such as the myth of Er that concludes the *Respublica*. Socrates' myth, furthermore, serves to reinforce the central ethical message of the dialogue that we must become just—to have harmonious souls, in which each part fulfills its proper role, just as every class in the just city fulfills its<sup>62</sup>—through philosophy. That is, it is not enough just to be just, but one must become just for the right reasons, which must be grounded in metaphysical understanding of what the just itself is.<sup>63</sup>

The problem of divine scandals in the traditional stories emerges particularly in the second and third books, following Thrasymachus' fierce contention in the first against Socrates and the other interlocutors that justice is merely “acting for the benefit of the stronger.”<sup>64</sup>

Glaucon, Plato's brother, is unsatisfied and asks whether justice is preferable in and of itself,

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different forms at different times, that at one moment he appears in one form then charges it into many shapes, at another he deceives us and makes things seem real about him? Or do you think that he is simple and least of all things would depart from his own form?” (ἄρα γόητα τὸν θεὸν οἶει εἶναι καὶ οἶον ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς φαντάζεσθαι ἄλλοτε ἐν ἄλλαις ἰδέαις, τοτὲ μὲν αὐτὸν γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀλλάττοντα τὸ αὐτοῦ εἶδος εἰς πολλὰς μορφάς, τοτὲ δὲ ἡμᾶς ἀπατῶντα καὶ ποιοῦντα περὶ αὐτοῦ τοιαῦτα δοκεῖν, ἢ ἀπλοῦν τε εἶναι καὶ πάντων ἥκιστα τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἰδέας ἐκβαίνειν; 380c-d). He further argues that any change in god would necessarily (ἀνάγκη) be from the better to the worse, because god is definitionally deficient in neither beauty nor virtue (ἐνδεᾶ... τὸν θεὸν κάλλους ἢ ἀρετῆς; 381c). God, Socrates concludes, is necessarily free from all deception (οὐκ ἄρα ἔστιν οὐ ἕνεκα ἂν θεὸς ψεύδοιτο). He combines this general critique with the specific critique of presenting a god as a goetic shapeshifter (μῆτε αὐτοῦς γόητας ὄντας τῷ μεταβάλλειν ἑαυτοῦς; 383a).

<sup>62</sup> “We are right to say, I think, Glaucon, that a man is just in the same way in which a city is just... But we have not somehow forgotten this, that the city is just when each of its three classes attends to its own affairs... Is it not fitting for the rational part to rule, since it is wise and consideration for the entire soul, and is it not fitting for the passionate part to be a subservient ally to it?” (καὶ δίκαιον δὴ, ὦ Γλαῦκων, οἶμαι φήσομεν ἄνδρα εἶναι τῷ αὐτῷ τρόπῳ ὄπερ καὶ πόλις ἦν δικαία... ἀλλ' οὐ πῆ μὴν τοῦτό γε ἐπιλελήσμεθα, ὅτι ἐκεῖνη γε τῷ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἕκαστον ἐν αὐτῇ πράττειν τριῶν ὄντων γενῶν δικαία ἦν... οὐκοῦν τῷ μὲν λογιστικῷ ἄρχειν προσήκει, σοφῷ ὄντι καὶ ἔχοντι τὴν ὑπὲρ ἀπάσης τῆς ψυχῆς προμήθειαν, τῷ δὲ θυμοειδεῖ ὑπηκόω εἶναι καὶ συμμάχῳ τούτου; IV.441d-e). See further 442a-e and Socrates' summary in *Ti.* 17c-d. For a very different approach, cf. Altman (2012), who extensively attacks Leo Strauss on political grounds throughout his scholarship—especially (2010)—yet employs a style of selective interpretation reminiscent of Strauss to argue away much of the explicit political argumentation of the *Resp.*

<sup>63</sup> Plato is still the *locus classicus* for moral realism. See especially Rist (2002) and (2012). See also Carone (2005). Cf. Kant (1785), as translated by Wood (2002): “For as to what is to be morally good, it is not enough that it conform to the moral law, but it must also *happen for the sake of this law*; otherwise, that conformity is only contingent and precarious, because the unmoral ground will now and then produce lawful actions, but more often actions contrary to the law” (6).

<sup>64</sup> φημι γὰρ ἐγὼ εἶναι τὸ δίκαιον οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἢ τὸ τοῦ κρεῖττονος συμφέρον (I.338c); see further 341a and 344c. He is initially described as “tensing himself up as if a beast and leaping as if he meant to tear us apart” (συστρέψας ἑαυτὸν ὡσπερ θηρίον ἤκεν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς ὡς διαρπασόμενος; 336b).

because it leads to good things such as reputation and rewards, or for both reasons. Adeimantus, Glaucon's other brother, responds by questioning how one could not think of rewards and punishments, given the prevalence of each in myths. Particularly, he draws attention to how they impact their audience, a problem that becomes central for the subsequent discussion:

My dear Socrates... all these sorts of things that are said about virtue and wickedness, how gods and men honor them, what do we think they do to the souls of the young that hear them? What should the young infer, those that are well-disposed and capable, conclude from these things when they flit about, so to speak, towards everything they hear about what sort of person to be and the path by which someone could conduct life in the best way possible?<sup>65</sup>

Educated by stories of unjust rewards, Adeimantus worries, the young are wrongly convinced that it is more important to seem just than to actually be just.

After some intervening discussion of the nature of the city, Socrates returns to education in his discussion of the guardians and reintroduces the problem of poetry.<sup>66</sup> He treats the issue more broadly than Adeimantus and argues that the earliest education consists in myths, even before children are ready to learn music and gymnastics, “for it is then that it is molded best and the impression sets in best.”<sup>67</sup> As a result, Socrates argues, the utmost care must be taken:

First of all, at it seems likely, we must have oversight of the makers of myths (μυθοποιοῖς); we must judge and include what they make that is beautiful and exclude what is not. Conversely, we will persuade both nurses and mothers to tell the children the myths that are selected for inclusion and so to shape their souls with myths even more

<sup>65</sup> ταῦτα πάντα... ὃ φίλε Σώκратες, τοιαῦτα καὶ τοσαῦτα λεγόμενα ἀρετῆς πέρι καὶ κακίας, ὡς ἄνθρωποι καὶ θεοὶ περὶ αὐτὰ ἔχουσι τιμῆς, τί οἰόμεθα ἀκουούσας νέων ψυχὰς ποιεῖν, ὅσοι εὐφυεῖς καὶ ἱκανοὶ ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ λεγόμενα ὥσπερ ἐπιπτόμενοι συλλογίσασθαι ἐξ αὐτῶν ποῖός τις ἂν ὦν καὶ πῆ πορευθεὶς τὸν βίον ὡς ἄριστα διέλθοι; (365a-b). See also III.392a-b. Plato depicts how such stories, “myths that are said about the things in the house of Hades, where it is necessary to pay the penalty for unjust deeds” (οἱ τε γὰρ λεγόμενοι μῦθοι περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου, ὡς τὸν ἐνθάδε ἀδικήσαντα δεῖ ἐκεῖ διδόναι δίκην; I.330d-e), have started to impact Cephalus as he advances into old age.

<sup>66</sup> After concluding that the ideal “guardian” (φύλαξ) will be “philosophical, brave, quick, and strong” (φιλόσοφον δὴ καὶ φιλομαθὴ καὶ ταχὺς καὶ ἰσχυρὸς; 376c), Socrates connects the topic of education back to the initial discussion of justice: “how should we rear and educate them? Perhaps this is a sort of preliminary question to the main topic we are examining, on the sake of which we examine everything now: in what way does justice and injustice come about in a city?” (θρέφονται δὲ δὴ ἡμῖν οὗτοι καὶ παιδευθήσονται τίνα τρόπον; καὶ ἄρα τι προὔργον ἡμῖν ἐστὶν αὐτὸ σκοποῦσι πρὸς τὸ κατιδεῖν, οὐπὲρ ἔνεκα πάντα σκοποῦμεν, δικαιοσύνην τε καὶ ἀδικίαν τίνα τρόπον ἐν πόλει γίγνεται; 376c-d). He emphasizes the mythical character (ἐν μύθῳ μυθολογοῦντές) of the following discussion.

<sup>67</sup> μάλιστα γὰρ δὴ τότε πλάττεται καὶ ἐνδύεται τύπος (377b).

than they shape their bodies with their hands but most of the myths that they tell now will have to be thrown out.<sup>68</sup>

Because the stakes are highest in early childhood, when children are most impressionable, Socrates' regime would regulate not only the myths of the poets, but all stories that mothers and nurses tell the children they rear. In book X, he particularly emphasizes the myths of the poets, but in books II to III, compulsion is broadly proposed for all conveyers of myth, artisans as well as mothers and nurses, lest the guardians-in-training should hear or see anything baleful for the soul.<sup>69</sup> He is particularly emphatic that the myth of the succession of the gods must not be depicted, or, if it is, only on the rarest and most prohibitively expensive of occasions.<sup>70</sup> The conversation turns, however, to cover the acceptable way to mythologize about “gods and *daemones* and heroes and the things in the house of Hades,” and finally humans, recalling

<sup>68</sup> πρῶτον δὴ ἡμῖν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐπιστατητέον τοῖς τοῖς μυθοποιοῖς, καὶ ὄν μὲν ἂν καλὸν ποιήσωσιν, ἐγκριτέον, ὄν δ' ἂν μὴ, ἀποκριτέον· τοὺς δ' ἐγκριθέντας πείσομεν τὰς τροφούς τε καὶ μητέρας λέγειν τοῖς παισὶ καὶ πλάττειν τὰς ψυχὰς αὐτῶν τοῖς μύθοις πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ σώματα ταῖς χερσίν, ὧν δὲ νῦν λέγουσι τοὺς πολλοὺς ἐκβλητέον (377b-c).

<sup>69</sup> “Must we oversee and compel only the poet to either engrave the image of good character in his poems or not write them at all among us, or must we also oversee the other craftsmen and hinder them for engraving bad character—unrestrained, servile, ugly character—in their works, whether in pictures of animals or house paintings or in any other kind of crafting, ... lest our guardians should be reared among images of evil” (ἄρ' οὖν τοῖς ποιηταῖς ἡμῖν μόνον ἐπιστατητέον καὶ προσαναγκαστέον τὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ εἰκόνα ἤθους ἐμποιεῖν τοῖς ποιήμασιν ἢ μὴ παρ' ἡμῖν ποιεῖν, ἢ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις δημιουργοῖς ἐπιστατητέον καὶ διακωλυτέον τὸ κακὸς τοῦτο καὶ ἀκόλαστον καὶ ἀνελεύθερον καὶ αἰσχημον μῆτε ἐν εἰκόσι ζώων μῆτε ἐν ἄλλω μηδὲν δημιουργουμένω ἐμποιεῖν, ... ἵνα μὴ κακίας εἰκόσι τρεφόμενοι ἡμῖν οἱ φύλακες...; 401b). Rather, only beautiful works should reach their vision or hearing (ἢ πρὸς ὄψιν ἢ πρὸς ἀκοήν; 401c).

<sup>70</sup> “First then, there is the greatest lie about the most important matters, what Hesiod ignobly lied about what Uranus had done, as well as what Cronus did in vengeance. I think that, even if the deeds of Cronus and his sufferings at the hands of his son are true, I think that they should not be easily spoken to either fools or children. Rather, it must be with the greatest silence, and, if it is necessary somehow to speak it, it must be heard during a rare and secret ritual, only after a sacrifice, not of a pig but something exotic and prohibitively difficult to procure, so that as few as possible might happen to hear it” (πρῶτον μὲν... τὸ μέγιστον καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων ψεύδος ὁ ἐπὶ τῶν καλῶς ἐψεύσατο ὡς Οὐρανός τε ἠργάσατο ἃ φησι δρᾶσαι αὐτὸν Ἡσίοδος, ὃ τε αὐτὸν Κρόνος ὡς ἐτιμωρήσατο αὐτόν. τὰ δὲ δὴ τοῦ Κρόνου ἔργα καὶ πάθη ὑπὸ τοῦ υἱοῦ, οὐδ' ἂν εἰ ἦν ἀληθὴ ᾧμιγν δεῖν ῥαδίως οὕτως λέγεσθαι πρὸς ἀφρονάς τε καὶ νέους, ἀλλὰ μάλιστα μὲν σιγᾶσθαι, εἰ δὲ ἀνάγκη τις ἦν λέγειν, δι' ἀπορρήτων ἀκούειν ὡς ὀλιγίστους, θυσασμένους οὐ χοῖρον ἀλλὰ τι μέγα καὶ ἄπορον θῦμα, ὅπως ὅτι ἐλαχίστοις συνέβη ἀκοῦσαι; 377e-8a). The myth is best known from Hesiod. It features in Classical art as well: although the extant artistic depictions of Cronus are relatively few, the swallowing of his children or the stone make up the entirety of depictions that contain mythological scenes (nos. 21-25, cf. 26-7) surveyed by Serbeti (1992).

Adeimantus' concern that some myths perversely depict the prospering of the unjust and so dangerously delude their audience.<sup>71</sup>

In the last book of the *Respublica*, criticism again returns to myth, but more specifically poetic imitation, which the next section examines further. Socrates mingles this, however, with his ethical criticism. Poets—especially tragic poets and Homer, “their commander”<sup>72</sup>—are objectionable because they aim at the lowest levels of the soul. Rather than seeking to make the young better, they inevitably make them worse.<sup>73</sup> For this, Socrates notoriously proposes to banish Homer and other poets from the city, although he allows that the lovers of poetry could secure their return, if they can prevail as champions in prose and show that poetry is beneficial as well as pleasurable.<sup>74</sup> Plato's Socrates himself, however, seems to present two such defenses of myth in the *Respublica*: the possibility of allegorical interpretation and the recasting of traditional material into ethically beneficial myths to play a role in philosophical education. Socrates briefly discusses allegorical interpretation as a possible defense of myth in book II,

<sup>71</sup> *περὶ γὰρ θεῶν ὡς δεῖ λέγεσθαι εἴρηται, καὶ περὶ δαιμόνων τε καὶ ἡρώων καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου (392a). Socrates points out the connection to the earlier discussion and considers the matter concluded (τὰ μὲν δὴ λόγων πέρι ἐχέτω τέλος; 392c).*

<sup>72</sup> *ἐπισκεπτέον τὴν τε τραγωδίαν καὶ τὸν ἡγεμόνα αὐτῆς Ὅμηρον (598d).*

<sup>73</sup> “And for this reason, we would be acting justly by not allowing him into the city, if it is to be run well, because he rouses and nurtues and strengthens that part of the soul while destorying the rational part, just as in the city whenever someone empowers malefactors and betrays the city, but destroys the nobler men.” (*καὶ οὕτως ἦδη ἂν ἐν δίκη οὐ παραδεχοίμεθα εἰς μέλλουσαν εὐνομεῖσθαι πόλιν, ὅτι τοῦτο ἐγείρει τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τρέφει καὶ ἰσχυρὸν ποιῶν ἀπόλλυσι τὸ λογιστικόν, ὥσπερ ἐν πόλει ὅταν τις μοχθηροὺς ἐγκρατεῖ ποιῶν παραδιδῶ τὴν πόλιν, τοὺς δὲ χαριεστέρους φθείρη;* 605a-b). He continues, “shall we affirm that the imitative poet too does the same thing? That they implant an evil constitution in the soul of each person, but, by imagining phantasms that are far removed from truth, gratify the irrational part that cannot even distinguish between greater and lesser things? Or worse, the part that thinks something is greater at one point, then lesser at another?” (*ταῦτόν καὶ τὸν μιμητικὸν ποιητὴν φήσομεν κακὴν πολιτείαν ἰδίᾳ ἐκάστου τῆ ψυχῆ ἐμποιεῖν, τῷ ἀνοήτῳ αὐτῆς χαριζόμενον καὶ οὔτε τὰ μείζω οὔτε τὰ ἐλάττω διαγιγνώσκοντι, ἀλλὰ τὰ αὐτὰ τοτὲ μὲν μεγάλα ἡγουμένῳ, τοτὲ γὰρ μικρά, εἶδωλα εἰδωλοποιούντα, τοῦ δὲ ἀληθοῦς πόρρω πάνυ ἀφεστῶτα (605b-c).* See further 604c-6d and *Grg.* 502b-d. Cf. Proclus on the parts of the myths and the parts of the soul, discussed *infra* pg. 207.

<sup>74</sup> “Let us grant, then, to her champions, who are not poets but lovers of poetry, to speak unmetered speech on her behalf, that she is not only pleasurable but also beneficial to the citizens and human life generally; let us listen charitably” (*δοῖμεν δὲ γέ που ἂν καὶ τοῖς προστάταις αὐτῆς, ὅσοι μιμητικοί, φιλοποιηταὶ δέ, ἄνευ μέτρου λόγον ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς εἰπεῖν, ὡς οὐ μόνον ἠδεῖα ἀλλὰ καὶ ὠφελίμη πρὸς τὰς πολιτείας καὶ τὸν βίον τὸν ἀνθρώπινόν ἐστιν· καὶ εὐμενῶς ἀκουσόμεθα;* 607d). Cf. Naddaff's (2002) characterization of Plato—given the tensions between the critiques of poetry in the last and the earlier books, as well as the poetic myth of Er—as a “self-subverting thinker” (3).



although he ultimately rejects it. Scandalous passages of Homer, such as Zeus' threat to hurl Hephaestus to the ground at the end of the first book of the *Iliad*, must not be allowed into the city, Socrates argues, "either embedded in allegories or without allegories."<sup>75</sup> The idea behind this sort of interpretation is that a myth is conveying its meaning in a puzzling manner, which only appears to be objectionable, while the hidden meaning is profoundly insightful or beneficial.

Plato provides examples of this sort of interpretation in the *Cratylus*, a dialogue that centers around the argument that "a name is not just what some people happen to come together and call it... but that there is by nature a certain rightness of names for everything, both among Greeks and non-Greeks."<sup>76</sup> Particularly in the case of the names of the gods, Socrates shows how many have a specifically intellectual significance, even in the superlatively scandalous Hesiodic succession myth:

It might seem entirely outrageous at first to hear that Zeus is the son of Cronus, but it would be well said that he is the offspring of some great intellect. For *koros* signifies not a child (*paida* [cf. *kouros*]), but his absolute purity (*koros*) of mind (*nous*). He is the son of Uranus, as the account goes. In turn, sight turned upward would be well called by the name "the heavens" (*ourania*), because looking upwards, which is how the astrologers say one obtains a pure mind, Hermogenes, is rightly given the name Uranus.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> ... οὐτ' ἐν ὑπονοίαις πεποιημένας οὔτε ἄνευ ὑπονοιῶν (378d). Socrates uses the terminology of "underlying significance" (ὑπονοία), while the terminology would expand by Plutarch's time to also include allegory, the literal meaning of which is something like "indicating something else" (ἀλληγορία): e.g. ... ταῖς πάλαι μὲν ὑπονοίαις ἀλληγορίας δὲ ... (*Quomodo adul.* 19e-f). See also the conclusion to *De Pyth. or.* 409c-d. To Cicero, the latter term seems to refer to obscure (*Att.* II.20.3) or flexible (*Orat.* 27.94) language.

<sup>76</sup> καὶ οὐ τοῦτο εἶναι ὄνομα ὃ ἂν τινες ξυνηθέμενοι καλεῖν καλῶσι, ... ἀλλὰ ὀρθότητά τινα τῶν ὀνομάτων πεφυκέναι καὶ Ἑλλήσι καὶ βαρβάροις τὴν αὐτὴν ἅπασιν (383a-b). Linguistic differences, both within Greece and beyond, is a central contention for Hermogenes' critique this thesis (385d-e), but Socrates introduces the figure of the name-giver (ὀνοματουργοῦ) as a sort of law-giver (νομοθέτης; 388e-9a), who "looks toward the true name itself" (βλέποντα πρὸς αὐτὸ ἐκεῖνο ὃ ἔστιν ὄνομα) and makes an imitation in syllables (συλλαβάς) that might differ from those of other name-givers, just as smiths instantiate the same idea with different iron (389d-9a). It does not matter, Socrates concludes, whether the man is Greek or not. Cf. 409d-e. Much of the scholarship on the etymologies of the *Crat.* has been philosophically negative, but cf. Sedley (1998b) and Barney (2001). Baxter (1992) argues strongly against the tendency in seeking an individual source for the etymologies (86-106).

<sup>77</sup> τοῦτον δὲ Κρόνον ὄν ὑβριστικὸν μὲν ἂν τις δόξειεν εἶναι ἀκούσαντι ἐξαίφνης, εὐλογον δὲ μεγάλης τινὸς διανοίας ἔκγονον εἶναι τὸν Δία· κόρον γὰρ σημαίνει οὐ παῖδα, ἀλλὰ τὸ καθαρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκίρατον τοῦ νοῦ. ἔστι δὲ οὗτος Οὐρανοῦ ὕος, ὡς λόγος· ἡ δὲ αὐτὸ ἐς τὸ ἄνω ὄψις καλῶς ἔχει τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα καλεῖσθαι, "οὐρανία," ὀρῶσα τὰ ἄνω, ὅθεν δὴ καὶ φασιν, ὧ Ἑρμόγετες, τὸν καθαρὸν νοῦν παραγίγνεσθαι οἱ μετεωρολόγοι, καὶ τῷ οὐρανῷ ὀρθῶς

Although the name Cronus implies the violent story that so scandalized Plato, these two intellectualizing etymologies make the names of Zeus' progenitors appropriate for the god. Perhaps this sort of interpretation might be beneficial for the right sort of audience, although this part of the *Cratylus* emphasizes its irony by attributing Socrates' solutions to either divine inspiration or the influence of Euthyphro;<sup>78</sup> toward the end of the dialogue, Socrates concludes that it is "better by far to learn and things through themselves, rather than through names."<sup>79</sup> These etymological interpretations are ingenious, however, and it would be irresponsible to expect the young, as they are being educated, to understand them: "this is because a young person is not able to judge what is an allegory and what is not, but rather are at that age where whatever opinions they grasp become ineradicable and unchangeable."<sup>80</sup> For Socrates' purposes in the *Respublica*, the possibility of allegorical interpretation does not mitigate the likely harm of such stories in education, since the young will not yet be able to guard themselves from such ruinous damage.<sup>81</sup>

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τὸ ὄνομα κεῖσθαι (396b-d). This interpretation, which Hermogenes attributes to divine inspiration and Socrates to Euthyphro (396d-e), is one of the most emphatic in the dialogue, and it becomes one of the most influential in Neoplatonism (cf. 400d, 401e). See also the etymologies of *daemones* (*Crat.* 398b-c) and Athena (406d-7c).

<sup>78</sup> Hermogenes remarks that Socrates seems "to suddenly proclaim oracles, just as inspired men do" (ὥσπερ οἱ ἐνθουσιῶντες ἐξαίφνης χρησιμωδεῖν; 396d), while Socrates claims that the "inspiration" came to him from Euthyphro, "an inspired man... of *daemonic* wisdom" (ἐνθουσιῶν... δαιμονίας σοφίας; 396d).

<sup>79</sup> οὐκ ἐξ ὀνομάτων ἀλλὰ πολὺ μᾶλλον αὐτὰ ἐξ αὐτῶν καὶ μαθητέον καὶ ζητητέον ἢ ἐκ τῶν ὀνομάτων (439b). He had offered Cratylus a dichotomy: "which is the nobler or cleared way to learn? To learn from the image whether whether it has been likened well itself as well as the truth of which it is an image, or to learn from the truth the truth itself as well as whether the image of it has been fittingly likened?" (ποτέρα ἂν εἴη καλλίων καὶ σαφεστέρα ἢ μάθησις; ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνας μαθάνειν αὐτὴν τε αὐτὴν εἰ καλῶς εἴκασται, καὶ τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἧς ἦν εἰκόν, ἢ ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας αὐτὴν τε αὐτὴν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτῆς εἰ περὶ πόντως εἴργασται; 439b-c). Cratylus affirms the latter.

<sup>80</sup> ὁ γὰρ νέος οὐχ οἶός τε κρίνειν ὅ τί τε ὑπόνοια καὶ ὁ μή, ἀλλ' ἂ τε ἂν τηλικούτος ὢν λάβῃ ἐν ταῖς δόξαις, δυσέκνιπτά τε καὶ ἀμετάστατα φιλεῖ γίγνεσθαι (378d).

<sup>81</sup> This objection does not stem the popularity of such interpretations, however, among the Platonists of the Empire, including Plutarch. On the Neoplatonic commentary on the dialogue, evidently largely excerpted from Proclus, see Duvick (2007: 1-4).

## *The Myth of Er*

Recasting the myths into educationally acceptable forms constitutes another means of surmounting Socrates' challenge. He does not discuss this possibility explicitly, but implicitly provides examples even in the *Respublica*.<sup>82</sup> While the myths of tradition pose danger to the ethical development of the young, the figures and images can be rearranged into a prose narrative that serves a philosophical purpose as an ethical exhortation.<sup>83</sup> In Socrates' conclusion to the dialogue, the myth of Er reinforces a central theme in such a way that complements the argumentation, the incommensurate preferability of practicing justice and, relatedly but even more importantly, living philosophically.<sup>84</sup> The myth has, however, had a mixed reception among recent scholars. Julia Annas, for instance, found it to be incongruous with the rest of the dialogue because it provides consequentialist reasons for being just, which are categorically avoided elsewhere in the dialogue.<sup>85</sup> Ronald Johnson argued to the contrary that the myth does, in fact,

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<sup>82</sup> See especially Van Riel (2017) on *Resp.* 378e-9a (119).

<sup>83</sup> Socrates emphasizes the exhortative nature of the myth of Er both immediately before relating it—"it is necessary to hear [about the rewards] so that each person might fully receive what is beneficial to hear from the argument" (χρή δ' αὐτὰ ἀκοῦσαι, ἵνα τελέως ἐκάτερος αὐτῶν ἀπειλήφῃ τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου ὀφειλόμενα ἀκοῦσαι; 614a)—and immediately after—"the myth might save us, if we believe it" (μῦθος ... ἡμᾶς ἂν σώσειεν, ἂν πειθώμεθα αὐτῷ; 621c).

<sup>84</sup> See e.g. *Resp.* V.475b-6b. See also e.g. *Phdr.* 256a-b.

<sup>85</sup> Annas is particularly negative in her introduction to the *Resp.* (1981): "The Myth of Er is a painful shock; its vulgarity seems to pull us right down to the level of Cephalus, where you take justice seriously when you start thinking about hell-fire. It is not only that the childishness of the myth jars; if we take it seriously, it seems to offer us an entirely consequentialist reason for being just, thus undermining Plato's sustained effort to show that justice is worth having for the agent in a non-consequentialist way. Your present life determines how you fare after death, so it is unwise to be unjust, because short enjoyment on earth will be followed by tenfold torment in hell (615a-b). How can this be squared with the Republic's sustained attempt to show us that justice is worth having for itself and for the rewards its nature brings about?" (349-50). Annas also refers to earlier claims that book X, as a whole, is an "appendix" or an "excrescence" (335). She later (1982) softens her position: "Although we find reincarnation implausible, and even grotesque, the Myth of Er has more serious moral appeal than the last judgement myth. For we find it plausible that we choose to be good, or not, against the background of a cosmos that is indifferent to individuals' concerns and does not necessarily guarantee rewards for our being just. It is not seriously open to us to espouse the moral optimism expressed in the *Gorgias* and *Phaedo* myths. Nobody but an exceptionally naive or ignorant theist could believe that just individuals will always be rewarded in the end" (138). See also Malabou (2017: 42-3).

reinforce the main arguments of the dialogue.<sup>86</sup> Stephen Halliwell more recently surveys “incongruities” within the myth and suggests a “this-wordly” reading, although he notes that the argument for the immortality of the soul leaves “a dilemma that the myth creates but cannot resolve itself.”<sup>87</sup> It seems, nevertheless, to form an ethical exhortation to Glaucon and the other interlocutors, no less than Socrates in the conclusion to the *Phaedo* that bids its audience to believe his myth there or something like it until a better conception is found.<sup>88</sup> After the further critique of poetry in book X, the subject returns again to the question of “the rewards and prizes for virtue.”<sup>89</sup> Socrates continues to hold that the soul should choose justice for its own sake, even if there is no reward—“did we not discover that justice itself is the best thing for the soul itself, and that it must act justly, whether or not it has the ring of Gyges, or even the helmet of Hades to go along with the ring?”<sup>90</sup>—but he allows, in addition, that the gods will reward the just after death, just as men reward justice in life; these are specifically those who “become just, practice virtue, and become as like to god as possible for a human” (ὁμοίωσις θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν), as Plato formulates the ideal aim of philosophy in the *Theaetetus* and *Respublica*, as he does elsewhere throughout the corpus.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> 1999. He criticizes Annas in particular (1-5) then argues that the myth “completes the argument by showing that the just life is worth living in this world *and* in whatever world may lie beyond it. Far from being ‘scrappy’ and ‘unsatisfactory,’ the Myth of Er completes the work by way of a symbolic summary that embodies the *Republic*’s main images and even puts its own ironic twist on the Homeric myths” (12).

<sup>87</sup> “a this-worldly reading of the myth of Er supports the cumulative moral case made by the entire *Republic* for the identification of a good and happy life with a just life” (470). See also Thayer (1988: esp. 377-9). On the immortality of the soul in *Resp.* X, see Robinson (1967).

<sup>88</sup> 114c-d. See *infra* pg. 256.

<sup>89</sup> ... ἐπίχειρα ἀρετῆς καὶ προκείμενα ἄλλα ... (608c).

<sup>90</sup> οὐκοῦν... αὐτὸ δικαιοσύνην αὐτῇ ψυχῇ ἄριστον ἡύρομεν, καὶ ποιητέον εἶναι αὐτῇ τὰ δίκαια, ἐάντ’ ἔχη τὸν Γύγου δακτύλιον, ἐάντε μή, καὶ πρὸς τοιοῦτῳ δακτυλίῳ τὴν Ἄιδος κυνῆν; (612b). Gyges’ ring refers to Glaucon’s thought experiment in book II (359a-60d), while Hades’ helmet of invisibility goes back to Homer (*Il.* V.844-5).

<sup>91</sup> ... δίκαιος γίνεσθαι καὶ ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετὴν εἰς ὅσον δυνατόν ἀνθρώπου ὁμοιοῦσθαι θεῶν (613a-b). See *infra* pg. 94.

The myth describes the soul of a soldier named Er, who seemed to fall in battle but rose again on his funeral pyre to recount its journey after it left the body.<sup>92</sup> He came to a sort of meeting place of souls, both of souls arriving from earth and those returning from thousand-year periods of punishment or reward, based on how they conducted their previous life.<sup>93</sup> They travel to another place and behold the mechanism that governs the broadest stretches of the physical world in the image of the “spindle of Necessity” (Ἀνάγκης ἄτρακτον), which guides the motion of the eight planets, described as its colorful whorls; a Siren stands upon each of the circles as they revolve and utter one voice with one tone, which all come together to make a harmonious music.<sup>94</sup> The daughters of Necessity, the three Fates, “garbed in white and wearing garlands upon their heads, Lachesis, Clotho, and Atropos,” sing together in harmony with the Sirens.<sup>95</sup> The names of the fates are familiar from the Hesiodic *Theogonia*, but while the poet describes them as “they who grant it to mortals from the time of their birth to have both the good and the bad,” the philosopher does away with the implication that goddesses could be responsible for evil, instead dividing their roles temporally:<sup>96</sup> Lachesis sings of what was, Clotho sings of what has

<sup>92</sup> “‘I will indeed not tell you,’ I said, ‘a speech for Alcinous, but of a brave (*alkimou*) man—Er, son of Armenius, Pamphylian in race. Long ago, he died in war, and when all the corpses were laid out and already rotting after ten days, he was taken for burial still healthy. He was taken homeward to be buried on the day, but came back to life. Once he came back, he described what he had seen there. He said that when he departed from there, his soul travelled in the company of many, and they arrived into some wondrous place, ...’” (ἀλλ’ οὐ μέντοι σοι, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, Ἀλκίμου γε ἀπόλογον ἐρῶ, ἀλλ’ ἀλκίμου μὲν ἀνδρὸς Ἦρος τοῦ Ἀρμενίου, τὸ γένος Παμφύλου· ὅς ποτε ἐν πολέμῳ τελευτήσας, ἀναιρεθέντων δεκαταίων τῶν νεκρῶν ἤδη διεφθαρμένων, ὑγιῆς μὲν ἀνηρέθη, κοσμισθεὶς δ’ οἴκαδε μέλλων θάπτεσθαι δωδεκαταῖς ἐπὶ τῇ πυρᾷ κείμενος ἀνεβίω, ἀναβιοῦς δ’ ἔλεγεν ἃ ἐκεῖ ἴδοι; X.614a-b).

<sup>93</sup> 614b-5c.

<sup>94</sup> ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν κύκλων αὐτοῦ ἄνωθεν ἐφ’ ἐκάστου βεβηκέναι Σειρήνα συμπεριφερομένην, φωνὴν μίαν εἰῖσαν, ἕνα τόνον ἐκ πασῶν δὲ ὀκτῶ οὐσῶν μίαν ἁρμονίαν ζυμφωνεῖν (617b). See Halliwell (2007: 456-7). On Necessity, cf. Emped. frg. B115 Diels.

<sup>95</sup> ἄλλας δὲ καθήμενας πέριξ δι’ ἴσου τρις, ἐν θρόνῳ ἐκάστην, θυγατέρας τῆς Ἀνάγκης Μοίρας λευχειμονούσας, στέμματα ἐπὶ τῶν κεφαλῶν ἐχούσας, Λάχεσιν τε καὶ Κλωθῶ καὶ Ἄτροπον, ὑμνεῖν πρὸς τὴν τῶν Σειρήνων ἁρμονίαν (617b-c). Plutarch dedicates a symposiastic vignette to discussion of the Sirens in the myth. See *infra* 222.

<sup>96</sup> αἶτε βροτοῖσι / γεινομένοισι διδοῦσιν ἔχειν ἀγαθόν τε κακόν τε (218-9). They appear as daughters of grim Night: “she bore Fates and brutally punishing Dooms, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos” (καὶ Μοίρας καὶ Κῆρας ἐγένετο νηλεοποιούσας, / Κλωθῶ τε Λάχεσιν τε καὶ Ἄτροπον; 217-8). They are said, presumably to Plato’s horror, to punish the transgressions (παραβασίας) of gods as well as humans (220).

come to be, and Atropos sings of what will be.<sup>97</sup> The governance of Necessity and her daughters stretches throughout all time and all of the visible world.

These names taken from traditional myth, and others—namely Lethe and those of the earlier generations of heroes such as Orpheus—are arranged as parts of a harmoniously governed world.<sup>98</sup> The Fates ensure that human choice is properly punished or rewarded no less than they ensure the continued motion of the spheres. After Er and the souls behold the spindle and the Fates, they are told to go to Lachesis' throne, where they will pick their next lives in an order determined by lot. Her priest (προφήτην) gives a proclamation explaining the significance of their choice:

This is the account of Lachesis, daughter of Necessity. Souls, alive for but a day, this is the beginning of another period of mortal life, a sort that will inevitably bring death. No *daemon* has chosen you by lot, but rather you all will choose the *daemon* for this life, which will accompany you out of necessity. Virtue has no master, but rather, each that honors it more and dishonors it less shall have it. The responsibility belongs to the chooser: god is blameless.<sup>99</sup>

Each human, according to the myth, has an element of choice in their fate, even though the world is governed according to necessity. Part of this governance is ethical: good decisions, made with philosophical moderation and care, are necessarily rewarded, while evil ones are punished—brutally, in the case of incurable tyrants, whom Plato depicts as tortured and flayed as a warning to other souls at the beginning of the myth.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Λάχεσιν μὲν τὰ γεγονότα, Κλωθῶ δὲ τὰ ὄντα, Ἄτροπον δὲ τὰ μέλλοντα (617c). They each also play a role in the rotation of the heavenly sphere (617c-d).

<sup>98</sup> Lethe: 621a-b; Orpheus: 620a. Plato's parade of traditional figures includes, among others, Ajax, Atalanta, and Thersites (620b-c). On this passage, see especially Moors (1988).

<sup>99</sup> Ἀνάγκης θυγατρὸς κόρης Λαχέσεως λόγος. ψυχαὶ ἐφήμεροι, ἀρχὴ ἄλλης περιόδου θνητοῦ γένους θανατηφόρου. οὐχ ὑμᾶς δαίμων λήξεται, ἀλλ' ὑμεῖς δαίμονα αἰρήσθω βίον, ᾧ συνέσται ἐξ ἀνάγκης. ἀρετὴ δὲ ἀδέσποτον, ἣν τιμῶν καὶ ἀτιμάζων πλέον καὶ ἔλαττον αὐτῆς ἕκαστος ἔξει. αἰτία ἐλομένου· θεὸς ἀναίτιος (617d-e).

<sup>100</sup> 615e-6a. Plato's depiction of eternal torment for incurable tyrants proved to provoke great controversy, especially among Epicureans, such as Colotes, who claimed, among other things, that he contradicted himself by disallowing poetic depictions of fearful things in the underworld from the education of the guardians yet included such descriptions in his own myths. See *infra* pg. 196.

Yet the ethical machinery described embedded in the narrative is complicated by the final sequence, the picking of lots and choosing of fates. Socrates—after giving an extensive exhortation directed to Glaucon that the most important thing for us is to be able to distinguish the good from the bad<sup>101</sup>—has Lachesis’ priest announce that the lots are not determinative of the souls’ fates, since the first choosers could choose poorly and receive horrible fates, while the last will still have good opportunities.<sup>102</sup> The subsequent narrative depicts various souls choosing fates, with playful recastings of traditional characters from the generations of heroes, but the first and last especially illustrate Socrates’ underlying point that the most important thing for humans is to learn how to choose well—that is, philosophically.<sup>103</sup> The first soul to choose misses the priest’s point entirely and condemns himself to misery:

[Er] said that the first to choose and approach picked the greatest of tyrannies, because out of gluttonous folly he did not examine all it contained sufficiently before he choose and did not realize that the life was fated to eat his own children and various other evils. After he examined it at greater length, he mourned and bewailed his choice, but he did not abide by the proclamations of the priest: he did not blame himself for these evils, but rather fate and the *daemones* and everything except himself.<sup>104</sup>

The soul, Er explains, was one of those who had been rewarded for living justly, but, because he had been living in a well-ordered city, he “practiced virtue out of habit, rather than through philosophy.”<sup>105</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Each of us, Socrates exhorts (ὃ φίλε Γλαύκων; 618b), must take care (ἐπιμελητέον) to learn how to distinguish good and bad lives (βίον καὶ χρηστὸν καὶ πονηρὸν διαγιγνώσκοντα; 618c). Plato characteristically reveals that the better life is the philosophical one.

<sup>102</sup> “Even to the one coming last, if he chooses with attention and lives earnestly, a desirable life lies in store, not a bad one. Let neither the first to choose lack attention, not let the last be discouraged” (καὶ τελευταίῳ ἐπιόντι, ξὺν νῶ ἔλομένῳ, συντόνωσ ζῶντι κείται βίος ἀγαπητός, οὐ κακός, μήτε ὁ ἄρχων αἰρέσεως ἀμελείτω μήτε ὁ τελευτῶν ἀθυμείτω; 619b). Cf. Halliwell’s (2007) discussion of 619d (465-6).

<sup>103</sup> On this section, see Moors (1988).

<sup>104</sup> τὸν πρῶτον λαχόντα ἔφη εὐθὺς ἐπιόντα τὴν μεγίστην τυραννίδα ἐλέσθαι, καὶ ὑπὸ ἀφροσύνης τε καὶ λαιμαργίας οὐ πάντα ἱκανῶς ἀνασκεινόμενον ἐλέσθαι, ἀλλ’ αὐτὸν λαθεῖν ἐνοῦσαν εἰμαρμένην παίδων αὐτοῦ βρώσεις καὶ ἄλλα κακά: ἐπειδὴ δὲ κατὰ σχολὴν σκέψασθαι, κόπτεσθαι τε καὶ οὐδύρεσθαι τὴν αἴρεσιν, οὐκ ἐμμένοντα τοῖς προρρηθεῖσιν ὑπὸ τοῦ προφήτου· οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτὸν αἰτιᾶσθαι τῶν κακῶν, ἀλλὰ τύχην τε καὶ δαίμονα καὶ πάντα μᾶλλον ἀνθ’ ἑαυτοῦ (619b-c).

<sup>105</sup> ... ἔθει ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας ἀρετῆς μετελιηφότα (619d).

This might seem to introduce an element of what we could call moral luck into the *Respublica*'s eschatological sketch.<sup>106</sup> The soul suffers because its circumstances were only conducive to a sort of surface-level virtue. Nothing required it to become virtuous for the right reasons, which is to say for philosophical reasons. Souls, moreover, require other virtues, which the myth especially depicts with a refashioned image of Lethe:<sup>107</sup> “then, at evening, they camped on the banks of the river Carelessness, where no container can hold the water; it is necessary for all to drink a measure of water, but there are those who are not saved by their prudence from drinking more than the measure.”<sup>108</sup> To the extent that we can learn from the past and remember it, the myth suggests, the better we will fare. The soul that picked the last lot, that of Odysseus, represents this aspect of the ethical exhortation most clearly. It evidently remembers its lessons from suffering, thus managing to make a better choice:<sup>109</sup>

By chance, Odysseus' soul was lotted to be the last of all to choose, but because it remembered its previous sufferings, it abated from ambition and looked around for a long time, looking for the life of a private man sheltered from politics. He found it lying somewhere, neglected by the others. When he saw it, he remarked that he would have chosen the same even if he had gotten the first lot and chose gladly.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>106</sup> The myth of Er thus raises a serious ethical problem, although the only solution it seems to offer is an exhortation to live philosophically. I discuss the problem of moral luck further, in light of Plutarch's related myth in *De sera*, *infra* pg. 229.

<sup>107</sup> “Then the others came and all were conveyed into the plain of Lethe through stifling heat, because it is barren of trees and whatever else the earth grows” (ἐπειδὴ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι διήλθον, πορεύεσθαι ἅπαντας εἰς τὸ τῆς Λήθης πεδῖον διὰ καύματός τε καὶ πνίγους δεινοῦ· καὶ γὰρ εἶναι αὐτὸ κενὸν δένδρων τε καὶ ὅσα γῆ φύει; 621a). On the traditional name, see Ar. *Ran.* 186; cf. Hes. *Th.* 227.

<sup>108</sup> σκιναῖσθαι οὖν σφᾶς ἤδη ἐσπέρας γιγνομένης παρὰ τὸν Ἀμέλητα ποταμὸν, οὗ τὸ ὕδωρ ἀγγεῖον οὐδὲν στέγειν. μέτρον μὲν οὖν τι τοῦ ὕδατος πᾶσιν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι πιεῖν, τοὺς δὲ φρονήσει μὴ σφροζομένους πλέον πίνειν τοῦ μέτρον (621a). Socrates ends his speech, in part, with an exhortation to believe the myth so as that “we might cross the river of Lethe well” (τὸν τῆς Λήθης ποταμὸν εὖ διαβησόμεθα; 621c).

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Sen. *Prov.*: “god has a fatherly mind towards good men and loves them forcefully; ‘let them be roused,’ he says, ‘by toils and sorrows and losses, so that they might gain true strength’” (*patrium deus habet aduersus bonos uiros animum et illos fortiter amat et “operibus” inquit “doloribus damnis exagitantur, ut uerum colligant robur;”* 2.5). Suffering, for Seneca, is not an occasion to learn, as in the myth of Er, but an opportunity to showcase virtue and to please father Jupiter, should he be watching, as Cato did while the Republic fell to ruin around him (II.9-10).

<sup>110</sup> κατὰ τύχην δὲ τὴν Ὀδυσσεῶς λαχοῦσαν πασῶν ὑστάτην αἰρησομένην ἰέναι, μνήμη δὲ τῶν προτέρων πόνων φιλοτιμίας λελωφικῶαν ζητεῖν περιοῦσαν χρόνον πολὺν βίον ἀνδρὸς ιδιώτου ἀπράγμονος, καὶ μόγις εὐρεῖν κείμενόν που καὶ παρημελημένον ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ εἰπεῖν ἰδοῦσαν ὅτι τὰ αὐτὰ ἂν ἔπραξεν καὶ πρώτη λαχοῦσα, καὶ ἀσμένην ἐλέσθαι (620c-d). Cf. Malabou (2017).



The myth of Er punctuates the discussion of justice in the *Respublica*, which has been a thread throughout the dialogue, from Socrates' debate with the would-be tyrant, Thrasymachus, to the examination of constitutions towards the end. It reinforces a lesson that was inherent in the most philosophically salient parts, such as the allegory of the cave and the image of the divided line: the good must be pursued beyond the physical world and our souls ordered harmiously in imitation of the perfect order of the eternal and unchanging idea. Plato's recasting of traditional mythology, stripped of the notorious impieties of the epic poets and other purveyors of tales, can serve as powerful exhortations that reinforce a dialogue's central ideas.<sup>111</sup> The form of a philosophical myth, although it is fundamentally imitative, as the next section discusses, allows Plato an avenue to usurp the prestige of the traditional myths through constructing mythic "likely accounts," such as Timaeus' lengthy speech in the dialogue named after him.

### *Imitation, likeness, and unreality*

While traditional myths, such as the ones conveyed in the Hesiodic poems, were attacked by philosophers for what was taken to be ethical absurdity they attracted criticisms for physical absurdity just as early.<sup>112</sup> Xenophanes mocks anthropomorphic depictions of the gods by imagining how horses and cows would depict the gods if they could paint and followed a similar logic of self-projection to that of Greek anthropomorphism.<sup>113</sup> Heraclitus criticizes the many for

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<sup>111</sup> "The myth was saved and did not perish," Socrates concludes to Glaucon, "and it might save us if we believe it" (... ὃ Γλαύκων, μῦθος ἐσώθη καὶ οὐκ ἀπόλετο, καὶ ἡμᾶς ἂν σώσειεν, ἂν πειθόμεθα αὐτῷ; 621b-c). Ferrari (2009) argues that the myth is particularly directed at Glaucon, who remains a lover of honor rather than wisdom.

<sup>112</sup> The Hesiodic account of Chaos as the first entity (116-7), however, could be a spur to natural philosophy, as is said of Epicurus (τοῦτό φασιν ἐνιοὶ αἴτιον γεγονέναι Ἐπικούρῳ τῆς ἐπὶ τὸ φιλοσοφεῖν ὁρμῆς; Sext. Emp. *Math.* X.18, see also Diog. Laert. X.2). Cf. Plut. *De Is.* 374c and Damascius *De principiis* 319.16-320.5.

<sup>113</sup> "But if cows and horses and bulls had hands, and they painted with their hands to make the sorts of works that men do, horses would depict the gods with bodies of similar forms to horses and cows with cows..." (ἀλλ' εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες <ἵπποι τ'> ἢ ἐλέοντες / ἢ γράψαι χεῖρεςσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἄπερ ἄνδρες, / ἵπποι μὲν θ' ἵπποισι βόες δέ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίας / καὶ <κε> θεῶν ἰδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ' ἐποίουν...; frg. B15 Diels). See also frg. 16: "Ethiopians

believing Hesiod, for instance, when he says that Day is the child of Night—“for they are one.”<sup>114</sup> Rationalizers, such as Hecataeus, Palaephatus, or the sort of man mocked by Socrates in the beginning of the *Phaedrus* as having too much time to hunt for the origins of the notion of centaurs, object that if beasts of legend came about in the past, they would still be happen among us now.<sup>115</sup> The problem of falsehood in myth, however, is especially weighty for Plato because he seems to hold that it can, nevertheless, somehow lead to truth—truth in the strong sense of apprehension of eternal and unchanging things, like the good itself or the form of the good.<sup>116</sup> If the poets, for instance, are to some extent divinely inspired—as he holds with some irony in the *Apologia* and the *Ion*, but far less so in the *Phaedrus* and *Leges*—how can part or all of their myths be false?<sup>117</sup> How can we then move from images to truth? The problem is further

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say that their gods are snub-nosed and black-skinned, while Thracians say theirs are blue-eyed and red-haired” (Αἰθιοπέες τε <θεοὺς σφετέρους> σιμοὺς μέλανάς τε / Θρηϊκῆς τε γλαυκοὺς καὶ πυρροὺς <φασὶ πέλεσθαι>). He criticizes anthropomorphism more generally in B14.

<sup>114</sup> διδάσκαλος δὲ πλείστων Ἡσίοδος τοῦτον / ἐπίστανται πλεῖστα εἰδέναι, ὅστις ἡμέρην καὶ εὐφρόνην οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν· ἔστι γὰρ ἓν (frg. B57 Diels). Cf. Hes. *Th.* 124-5. Heraclitus is critical of both traditional and contemporary authorities—Homer (especially B56), Archilochus (B42), Pythagoras (B129), and Xenophanes as well as Hecataeus (B40)—on grounds that seem more to do with general absurdity rather than moral: “For what knowledge or sense do they have? They trust the singers of the peoples and use the throng as teacher, unaware that most are bad, but a few are good” (τίς γὰρ αὐτῶν / νόος ἢ φρήν; δῆμων ἀοιδοῖσι πείθονται καὶ διδασκά/λοι χρεῖωνται ὁμίλῳ οὐκ εἰδότες ὅτι “οἱ πολλοὶ / κακοί, ὀλίγοι δὲ ἀγαθοί;” B104).

<sup>115</sup> Palaephatus, whom Stern (1996) argues was a contemporary of Aristotle (1-4), expresses this principle most clearly: “whatever forms and shapes are said to have arisen once, but which are not still present, these never existed at all” (ὅσα δὲ εἶδη καὶ μορφαὶ εἰσι λεγόμεναι καὶ γενόμεναι τότε, αἶ νῦν οὐκ εἰσὶ, τὰ τοιαῦτα οὐκ ἐγένοντο; pref. 9-11). The fifth century historian Hecataeus, however, may be the earliest of this sort of rationalizer: “Hecataeus declares it thus. These things I write, as they seem to truly be to me, since there are many laughable accounts among the Greeks, as is obvious to me” (Ἐκαταῖος Μιλήσιος ὧδε μυθεῖται· τάδε γράφω, ὡς μοι δοκεῖ ἀληθέα εἶναι· οἱ γὰρ Ἑλλήνων λόγοι πολλοὶ τε καὶ γελοῖοι, ὡς ἐμοὶ φαίνονται, εἰσίν; frg. 1 Jacoby). Some of his particular gripes are preserved, such as what Pausanias calls a “likely account” (λόγον εὖρεν εἰκότα): because it is ridiculous for Hercules to drag a hound up from the underworld, the story refers to a dangerous snake (ὄφιν... δεινόν) which earned the metaphorical name on account of its venom (III.25.4 = frg. 27). See also Palaephatus XXXIX. On Hecataeus’ rationalization of myth, see Herren (2017: 87-91). In the *Phdr.* Socrates characterizes this sort of man, who “corrects the shape of centaurs” (τὸ τῶν Ἴπποκενταύρων εἶδος ἐπανορθοῦσθαι), as “extremely clever and laborious but not fortunate” (λίαν δὲ δεινοῦ καὶ ἐπιπόνου καὶ οὐ πάνυ εὐτυχοῦς ἀνδρός) because “if someone should disbelieve and reduce each of these things according to what is likely... he will need much leisure” (αἷς εἴ τις ἀπιστῶν προσβιβᾷ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἕκαστον, ἄτε ἀγροίκῳ τινὶ σοφία χρώμενος, πολλῆς αὐτῷ σχολῆς δεήσει; 229e) Socrates dismisses the task in favor of the pursuit of self-knowledge (σκοπῶ οὐ ταῦτα ἀλλ’ ἐμαντόν; 230a). For a proposal of the significance of the passage for the dialogue as a whole, see Griswold (1986: 36-44).

<sup>116</sup> This is perhaps most clearly laid out in the analogy of the sun in the *Resp.* (VI.507b-9c).

<sup>117</sup> Poetic inspiration, the possibility that divine truth is conveyed through the poet, although he might not understand the truth of his verses, occurs more broadly throughout the corpus, such as in the short dialogue, the *Ion*, that is

complicated, however, in light of the expansiveness of the category of image in the corpus, both in the *Respublica* as well as the *Cratylus* and *Timaeus*: all words and all physical objects are meaningfully images for Plato. He sees, moreover, a strong correlation between stability and knowability, such that images categorically cannot be as well known as their models. In this section, I examine the status of images in Platonic philosophy, which bears on artistic imitation, the signifying power of words, and the relation of the entire physical world to the changeless reality beyond. In the next section, I suggest that Plato employs a certain kind of mythic narrative, seems to identify specific narratives—especially exemplified by *Timaeus*' "likely myth" or "account"—as appropriate to philosophy. Rather than striving to deceive the reader, as with the kind of myths Socrates rejects in *Respublica* II, III, and X, *Timaeus*' teleological tale emphasizes its own fictionality—its status as an image, a hypothetical account that might be worthy of belief, but is certainly not equivalent to the truth itself. Plato thus both criticizes the deceptive power of imitative myths, while also providing a model for how a certain sort of myth can serve a valuable philosophical function.

The distinction between images and models is thus crucial for Plato's metaphysics.<sup>118</sup> Images, the category that includes myths and stories, are particularly ambiguous in the *Respublica*, however, in light of the broader ambiguity of the broader critique of imitation (*mimêsis*) in the last book.<sup>119</sup> Socrates introduces the issue through the metaphor of

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dedicated to the topic. It contains, for example, a famous image of a magnetized chain (533c-4a), such that the truth is transmitted from the gods to the poet to the rhapsode and finally to the audience, although each of the lower rings may well fail to apprehend it. The topic also appears in the *Ap.* (22a-d) and, more sympathetically, in the *Phdr.* (245a-b). See further Tigerstedt (1969). This question of inspiration reaches its height with Proclus, who is spurred to a three-fold distinction in types of poetry to explain how inspired and non-inspired—ethical or mimetic—poetry could coexist in figures such as Homer (*In Remp.* VI).

<sup>118</sup> E.g. Porter (2010): "Plato's thought, from his metaphysics to his poetics, is unthinkable apart from his theory of the image... Platonic metaphysics rests on the assumption of an image that is copied in successive stages, each suffering a derogation from the original Form or *idea*" (75).

<sup>119</sup> The book opens by confirming (ὁρθῶς ὑκίζομεν) what was said earlier about poetry (περὶ ποιήσεως) and imitation (595a).

craftsmanship, resting on “our customary procedure” of speculating one idea (εἶδος) from many instances.<sup>120</sup> There are many tables, but only one idea of table. The former are made only in reference to the latter: “surely, are we also accustomed to say that the craftsman of any artifact thus creates looking to the idea, whether he makes couches or tables or any of this sort of thing which we use? No craftsman somehow crafts the idea itself—how would that work?”<sup>121</sup> The individual tables would not exist without the idea of the table, whereas the idea of the table could exist without any given individual table. The former is, according to Plato, categorically more real than the latter.<sup>122</sup> Socrates playfully proposes carrying around a mirror and producing images of visual things, such as the sun and artifacts, which prompts Glaucon to summarize the fundamental ontological distinction:<sup>123</sup> “surely these are things that appear and not things that really exist in truth.”<sup>124</sup> Through the course of the conversation, Socrates extends the argument to first painters, whom he had also criticized on ethical grounds in the earlier books, and then to poets. Both, he argues, do not imitate realities, but rather images.<sup>125</sup> A depiction of the

<sup>120</sup> ἐκ τῆς εἰωθυίας μεθόδου (596a). Whether Plato thinks that there actually is an idea or form of the table, an artifact contingent on human invention rather than a universal, or whether this is simply an example, is unclear. On Aristotle’s difficult treatment of the problem for Plato in *Metaph.* I, see esp. Fine (1977: 81-8). Other physical entities present other sorts of problems. In the *Prm.*, for instance, Socrates and Parmenides doubt whether there are forms of things such as “hair, mud, and filth” (θριξ καὶ πηλὸς καὶ ῥύπος; 130c). Cf. *Resp.* X.597b-c, on which see especially Cherniss (1932).

<sup>121</sup> οὐκοῦν καὶ εἰώθαμεν λέγειν, ὅτι ὁ δημιουργὸς ἑκατέρου τοῦ σκεύους πρὸς τὴν ιδέαν βλέπων οὕτω ποιεῖ ὁ μὲν τὰς κλίνας, ὁ δὲ τὰς τραπέζας, αἷς ἡμεῖς χρώμεθα, καὶ τὰλλα κατὰ ταυτά; οὐ γάρ που τὴν γε ιδέαν αὐτὴν δημιουργεῖ οὐδεὶς τῶν δημιουργῶν· πῶς γάρ; (596b).

<sup>122</sup> The key concept seems to be contingency: the image could not exist without the model, because the image is contingent upon the model, while as the model could easily exist without the image, because it is not contingent.

<sup>123</sup> “If you should want to carry around a mirror everywhere, it will not be difficult to quickly create things everywhere. You will quickly make the sun and the things of the heavens, the earth, and yourself and all of the other animals, as well as artifacts and plants and everything which now exists” (οὐ χαλεπός... ἀλλὰ πολλαχῆ καὶ ταχὺ δημιουργούμενος, τάχιστα δὲ που, εἰ ‘θέλεις λαβὼν κάτοπτρον περιφέρειν πανταχῆ· ταχὺ μὲν ἥλιον ποιήσεις καὶ τὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ταχὺ δὲ γῆν, ταχὺ δὲ σαυτὸν τε καὶ τὰλλα ζῶα καὶ σκευὴ καὶ φυτὰ καὶ πάντα ὅσα νυνδὴ ἐλέγετο; 596d-e). Some scholars, such as Capra (2017: 82-3), consider this a reference to Agathon’s mirror in *Ar. Thesm.*

<sup>124</sup> ναί... φαινόμενα, οὐ μέντοι ὄντα γέ που τῇ ἀληθείᾳ (596e).

<sup>125</sup> “It is necessary to investigate whether they have come across imitators and been deceived when they saw their works, which they did not realize are twice removed from reality, and easy to create for one with no knowledge of the truth” (δεῖ δὲ ἐπισκέψασθαι πότερον μιμηταῖς τούτοις οὗτοι ἐντυχόντες ἐξηπάτηνται καὶ τὰ ἔργα αὐτῶν ὀρώντες οὐκ αἰσθάνονται τριττὰ ἀπέχοντα τοῦ ὄντος καὶ ῥάδια ποιεῖν μὴ εἰδότες τὴν ἀλήθειαν; 598e-9a); “then would you call the craftsman of a product twice removed from nature the imitator?” (εἴεν... τὸν τοῦ τρίτου ἄρα γεννήματος ἀπὸ τῆς φύσεως μιμητὴν καλεῖς; 597e). See also Naddaff (2002: 83-91).

manufactured table, by this logic, is yet another step removed from reality, an image of an image, because it is made with reference only to the imitation, and not to the reality.

Much of the critique of poetry in book X, however, is rooted in the ethical criticism that the last section examined. Socrates is concerned that the young are especially susceptible to mimetic deception.<sup>126</sup> This is all the worse in the case of poetry, such as tragedy, because it seeks to influence the lowest parts of the soul in detrimental ways.<sup>127</sup> It nevertheless seems that the criticism in book X is directed at mimetic poetry for its quality of being mimetic and not just the deleterious ethical effects of certain kinds of mimesis such as tragedy. Towards the beginning of the book, Socrates introduces the topic by affirming that he thinks they were correct in the earlier discussion “to prohibit entirely as much of poetry as is imitative.”<sup>128</sup> Poetry, moreover, is held to be persuasive because of its adornments—its aesthetic qualities such as metre and harmony that give the image the appearance of reality, its “bewitching” effect, rather than any knowledge on the part of the imitative poet.<sup>129</sup> Socrates banishes not just Homer from the city, however, but “all

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<sup>126</sup> Socrates worries that listeners will be misled by imitative (μιμητική) poetry if they do not “possess a cure, the knowledge of what these very things actually are” (μη ἔχουσι φάρμακον τὸ εἰδέναι αὐτὰ οἷα τυγχάνει ὄντα; 595b). He later argues that a convincing painting of a carpenter may deceive “children and fools” (παῖδας τε καὶ ἄφρονας ἀνθρώπους; 598c).

<sup>127</sup> Any mimetic art, Socrates earlier claimed, necessarily aims at the part of the soul that is furthest from the intelligence (πόρρω δ’ αὖ φρονήσεως; 603a).

<sup>128</sup> τὸ μηδαμῆ παραδέχεσθαι αὐτῆς ὅση μιμητική (595a). His subsequent statement, however, already seems to anticipate the argument that bad sorts of imitation such as tragedy aim at the lowest parts of the soul: “It seems even clearer now that it is not to be accepted, since the different parts of the soul have been distinguished” (παντὸς γὰρ μᾶλλον οὐ παραδεκτέα νῦν καὶ ἐναργέστερον, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, φαίνεται, ἐπειδὴ χωρὶς ἕκαστα διήρηται τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς εἶδη; 595a). Cf. Gould (1964: 85-7).

<sup>129</sup> “We will say that the poetic man renders the affairs of each of the arts through the color of words and phrases, ignorant of anything but imitation, such that he seems to the comparably ignorant to know about them through his words, whether he should speak about cobbling or generalship or anything else in metre, rhythm, and harmony, he will seem to speak very well. Thus is the nature of these things to bear some great bewitchment” (τὸν ποιητικὸν φήσομεν χρώματα ἄττα ἐκάστων τῶν τεχνῶν τοῖς ὀνόμασι καὶ ῥήμασιν ἐπιχρωματίζειν αὐτὸν οὐκ ἐπαίοντα ἀλλ’ ἢ μιμῆσθαι, ὥστε ἐτέροις τοιούτοις ἐκ τῶν λόγων θεωροῦσι δοκεῖν, ἐάντε περὶ σκυτοτομίας τις λέγη ἐν μέτρῳ καὶ ῥυθμῷ καὶ ἁρμονίᾳ, πάνυ εὖ δοκεῖν λέγεσθαι, ἐάντε περὶ στρατηγίας ἐάντε περὶ ἄλλου ὅτουοῦν· οὕτω φύσει αὐτὰ ταῦτα μεγάλην τινὰ κήλησιν ἔχειν; 601a-b). He continues the metaphor of witchcraft (γοητείας; 602d) and distinguishes the knowledge of those who use, those who make, and those who imitate things (χρησομένην, ποιήσουσαν, μιμησομένην; 601d), the latter being the least.

poetry and imitation directed at pleasure.”<sup>130</sup> There seems to be something inherently dangerous about imitation itself in Plato’s eyes, at least when wielded by the wrong sorts.

Scholars have argued, however, that there are tensions between this critique of imitation and other parts of the *Respublica*.<sup>131</sup> Elsewhere in book X, Socrates allows two sorts of poetry: “the only poetry that must be allowed into the city are hymns to the gods and praises of good men.”<sup>132</sup> These sorts of poems are still mimetic, even if Plato would not consider them as ethically dangerous, if executed fittingly.<sup>133</sup> Scholars as early as J. Tate also point to tensions with the discussion of imitation in book III, which distinguishes different sorts of imitation.<sup>134</sup> The dialogue is, moreover, replete with images, such as the analogy of the sun, the image of the divided line, and the allegory of the cave.<sup>135</sup> Plato often describes his myths, moreover, with the language of imagery, such as in the *Phaedrus*. Within the *Respublica*, the divided line in particular is an image that bears on the nature of images, and arguably it depicts a positive

<sup>130</sup> ἡ πρὸς ἡδονὴν ποιητικὴ καὶ ἡ μίμησις (607c); “depiction, and all imitation, produces a distinctive product that is far from truth” (ἡ γραφικὴ καὶ ὅλως ἡ μιμητικὴ πόρρω μὲν τῆς ἀληθείας ὄν αὐτῆς ἔργον ἀπεργάζεται; 603a).

<sup>131</sup> The scholarship on imitation in the *Resp.* is vast. There are at least two relevant Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy articles, for instance: Griswold (2016 [2003]) and Pappas (2016 [2008]). Gould (1964) distinguishes Aristotle’s aesthetics from Plato’s. See also Partenie (2004): “This contradiction, however, could hardly fail to make us wonder; and Plato, like Aristotle, believed that wonder is what triggers the very act of philosophizing” (xxvi, citing *Tht.* 155d). On the metaphysical significance of the distinction between models and images in Plato, see especially Patterson (1985).

<sup>132</sup> ὅσον μόνον ὕμνους θεοῖς καὶ ἐγκώμια τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ποιήσεως παραδεκτέον εἰς πόλιν (607a).

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Tate (1928: 16).

<sup>134</sup> 392c-400a. See also 388b and 401b-2a. Tate (1928) distinguishes three “styles” of imitation in book III: the “non-imitative style, which is the style of the virtuous man,” which the guardians must practice by imitating good people like themselves; the “imitative style, which is natural to the an of opposite character,” which poets practice by likening their characters to every sort of person and not just the virtuous; and a “style compounded” of the two (18). Tate argues that only the first is acceptable to Plato. He later (1932) expands his argument from the *Resp.* to the entire Platonic corpus. Cf. Nehamas (1982: 47-54). See also Moss (2007: 415-7). Belfiore (1984), however, convincingly argues that the treatment of imitation in the two books is coherent. Capra (2017) identifies the real contradiction as *Resp.* X and the depiction of Socrates composing poetry in *Phd.* 61b (84-5).

<sup>135</sup> The analogy of sun precedes the divided line in book VI (507b-9c). Plutarch draws on this image in *De fac.*, as I argue *infra* pg. 323. The allegory of the cave takes place in the book following the divided line (VII.514a-20a). Glaucon introduces the story of Gyges (ἃ μυθολογοῦσιν θαυμαστὰ; II.359d) to use his magic ring (δακτύλιον), which can turn the wearer invisible, for a thought experiment (359c-160b). Next, he compares two hypothetical men. Socrates playfully responds by comparing the men (τοῖν ἀνδρῶν) with statues (ὥσπερ ἀνδριάντα; 361d). See also Socrates’ utilization of the image of the sea-god Glaucus to represent the soul (X.611d-e).

philosophical role for a certain kind of image.<sup>136</sup> Socrates introduces the image of a “line cut in twain with unequal cuts,” such that there are two sides of different lengths.<sup>137</sup> The main division in the line is between the sense-perceptible world and the intellectual world, the latter being “clearer” and more real than the former, and each side is further subdivided.<sup>138</sup> On the sense-perceptible side of the line, the two parts are physical things and images (εἰκόνες) of them, which Socrates exemplifies with shadows and reflections (φαντάσματα).<sup>139</sup> In the intellectual portion, one side, represents inquiry that must “use images” (εἰκόσιν χρωμένη) and move “from hypotheses” (ἐξ ὑποθέσεων), while the other represents apprehension of the intellectual form “without images” (ἄνευ... εἰκόνων).<sup>140</sup> As he further clarifies with the example of the practitioners of geometry, it is possible to use images in pursuit of intellectual reality, although they are presumably categorically different from the kinds of images on the sense-perceptible side of the line.<sup>141</sup> Perhaps there are kinds of images that differ not in their ethical impacts, but in their

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<sup>136</sup> The highest and clearest part of reality, the intelligible form, which the preceding part of the dialogue had described as the form of the good through analogy with the sun, is only intelligible by the mind itself, with no part of sense perception, but also with no part of the images and hypotheses that apparently characterize the next highest part of reality. Socrates assigns a certain faculty to each level of reality or unreality reflected by a part of the line. The highest human faculty, intelligence (νόησιν), does not seem to have any use for images, but it is unclear that the understanding (διάνοιαν), the next highest, can move away from images. The other faculties are belief (πίστιν) and imagination (εἰκασίαν). Cf. *Ep.* VII.342a-d.

<sup>137</sup> γραμμὴν δίχα τετμημένην... ἄνισα τμήματα (VI.509d). See Kahn (1996: 294-6). Foley (2008) argues that the middle portions of the line will turn out equal if a reader constructs a diagram of the line according to Socrates' instructions, which he argues is meant to spur the reader to transcend the text. Plutarch dedicates the third of his *Quaest. Plat.* to the question of which side of the divided line is longer: see *infra* pg. 149.

<sup>138</sup> νόησον τοίνυν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὥσπερ λέγομεν, δύο αὐτῶ εἶναι, καὶ βασιλεύειν τὸ μὲν νοητοῦ γένους τε καὶ τόπου, τὸ δ' αὖ ὄρατοῦ, ἵνα μὴ οὐρανοῦ εἰπὼν δόξω σοὶ σοφίζεσθαι περὶ τὸ ὄνομα. ἀλλ' οὖν ἔχεις ταῦτα διττὰ εἶδη, ὄρατόν, νοητόν; (509d).

<sup>139</sup> 509e-10a.

<sup>140</sup> ... ἃ οὐκ ἂν ἄλλως ἴδοι τις ἢ τῆ διανοίᾳ... τοῦτο τοίνυν νοητόν μὲν τὸ εἶδος (511a).

<sup>141</sup> “I think that you know that those who concern themselves with geometry, calculation, and things of this sort, who assume the even, odd, shapes, the three angels, and similar things through this method; they treat them as known and as hypotheses. They do not make any further account of them, neither to themselves nor to others, but rather think that they proceed entirely from clear thinks, and begin to explain everything else from them...” (οἶμαι γὰρ σε εἰδέναι ὅτι οἱ περὶ τὰς γεωμετρίας τε καὶ λογισμοῦς καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πραγματευόμενοι, ὑποθέμενοι τὸ τε περιττόν καὶ τὸ ἄρτιον καὶ τὰ σχήματα καὶ γωνιῶν τριττὰ εἶδη καὶ ἄλλα τούτων ἀδελφὰ καθ' ἐκάστην μέθοδον, ταῦτα μὲν ὡς εἰδότες, ποιησάμενοι ὑποθέσεις αὐτά, οὐδένα λόγον οὔτε αὐτοῖς οὔτε ἄλλοις ἐτι ἀξιοῦσι περὶ αὐτῶν διδόναι ὡς παντὶ φανερῶν, ἐκ τούτων δ' ἀρχόμενοι τὰ λοιπὰ ἤδη διεξιόντες τελευτῶσιν...; 510c-d). The allegory of the cave could similarly present a positive role for images, insofar as the eyes of the freed prisoner cannot withstand light of the sun at first, such that he must look in reflections in water at first. See also *Resp.* X.595e-6a.

relation to the reality that they signify, but if so, Plato is not explicit about such a division in the *Respublica*. In the *Sophista*, the Eleatic stranger does suggest such a dichotomy of “forms of imagemaking,” between the arts of likenesses and illusions, although it is not clear how, or whether, this could help to explain the positive philosophical uses of images in the *Respublica*.<sup>142</sup>

The concepts of imitation and images, however, are treated much more expansively in the broader Platonic corpus, although they cohere in their essential metaphysical details.<sup>143</sup> He expands the category of image to make it clear that any earthly inquiry requires grappling with imitation. In the *Cratylus*, Socrates analyzes names as images of things, imitations which are like the object that they imitate.<sup>144</sup> Hermogenes asks what sort of imitation (μίμησις) a name is and Socrates begins by distinguishing the quality of its imitation from music and painting: “is it true that all things have sound and shape, and many have color as well? ... It does not seem to me that someone imitates these things, nor that the art of naming is to be found in these imitations; for those arts are music and painting.”<sup>145</sup> Socrates instead asks, “if someone might be able to imitate the thing itself of each thing, the essence (οὐσίαν), in letters and syllables, would he not

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<sup>142</sup> τὸ δύο ἔλεγον εἶδη τῆς εἰδωλοποιικῆς, εἰκαστικὴν καὶ φανταστικὴν (236c). The Eleatic stranger at one point suggests that the sophist is a “some sort of sorcerer, an imitator of real things,” (... τῶν γοήτων ἐστὶ τις, μιμητὴς ὧν τῶν ὄντων; 235a), which eventually prompts him to “divide the art of imagemaking” (διαρεῖν τὴν εἰδωλοποιικὴν τέχνην; 235b). A likeness is said to be made when someone follows “the symmetries of the model in length, breadth, and depth; in addition to these, they give them fitting colors for each” (κατὰ τὰς τοῦ παραδείγματος συμμετρίας τις ἐν μήκει καὶ πλάτει καὶ βάθει, καὶ πρὸς τούτοις ἔτι χρώματα ἀποδίδουσι τὰ προσήκοντα ἐκάστοις; 235d-e). An Illusion (φάντασμα), in contrast to an image (εἰκόνα), are made when “someone should abandon the true symmetry of beautiful things” (εἰ γὰρ ἀποδιδόειν τὴν τῶν καλῶν ἀληθινὴν συμμετρίαν) to create proportions that look more realistic from a single angle (235e-6c). On this passage, see Gill (2012: 147-8, 170-1) and especially Van Riel (2017)

<sup>143</sup> On this issue, I follow the Unitarian school of Platonic interpretation, which is perhaps still best represented by Shorey (1903). On imitation in particular, cf. Halliwell (2002): “To deny that Plato ever offers us a wholly fixed, let alone monolithic, doctrine of mimesis is not to deny that some recurrent, underlying anxieties are traceable beneath the surface of relevant passages in his text” (39).

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Socrates in the *Resp.*: “A lie, then, is not unmixed, since it is an image in words and a later after-image of some state of the soul” (ἐπεὶ τὸ γε ἐν τοῖς λόγοις μίμημά τι τοῦ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ἐστὶ παθήματος καὶ ὕστερον γεγονὸς εἶδωλον, οὐ πάνυ ἄκρατον ψεῦδος; II.382b-c).

<sup>145</sup> ἔστι τοῖς πράγμασι φωνὴ καὶ σχῆμα ἐκάστω, καὶ χρῶμά γε πολλοῖς; ... ἔοικε τοίνυν οὐκ ἂν τις ταῦτα μιῆται, οὐδὲ περὶ ταύτας τὰς μιμήσεις ἢ τέχνη ἢ ὀνομαστικὴ εἶναι. αὐταὶ μὲν γὰρ εἰσιν ἢ μὲν μουσικὴ, ἢ δὲ γραφικὴ (423d). The comparison with painting recurs throughout the discussions of imitation (424d-e, 425a-b, 430b, 434a-b).



show what each thing is?”<sup>146</sup> Socrates’ examples extend to both nouns and verbs, the main parts of speech discussed in the dialogue, which shows that all language is fundamentally imitative.<sup>147</sup> Words represent things by representing some quality of them through likenesses.<sup>148</sup> Poems are composed, therefore, of many images and imitations, but so is any discourse composed in human language, including philosophical dialogues.

In the *Timaeus*, the category of image is expanded to include everything in the sense-perceptible world. Critias beckons Timaeus to “first speak beginning from the birth of the universe, concluding with human nature.”<sup>149</sup> He begins by making a few critical—and quintessentially Platonic—assumptions: there is a difference between something “existing” (τι τὸ ὄν ἀεί) which means to be “always existing uniformly,” and for something to be in a state of “becoming” (τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί); the former is apprehensible to the mind (νοήσει) with the use of reason, because it is always existing in the same way, while as the latter is apprehensible to opinion (δόξει) through irrational perception because it suffers generation and degeneration, and therefore without ever truly existing.<sup>150</sup> Only things in “becoming” have causes because they are necessarily contingent on things that have “being,” whereas things that have “being” are definitionally never contingent on anything. After this tightly argued proof, Timaeus introduces

<sup>146</sup> τί οὖν; εἴ τις αὐτὸ τοῦτο μιμεῖσθαι δύναίτο ἐκάστου, τὴν οὐσίαν, γράμμασι τε καὶ συλλαβαῖς, ἄρ’ οὐκ ἂν δηλοῖ ἕκαστον ὃ ἔστιν; (423e). Socrates considers several possibilities for how names were originally chosen but does not commit himself to any (425d-6b).

<sup>147</sup> The terms “to flow” (τῷ ρεῖν) and “stream” (ῥοῆ), for instance, “imitate the motion through the letter” (διὰ τούτου τοῦ γράμματος τὴν φορὰν μιμεῖται) presumably through the liquid, gliding quality of rho (426d). Cf. 434c. On Plato’s theory of “names,” see Fine (1977). For Plutarch’s exposition of (Platonic) linguistic theory, see *infra* pg. 164 on *Quaest. Plat. X*.

<sup>148</sup> Socrates later insists to Cratylus that words cannot be equivalent to what they represent—cf. the “two Cratyluses” argument (432a-c)—or else they would cease to be images (432c-d). See also 434a-b.

<sup>149</sup> πρῶτον λέγειν ἀρχόμενον ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου γενέσεως, τελευτᾶν δὲ εἰς ἀνθρώπων φύσιν (27a). Critias describes him as “the most astronomical of us and one who makes it his work to most of all know about the nature of the world” (ἀστρονομικώτατον ἡμῶν καὶ περὶ φύσεως τοῦ παντὸς εἰδέναι μάλιστα ἔργον πεποιημένον). Betegh (2009) argues that this makes him a better candidate to be able to construct such an account than Socrates (100).

<sup>150</sup> ἔστιν οὖν διὰ κατ’ ἐμὴν δόξαν πρῶτον διαιρετέον τάδε· τί τὸ ὄν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί, ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε; τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, ἀεί κατὰ ταῦτα ὄν, τὸ δ’ αὖ δόξει μετ’ αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν, γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον, ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν (27e-8a).

the figure of a creator (δημιουργός) of a physical object, who looks to a model: if the model has “being,” the object will be beautiful, while as if the object is in “becoming,” it will not.<sup>151</sup>

Concluding that the world is in “becoming” because it is sense-perceptible, he sets out to identify the model:

In reference to what sort of model (παραδειγμάτων) did the demiurge craft and construct the world? To that which exists in the same way and is always self-same, or to that which is generated? If, then, this world is beautiful, and its creator is good, it is clear that he looked toward the eternal. But if it is as is impermissible to speak, then to the generated. It is clear to everyone, therefore, that it was toward the eternal: for this world is the most beautiful of generated things and this creator the best of causes. Having come about in this way, it has been crafted by that which is apprehensible by reason and mind and existing in the same ways.<sup>152</sup>

Although Timaeus feigns to suppose that the creator might not actually be the best of causes, the possibility is dismissed as impious.<sup>153</sup> This introduces the assumption of teleological arrangement: Timaeus must answer not only how things are arranged, but how it serves the best of causes and the eternal model. The world is, then, an image (εικόνα) of this paradigm, an imperfect imitation but nevertheless one that is made after the model of the good. Lacking envy, “the god wants everything to be good and nothing evil, insofar as is possible.”<sup>154</sup> This is why only opinions and not knowledge, Timaeus concludes, can be formed about the physical world.<sup>155</sup> The relationship between image and model is thus central to the dialogue, as well as Plato’s thought more broadly; but the *Timaeus* shows how images can crucially serve philosophical

<sup>151</sup> πᾶν δὲ αὖ τὸ γιγνόμενον ὑπ’ αἰτίου τινὸς ἐξ ἀνάγκης γίνεσθαι· παντὶ γὰρ ἀδύνατον χωρὶς αἰτίου γένεσιν σχεῖν. ὅτου μὲν οὖν ἂν ὁ δημιουργὸς πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχον βλέπων αἰεὶ, τοιοῦτω τινὶ προσχρώμενος παραδείγματι, τὴν ιδέα καὶ δύναμιν αὐτοῦ ἀπεργάζηται, καλὸν ἐξ ἀνάγκης οὕτως ἀποτελεῖσθαι πᾶν· οὐ δ’ ἂν εἰς γεγονόσ, γεννητῶ παραδείγματι προσχρώμενος, οὐ καλόν (29a-b).

<sup>152</sup> πρὸς πότερον τῶν παραδειγμάτων ὁ τεκταινόμενος αὐτὸν ἀπειργάζετο, πότερον πρὸς τὸ κατὰ ταῦτα καὶ ὡσαυτως ἔχον ἢ πρὸς τὸ γεγονός. εἰ μὲν δὴ καλός ἐστιν ὁδε ὁ κόσμος ὃ τε δημιουργὸς ἀγαθός, δηλον ὡς πρὸς τὸ αἰδίων ἔβλεπεν· εἰ δὲ ὁ μὴδ’ εἰπεῖν τινὶ θέμις, πρὸς γεγονός. παντὶ δὴ σαφές ὅτι πρὸς τὸ αἰδίων· ὁ μὲν γὰρ κάλλιστος τῶν γεγονότων, ὁ δ’ ἄριστος τῶν αἰτίων. οὕτω δὴ γεγενημένος πρὸς τὸ λόγῳ καὶ φρονήσει περιληπτὸν καὶ κατὰ ταῦτα ἔχον δεδημιούργηται (29a). On the figure of the demiurge, see O’Brien (2015: 18-35).

<sup>153</sup> The exchange between Socrates and Protarchus in *Phlb.* 28d-e is similar.

<sup>154</sup> βουλευθεὶς γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἀγαθὰ μὲν πάντα, φλαυρονδὲ μηδὲν εἶναι κατὰ δύναμιν... (30a).

<sup>155</sup> See further *supra* pg. 7 and *infra* pg. 44.

education by emphasizing its own status as an image. The Sicilian astronomer even concludes his speech by describing, almost hymning, “the sense-perceptible god, image of the intellectual.”<sup>156</sup>

### *Timaeus' likely story*

According to *Timaeus'* preface, anything that occurs in the physical world occurs within an image, which bears a relationship to its model but is not itself unqualifiedly real. A Platonic dialogue, like a poem, is several removes from reality: it is an image, in words, of a conversation that occurs through human language within the physical world, which is itself an image.<sup>157</sup> It is quite natural that Critias, the main speaker of the eponymous dialogue that continues the *Timaeus*, remarks, “it is necessary that whatever is said by all of us be imitation and representation.”<sup>158</sup> The pair of dialogues particularly emphasize the status of images, both in the frame of the *Timaeus* as well as in the metaphysically dense discussion of the demiurge. The earlier dialogue even begins with Socrates recounting the discussion of the *Respublica* and lamenting the staticity of its depiction of the ideal city:<sup>159</sup>

Suppose that some passion fell upon me—as if someone beheld beautiful animals, whether depicted by an artist or truly living but at rest—and became to desire to see them move and engage in some contest that befits the appearance of their bodies. I have suffered exactly this with regard to the city which we discussed. I would pleurably hear someone expound on the contests which the city fights against other cities, how fittingly it arrives into war, how it renders what pertains to war in a manner befitting its education

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<sup>156</sup> εἰκὼν τοῦ νοητοῦ θεοῦ αἰσθητός (92c). On the coherency of the presentation of images in the *Ti.* with the other dialogues, see especially Cherniss (1957b).

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Mason's (2010) discussion of “the paradox of Plato” (199-200). Plato, moreover, problematizes the value of writing in the *Phdr.* (274b-7a). On the relevance of the critique of writing to myth, see Hooper (2010: 845-7, 850).

<sup>158</sup> μίμησιν μὲν γὰρ δὴ καὶ ἀπεικασίαν τὰ παρὰ πάντων ἡμῶν ῥηθέντα χρεῶν που γενέσθαι (107b). He asks for forbearance (συγγνώμη; 108a) on the grounds that humans are more critical about representations of humans, with whom they are more familiar, than gods, with whose representations they are pleased if there is even a bit of likeness (βραχὺ πρὸς ὁμοιότητα αὐτῶν ἀπομιμῆσθαι δυνατὸς ἦ; 107c).

<sup>159</sup> On the philosophical significance of Socrates' initial speech, see especially Slaveva-Griffin (2005).

and upbringing both in the deeds of these affairs and in negotiations in words with those of the cities.<sup>160</sup>

Socrates consciously requests an image from his interlocutors, but a better sort of image than a static painting of an animal. He wishes for an account, as a historian might render, of the deeds of the ideal city postulated in the *Respublica*. He even compares two sorts of members of the “imitative clan” (μιμητικὸν ἔθνος) that he criticizes in other dialogues: the poets and the sophists. While he claims not to “despise” (ἀτιμάζων) the former, perhaps with some irony, he denies that they are fit for the task because “things in which they have been reared will be imitated excellently and easily, while what is outside their upbringing will be imitated with difficulty—it is difficult to imitate well in deeds, but even harder still in words.”<sup>161</sup> Rather, Socrates has need of better imitators, such as Timaeus, who will give the account of the demiurge’s creation, and Critias, who will recount the story of Atlantis.<sup>162</sup>

Timaeus himself emphasizes the status of his cosmological exposition as an image by stressing its quality of being “likely.” After his argument that the creator of the world must have had a perfect and unchanging model, he attempts to preemptively lower Socrates’ expectations:

If then, Socrates, we should not be able render everything about the gods and the generation of the world with much accuracy and self-consistency, do not be surprised. But if we should offer anything that is at all likely, it is necessary to greet it with

<sup>160</sup> προσέεικεν δὲ δὴ τινὶ μοι τοιῷδε τὸ πάθος, οἷον εἴ τις ζῷα καλά που θεασάμενος, εἴτε ὑπὸ γραφῆς εἰργασμένα εἴτε καὶ ζῶντα ἀληθινῶς ἠσυχίαν δὲ ἄγοντα, εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν ἀφίκοιτο θεάσασθαι κινούμενά τε αὐτὰ καὶ τι τῶν τοῖς σώμασιν δοκούντων προσήκειν κατὰ τὴν ἀγωνίαν ἀθλοῦντα· ταῦτόν καὶ ἐγὼ πέπονθα πρὸς τὴν πόλιν ἣν διήλθομεν. ἡδέως γὰρ ἂν τοῦ λόγου διεξιόντος ἀκούσαιμι ἂν ἄθλους οὖς πόλις ἀθλεῖ, τούτους αὐτὴν ἀγωνιζομένην πρὸς πόλεις ἄλλας, πρεπόντως εἰς τε πόλεμον ἀφικομένην καὶ ἐν τῷ πολεμῆν τὰ προσήκοντα ἀποδιδούσαν τῇ παιδείᾳ καὶ τροφῇ κατὰ τε τὰς ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις πράξεις καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις διερμηνεύσεις πρὸς ἐκάστας τῶν πόλεων (19b-c).

<sup>161</sup> ... οἷς ἂν ἐντραφῇ, ταῦτα μιμήσεται ῥᾶστα καὶ ἄριστα, τὸ δ’ ἐκτὸς τῆς τροφῆς ἐκάστοις γιγνόμενον χαλεπὸν μὲν ἔργοις, ἔτι δὲ χαλεπώτερον λόγοις εὖ μιμεῖσθαι (19d-e). He similarly praises the sophists (τὸ δὲ τῶν σοφιστῶν γένος) for “many beautiful other speeches” (πολλῶν μὲν λόγων καὶ καλῶν ἄλλων) but cites their itinerant lifestyle as the source of their insufficiency for the task at hand (19e). See also *Phdr.* 247c.

<sup>162</sup> The grounds for their qualifications are both political and philosophical (20a).

affection, because we remember that you and I, as the one speaking, are judges with a human nature, such that we should accept the likely myth and seek nothing further.<sup>163</sup>

Timaeus reiterates the difficulty of giving a precise account of the physical world at various points of his speech, but he deems it a “likely account” (*eikos logos*) as well as a “likely myth” (*eikos muthos*).<sup>164</sup> The exact meaning of each of these terms, “likely,” “account,” and “myth,” has stirred a great deal of scholarly controversy. Gregory Vlastos, for instance, objects “the *Timaios* is unique among Plato’s myths” because it is entirely “scientific” and therefore probable—there are no troublesome names of gods;<sup>165</sup> Leonardo Tarán, to the contrary, argues that only part of the dialogue is meaningfully mythic, namely the demiurgic creation.<sup>166</sup> Given that the physical world is merely an image, according to Timaeus’ account, however, and that Plato holds that firm knowledge is only possible about unchanging realities such as the demiurge’s model, it is perhaps unsurprising that all Timaeus can offer is a likely account. This epistemological problem actually makes myth a fitting medium for an account of something as changing and uncertain as Plato’s conception of the sense-perceptible world, especially when its fictional status is stressed such as by Timaeus’ stress on the limits of his own speech. The narrative allows him to depict the demiurge’s composition of the world from underlying matter into a harmoniously ordered world, complete with gods and a living world soul. While in the myth of Er Plato exemplifies a

<sup>163</sup> ἐὰν οὖν, ὦ Σώκρατες, πολλὰ πολλῶν περὶ θεῶν καὶ τῆς τοῦ παντός γενέσεως, μὴ δυνατοὶ γινώμεθα πάντη πάντως αὐτοὺς ἑαυτοῖς ὁμολογουμένους λόγους καὶ ἀπηκριβωμένους ἀποδοῦναι, μὴ θαυμάσης· ἀλλ’ ἐὰν ἄρα μηδενὸς ἦττον παρεχώμεθα εἰκότας, ἀγαπᾶν χρή, μεμνημένους ὡς ὁ λέγων ἐγὼ ὑμεῖς τε οἱ κριταὶ φύσιν ἀνθρωπίνην ἔχομεν, ὥστε περὶ τούτων τὸν εἰκότα μῦθον ἀποδεχομένους πρέπει τούτου μηδὲν ἔτι πέρα ζητεῖν (29c-d).

<sup>164</sup> Timaeus emphasizes this before introducing the difficult idea (*χαλεπὸν καὶ ἀμυδρὸν εἶδος*) of the receptacle (*ὑποδοχὴν*), which a speech can only represent in images (*νῦν δὲ ὁ λόγος ἔοικεν εἰσαναγκάζειν*; 49a): “abiding by what was said from the beginning, the capability of likely accounts, I will try to express anything that is likely, but moreso...” (*τὸ δὲ κατ’ ἀρχᾶς ῥηθὲν διαφυλάττων, τὴν τῶν εἰκότων λόγων δύναμιν, πειράσομαι μηδενὸς ἦττον εἰκότα, μᾶλλον δέ...*; 48d). See also 69a-b. On the problem, see especially Brisson (2012).

<sup>165</sup> 1939: “It is a mistake to put it on a level with the eschatological myths of the *Gorgias*, *Phaidon*, *Republic X*, and *Phaidros*. The *Timaios* offers no gentle disavowal of the scientific scrupulousness of the account by the literary devices employed in every one of these others” (71).

<sup>166</sup> 1966. Some aspects of Timaeus’ speech might seem more immediately mythic, such as the demiurge’s speech to the created gods (41a-d). Regali (2000), for instance, detects reminiscences of Hesiod.

narrative that is better fit for education than those of tragedy, in the *Timaeus* he provides the example of a teleological account of the physical world that stresses its status as merely likely.<sup>167</sup>

While Critias' narrative, which constitutes the Atlantis myth, has received less seriously scholarly attention than Timaeus' myth, its epistemological ramifications have attracted an increasing body of engagement, particularly in the last few decades.<sup>168</sup> There are many reasons to believe that the account is meant to be unbelievable, such as the objections Sarah Broadie has made, yet Critias refers to it as an "account" and Socrates calls it "true history."<sup>169</sup> Luc Brisson largely bases his examination of the transmission of traditional stories on the transmission of the Atlantis myth through the Egyptian priest, Solon, and Critias' ancestors.<sup>170</sup> Thomas Johansen argues that Critias' tale serves a critical epistemological role in the former in setting the stage for Timaeus' own exposition.<sup>171</sup> Svetla Slaveva-Griffin argues that Timaeus offers an image of being while Critias an image of becoming, such that the two must be viewed together.<sup>172</sup> Both of the speeches of the *Timaeus*, it seems, may bear on the epistemological status of myths: they are only images that can only bear some likeness to the truth; yet we cannot hope for a better account about the physical world. Because they emphasize their own hypothetical status, as Katherine Morgan has shown, they are fitting instruments for Plato's philosophy.<sup>173</sup>

### *Conclusion*

Myth, perhaps to a surprising degree, proves to be a critically important issue for Plato. He criticizes it both for the ethical and metaphysical issues posed by traditional myth and its

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<sup>167</sup> The fourth chapter examines the *Ti.* myth as a teleological account.

<sup>168</sup> Elias (1984), for instance, is particularly dismissive of "the intolerably long-winded Critias" (181).

<sup>169</sup> Esp. 2013. See also Gill (2017: 7).

<sup>170</sup> 1998 (1994): 17-39.

<sup>171</sup> 2004.

<sup>172</sup> 2005: 324-5.

<sup>173</sup> 2000. See further *supra* pg. 15.

methods of transmission, while also adapting the form to his own sort of philosophically-aimed ethical exhortations and teleological accounts, such as the myth of Er and Timaeus' likely myth, respectively. Plutarch of Chaeronea grapples deeply and broadly with the Platonic dialogue but, more than any other any other Middle Platonist extant in the evidence, he grapples both with Plato's critique of myth and with his philosophizing adaptations. He considers and echoes both aspects of Plato's critiques, as well as formulating Platonistic responses to the challenges raised, particularly in the *Respublica*. He also composed his own imagistic myths, especially in the dialogues *De sera numinis vindicta* and *De facie in orbe lunae*.<sup>174</sup> To conclude this introduction, I survey both aspects of Plutarch's Platonist approach to myth, before summarizing the subsequent chapters.

Despite the prominence of the critique of myth in Plato's corpus, discussions of Plato's myths are surprisingly sparse among most ancient philosophers, and debate over the form of Platonic myth is even rarer than denigration and rebuttal of the literal content. Aristotle, for instance, presents a series of physical arguments against the notion of underworld rivers as imagined in the myth of the *Phaedo*.<sup>175</sup> Yet he has less to say on the form of Plato's mythic discourse itself, and he is ambivalent on the potential philosophical role of myth generally: on the one hand he stresses in the *Metaphysica* that the lover of myth is somehow equivalent to the lover of philosophy, while in a later book he cautions that the proponents of myth, as opposed to

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<sup>174</sup> His myths even attracted some high praise from Julian the Apostate (*Ep.* VII.227a-b).

<sup>175</sup> "But what is written in the *Phaedo* about both the rivers and the sea is impossible" (τὸ δ' ἐν τῷ Φαίδωνι γεγραμμένον περὶ τε τῶν ποταμῶν καὶ τῆς θαλάττης ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν; *Meteor.* II.355b). Aristotle describes this aspect of the myth at length (355b-6a), then gives three arguments to show the physical impossibility (356a). Gertz (2011) compares Neoplatonic responses: "Olympiodorus... is quite prepared to defend the passage against Aristotle's attacks in the *Meteorology*, claiming that it contains both physical and ethical truths. In fact, however, most of the interpretations of the passage seem to be allegories of one kind or another," further contrasting Proclus' physical allegory (each river representing an element) and Damascius' "theological" one (184).

philosophers such as Empedocles, should not be addressed seriously.<sup>176</sup> Plutarch, however, engages on both main points of Plato’s polemic against myth and poetry. He similarly addresses the problem of harm coming to the young through traditional tales. He dedicates the treatise *Quomodo adulescens poetas audire debeat* to this issue and justifies myth—whether in prose or poetry<sup>177</sup>—as a sort of pleasurable preliminary instruction, before young students can begin studying philosophy proper. They must be reminded, he warns, that when base or wicked things are portrayed—whether in poetry or visual art—what is pleasurable is artistry of the imitation, not the thing being imitated.<sup>178</sup> Imitation relies on its semblance to truth, he argues, for its pleurability, such that imitations are not purely falsehoods.<sup>179</sup>

Plutarch is more disparaging in the treatise entitled *De gloria Atheniensium*, which sets out to answer whether the city is more glorious because of its deeds of war or of peace, including

<sup>176</sup> “For through wondering, men both now and in the beginning started to philosophize... He is at a loss and marvels and recognizes that he is ignorant (which is why a lover of myths is also in some respect a lover of wisdom). Therefore, if men philosophized to escape ignorance, it is clear that they were pursuing knowing for the sake of thinking, and not on account of some gain” (διὰ γὰρ τὸ θαυμάζειν οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ νῦν καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἤρξαντο φιλοσοφεῖν, ... ὁ δ’ ἀπορῶν καὶ θαυμάζων οἶεται ἀγνοεῖν (διὸ καὶ ὁ φιλόμυθος φιλόσοφος πῶς ἐστίν· ὁ γὰρ μῦθος σύγκειται ἐκ θαυμασίων)· ὥστ’ εἴπερ διὰ τὸ φεύγειν τὴν ἀγνοίαν ἐφιλοσόφησαν, φανερόν ὅτι διὰ τὸ εἰδέναι τὸ ἐπίστασθαι ἐδίωκον, καὶ οὐ χρήσεώς τινος ἔνεκεν; A.982b); “but about those speculating mythically, a serious investigation is inappropriate” (ἀλλὰ περὶ μὲν τῶν μυθικῶς σοφίζουμένων οὐκ ἄξιον μετὰ σπουδῆς σκοπεῖν; III.1000a). Cf. Dörrie (1972): “Die Art und Weise, wie sich philosophische Aussage seit nun weit über 2000 Jahren dem Leser anbietet, ist tiefgreifend durch Aristoteles geprägt worden. Seit und durch Aristoteles gilt das Axiom, daß philosophische Forschung auf geradlinigem Weg zu eindeutigen Ergebnissen führen müsse” (5). He goes onto argue that Aristotle came to this position “gegen die Mitte seines Lebens,” and that this position predominated subsequent philosophy from Chrysippus to Kant. On Aristotle’s approach to myth, see Callahan (1977: 76-80) and Heath (2013: 120-1).

<sup>177</sup> “It is neither meter nor style nor dignity of phrasing nor appropriateness of metaphor nor harmony and composition that brings persuasion and charm, but rather the exquisitely plaited arrangement of mythology” (οὔτε γὰρ μέτρον οὔτε τρόπος οὔτε λέξεως ὄγκος οὔτ’ εὐκαιρία μεταφορᾶς οὔθ’ ἁρμονία καὶ σύνθεσις ἔχει τοσοῦτον αἰμυλίας καὶ χάριτος ὅσον εὖ πεπλεγμένη διάθεσις μυθολογίας; 16c).

<sup>178</sup> ἐν οἷς μάλιστα δεῖ τὸν νέον ἐθίζεσθαι, διδασκόμενον ὅτι τὴν πράξιν οὐκ ἐπαινοῦμεν ἢ γέγονεν ἢ μίμησις, ἀλλὰ τὴν τέχνην εἰ μιμήται προσηκόντως τὸ ὑποκείμενον (18b). Plutarch gives examples of occasions for concerns: “some paint even strange deeds, such as when Timomachus depicts the slaughter of Medea’s children...” (γράφουσι δὲ καὶ πράξεις ἀτόπους ἔνιοι, καθάπερ Τιμόμαχος τὴν Μηδείας τεκνοκτονίαν...; 18a).

<sup>179</sup> “... poetry, because it has an imitative basis, uses adornment and grace when it deals with underlying actions and characters, but it does not abandon its similarity to the truth entirely, since this is imitation’s guide in plausibility” (... μιμητικὴν ἢ ποιήσις ὑπόθεσιν ἔχουσα κόσμῳ μὲν καὶ λαμπρότητι χρῆται περὶ τὰς ὑποκειμένας πράξεις καὶ τὰ ἦθη, τὴν δ’ ὁμοίότητα τοῦ ἀληθοῦς οὐ προλείπει, τῆς μιμήσεως ἐν τῷ πιθανῷ τὸ ἀγωγὸν ἐχούσης; 25b-c). For a lengthy survey of the ambiguity “inherited from Plato by Plutarch,” see Mossman (1991: 108n30).



visual art and poetry. In a set of passages that scandalize some English poetry critics, Plutarch confirms that images are inferior to their referents and mocks the idea that someone could take more pleasure in a depiction of glorious deeds than in the deeds themselves.<sup>180</sup> At several points in the corpus, he even has characters echo the characteristically Platonic concern that people might think the sun is, at most, just an image of god or the good and not the reality itself.<sup>181</sup> Yet he allows a particular philosophical role for such imitations towards the end of *Quomodo*.

Drawing on Plato's allegory of the cave, he suggests that some people might be unable to bear the light of truth at first, although they are capable at seeing a reflection:

Joining together and harmonizing poems with ideas thus lifts poems above myth and portrayal, lending some seriousness to things that are usefully said. It, moreover, opens and stirs the soul of the young for philosophical discourses. For he comes to philosophy with at least a bit of a foretaste because he has heard at least a bit, nor is he uncritically filled with what he always hears from his mother and nurse and—god help him—his father and tutor, these who deem rich men blessed and at in awe of them, they shudder at pain and toil, they consider virtue without wealth and reputation as paltry. Yet when the young first hear the philosophers speak against these things, they are gripped by perplexity, terror, and astonishment; they are unable to believe them, except if they are like those that are accustomed to being in deep darkness but are about to see the sun, that is to see the soft beam of truth hidden in a reflected light through myths without harm, rather than fleeing them entirely.<sup>182</sup>

<sup>180</sup> “I do not think you would judge the contest for the painter over the general, nor would you agree with those who prefer painted tablets over the trophy and the imitation over the truth” (ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἂν οἶμαι τῷ ζωγράφῳ κρίσιν προθείητε πρὸς τὸν στρατηγὸν οὐδ’ ἀνάσχοισθε τῶν προτιμώντων τὸν πίνακα τοῦ τροπαίου καὶ τὸ μίμημα τῆς ἀληθείας; 346f). Painters and writers differ in their methods of imitation and their material (ἄλλῃ καὶ τρόποις μιμήσεως διαφέρουσι) but the end is still the same (347a). He broadens the critique to historians as well (347c). Cf. Sikes (1931: e.g. 201) and Johnson (1972: 39). See also Auden (1979 [1939]): “For poetry makes nothing happen.”

<sup>181</sup> See *infra* pg. 88.

<sup>182</sup> τὸ γὰρ οὕτω συνάπτειν καὶ συνοικεῖν τοῖς δόγμασιν ἐξάγει τὰ ποιήματα τοῦ μύθου καὶ τοῦ προσωπείου, καὶ σπουδῆν περιτίθεισιν αὐτοῖς χρησίμως λεγομένοις: ἔτι δὲ προανοίγει: καὶ προκινεῖ τὴν τοῦ νέου ψυχὴν τοῖς ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ λόγοις, ἔρχεται γὰρ οὐκ ἄγευστος αὐτῶν παντάπασιν οὐδ’ ἀνήκοος, οὐδ’ ἀκρίτως ἀνάπλεως ὧν ἤκουε τῆς μητρὸς αἰεὶ καὶ τίτθης καὶ νῆ Δία τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ παιδαγωγοῦ, τοὺς πλουσίους εὐδαιμονιζόντων καὶ σεβομένων, φριπτόντων δὲ τὸν θάνατον καὶ τὸν πόνον, ἄζηλον δὲ τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ τὸ μηδὲν ἄνευ χρημάτων καὶ δόξης ἀγόντων. οἷς ἀντίφωνα τὰ τῶν φιλοσόφων ἀκούοντας αὐτοὺς τὸ πρῶτον ἐκπληξίς ἴσχει καὶ ταραχὴ καὶ θάμβος, οὐδ’ ὑπομένοντας, ἂν μὴ καθάπερ ἐκ σκοτοῦς πολλοῦ μέλλοντες ἤλιον ὄραν ἐθισθῶσιν οἷον ἐν νόθῳ φωτὶ κεκραμένης μύθοις ἀληθείας αὐγῆν ἔχοντι μαλακὴν ἀλύπως διαβλέπειν τὰ τοιαῦτα καὶ μὴ φεύγειν (36d-e). Cf. Pl. *Resp.* VII.515c-d.

Plutarch echoes and broadens Plato's concern over what children hear from their caretakers growing up and suggests poetry, at least if read correctly, can serve as an intermediary aid to philosophy. These considerations of poetry, education, and imitation are elaborations of Plato's critiques—that is, prose defense of mythic verse.

Plutarch's dialogues, moreover, present implicit interpretations of Plato through their imitations of him.<sup>183</sup> I argue that Plutarch's characters use philosophical myths, in imitation of Plato's, as a distinctive sort of discourse. These two modes of argument are presented as parallel paths to the same sort of truth. Plutarch signals this epistemic status of his myths through very specific imitation of the framing aspects the myths, including in the presentation of myths as something that might touch on the truth or be worthy of belief or testing. In *De genio Socratis*, for example, Simmias, a character familiar from the *Phaedo*, attempts to demur from relating what he “heard Timarchus of Chaeronea say” because they might seem “more like *mythoi* than *logoi*,” but the Pythagorean Theanor bids him to go on: “there is some way in which the mythic too touches on the truth, even if there is not much accuracy.”<sup>184</sup> Myths and accounts, by this logic, aim at the same truth, but drive towards it in different manners. This way of characterizing the myth serves a weighty philosophical function by calling attention to the myth's status, lest

<sup>183</sup> Brenk (1994) argues for other sorts of broader eschatological differences (3) but emphasizes the idea of vision and Plutarch's use of light (especially 19). Cf. Jones (1916): “The main thoughts of the myths are those which are found in Plato: the fall of the soul from a more blessed condition to birth upon the earth; sojourn of the soul after death in a place of reward or punishment; subsequent rebirth in the form of man or animal, and final restoration to previous state. The principal non-Platonic elements are the connection with demonology, the different mythical treatment of the νοῦς and ψυχή, and the speculations concerning the part played by the sun and the moon” (42).

<sup>184</sup> ἃ δὲ Τιμάρχου τοῦ Χαιρωνέως ἠκούσαμεν ὑπὲρ τούτων διεξιόντος, οὐκ οἶδα μὴ μύθοις <ομοιότερ' ἢ> λόγοις ὄντα σιωπᾶν ἄμεινον. 'μηδαμῶς' εἶπεν ὁ Θεόκριτος, 'ἀλλὰ δῖελθ' αὐτά· καὶ γὰρ εἰ μὴ λίαν ἀκριβῶς, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ὅπη ψαύει τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τὸ μυθῶδες, πρότερον δὲ τίς ἦν οὗτος ὁ Τιμάρχος φράσον· οὐ γὰρ ἔγνω τὸν ἄνθρωπον' (589f-90a). He continues: “indeed it was plausible” (εἰκότως γ'). Cf. Hardie (1992): “Platonic echoes are especially obvious when Plutarch discusses the status of his own large-scale exercises in writing myths” (4744). Plutarch includes a similar statement, but about traditional rather than philosophical myth, in the *Amat.*: “not, I suppose, that I believe the myths, but I surely do not disbelieve them entirely” (οὔτι τοῖς μύθοις πειθόμενος οὐ μὴν οὐδ' ἀπιστῶν παντάπασι; 762a). Cf. *De def. or.* 438d. The *De fac.* myth ends a sort of “formules conclusive,” as Lernould (2013) puts it (87n470), that seems to play a complementary role: “but it is for you all, Lamprias, to use the *logos* in what way you choose” (ὁμῖν δ', ὦ Λαμπρία, χρῆσθαι τῷ λόγῳ πάρεστιν ἢ βούλεσθε; 945e).

the audience should mistake a “likely account” for an unquestionable revelation or a pronouncement of doctrine.<sup>185</sup> Myth may make up for its lack of precision, however, in its more immediate pleurability and fitness for certain audiences. Plutarch’s praise for Diotima’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium* in the programmatic preface to the first book of the *Quaestiones convivales*, a collection of short symposiastic vignettes, characterizes the role of Platonic myth:

For you see that even Plato in the *Symposium* discusses the *telos* and the first good and everything of theology, he does not strain through a proof nor kick up a cloud of dust and make a vigorous and inescapable hold as he was accustomed; rather, he won over men through softer premises and examples and mythic tales.<sup>186</sup>

Philosophical myths such as Diotima’s in the *Symposium* compensate, in Plutarch’s eyes, for their potential lack of precision by their charming elements, which allow him to attract different sorts of audiences than, for example, the dry and intricate exegesis of complicated dialogues such as the *Timaeus*.<sup>187</sup> The truth that myths touch upon is the same exact aim as dialectical argumentation, but the former is insufficient in itself for belief.<sup>188</sup>

Plutarch engages not just with Plato’s critique of traditional myth, but also his creative adaptation of such imagistic narratives as philosophical myths. Plutarch composed imagistic myths in imitation of Plato for at least three dialogues: *De genio Socratis*, *De sera*

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<sup>185</sup> On Plutarch’s attitude to certainty and uncertainty about the physical world, see *infra* pg. 117. Plutarch often maintains some skepticism, especially in theological matters, but perennially hard questions require multiple paths to reach after the truth.

<sup>186</sup> ὁρᾷς γὰρ ὅτι καὶ Πλάτων ἐν τῷ Συμποσίῳ περὶ τέλους διαλεγόμενος καὶ τοῦ πρῶτου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ὅλως θεολογῶν οὐκ ἐντείνει τὴν ἀπόδειξιν οὐδ’ ὑποκονίεται, τὴν λαβὴν ὥσπερ εἴωθεν εὐτόνον ποιῶν καὶ ἄφυκτον, ἀλλ’ ὑγροτέρους λήμμασι καὶ παραδείγμασι καὶ μυθολογίαις προσάγεται τοὺς ἄνδρας (614c-d). Cf. Klotz (2014: 211-2).

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Lucretius’ famous image of the honeyed rim on the cup of wormwood (I.936-42 and IV.13-7).

<sup>188</sup> Cf. Theon in *Non posse*: “... not even a lie is without a share in truth, but even in fabrications and fictions, which are not able to be believe, there is nevertheless something persuasive. Just consider how moved we are when we read Plato’s book on Atlantis and the end of the *Iliad*, how we long for what has been left from the myth as if a shrine or a theater has closed” (οὐδὲ τὸ ψεῦδος ἀμοιρεῖ χάριτος, ἀλλὰ καὶ πλάσμασι καὶ ποιήμασι τοῦ πιστεῦσθαι μὴ προσόντος ἔνεστιν ὅμως τὸ πεῖθον. ἐννόει γάρ, ὡς δακνόμενοι τὸν Πλάτωνος ἀναγινώσκομεν Ἀτλαντικὸν καὶ τὰ τελευταῖα τῆς Ἰλιάδος, οἷον ἱερῶν κλειομένων ἢ θεάτρων ἐπιποθοῦντες τοῦ μύθου τὸ λειπόμενον; 1092f-3a). Epicurean critique emerges as the greatest attack on the form of Platonic myth. See further *infra* pg. 196.

*numinis vindicta*, and *De facie in orbe lunae*.<sup>189</sup> Despite the prominence of myth in Plato's corpus, there is not much evidence of philosophical myths in the later Hellenistic era. His immediate successor, Speusippus, for instance, reportedly composed dialogues but there is no indication whether he included mythic narratives.<sup>190</sup> Aristotle, his contemporary and fellow-student, however, seems to have included both fables, such as the story that Midas bound Silenus and coerced him to answer the question, "what is best in life for a human," to which the captive satyr eventually responds, "not being born at all is the best thing of all... but second, to die as quickly as soon as they are born."<sup>191</sup> Aristotle also seems to have incorporated the figure of a dreaming Cronus into one of his dialogues, which may have been a part of a more elaborate myth, such as Plutarch's incorporation of an apparently similar in the myth of *De facie*. The early Peripatetic Clearchus of Soli, however, takes the other sort of approach, and apparently had characters invoke exotic religious authorities: according to Proclus, for instance, he had the

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<sup>189</sup> It seems that Plutarch also included an extended eschatological myth in his lost dialogue *De anima*, taking the form of a near-death vision experienced by a certain Antyllus, which Eusebius compares to Plato's myth of Er (*Praep. ev.* 11.36.1 = frg. 176 Sandbach; similarly: Origen. *C. Cel.* V.57 = frg. 173). A passage in Stobaeus (IV.52.49 = frg. 178), although attributed to Themestius, is generally thought to belong to Plutarch because the characters—namely Timon and Patrocleas, relatives of Plutarch—appear elsewhere in Plutarch, such as *De sera*. It describes the experience of coming to an underworld with reference to the mysteries, punning on the similarity (προσέουκε) of dying (τελευτᾶν) and being initiated (τελειῶσθαι). These two parts of the dialogue, if both are indeed from Plutarch, are plausibly connected. Other passages from Stobaeus (frgs. 203-6) and Damascius *In Phd.* (215-7) have been suggested but are more tenuous: Bonazzi (2011: 75-7). Philip's mythic narrative in *De def. or.* (419a-e) is simpler but masterly as a work of literature. An Egyptian helmsman named Thaumus (a pun?) is instructed by a mysterious voice to "announce that the great pan has died" (ἀπάγγελον ὅτι Πᾶν ὁ μέγας τέθηκε) further on in his journey, which brings the unseen *daemones* to lament and wonder (στεναγμὸν ἅμα θαυμασμῶ μεμιγμένον). Plutarch's anti-Epicurean treatise *De lat. viv.* also has a conclusion that describes a mythic underworld (1130c-e), on which see Hilton (2019).

<sup>190</sup> Diogenes Laertius relates that Speusippus "left behind very many notes and many dialogues" (καταλέλοιπε δὲ ἀμπλείστα ὑπομνήματα καὶ διαλόγους πλείονας; IV.1.4), but no fragments remain. Dillon (1977) suggests, from the titles, that Xenocrates' *Arkas* and *Archedemus* may have been dialogues (39).

<sup>191</sup> ... πάμπαν οὐκ ἔστι γενέσθαι τὸ πάντων ἄριστον... δεύτερον δέ, τὸ γενομένους ἀποθανεῖν ὡς τάχιστα (frg. 44 Rose = Plut. *Cons. ad Apoll.* 115c). Davies (2004) analyzes the myth as a folk tale but echoes the conclusion of Jaeger that "the point of the story in this early dialogue the Eudemus relates to the Platonic doctrine of form" (692). Plutarch also cites the early Academic Crantor (115b) and acknowledges the commonality of the sentiment (e.g. Soph. *OC* 1225): "someone could add heaps upon heaps of similar things on this topic" (μυρία δ' ἐπὶ μυρίους ἂν τις ἔχοι τοιαῦτα παρατίθεσθαι πρὸς ταῦτ' κεφάλαιον; 115e). The Silenus story has a long *Nachleben* in the concept of "Greek pessimism" due to Nietzsche (1886: 28), following the lead of Schopenhauer (1819): Beiser (2016: 45-7).

character of Aristotle invoke a Jewish sage in one of his dialogues.<sup>192</sup> The concluding episode of Cicero's *De Respublica*, known as the *Somnium Scipionis*, famously reimagines Plato's myth of Er, which remains, unlike the now-shadowy earlier works, comes down to us almost entirely extant.<sup>193</sup> In it, Scipio Aemilianus describes his encounter with his patronymic ancestors in a dream where his soul travels out from the body and through the heavens. Cicero's myth, however, is firmly grounded in a specifically Roman historical setting, rather unlike Plato's Er from Everytribe.<sup>194</sup> Nor do any of Cicero's many other extant dialogues, moreover, include any mythic narratives such as this. Perhaps this is one part of why he tends to describe his dialogues after the earlier cluster—*De respublica*, *De legibus*, and *De oratore*—as following in the style of one of the early Peripatetics, rather than Plato.<sup>195</sup> There are very few suggestions of other

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<sup>192</sup> Apparently in the same dialogue, Proclus claims that Clearchus depicts a *magus* proving the separability of the soul to Aristotle by a surprising sort of empirical demonstration: “Just as Clearchus says in *De somno*, regarding the soul, how it is separated from the body, how it enters into it, and how it (the soul) uses the same thing (the body) as if a vehicle: by striking a boy with a rod, he draws out the soul and, as if leading it away from the body with the rod, he reveals that the body, preserved unmoved and unharmed, lacks perception ... and when the rod leads it back near to the body, the soul announces everything after its reentry. From this evidence, then, [he says] that Aristotle, among other viewers of such an investigation, believes that the soul is separable from the body” (καθάπερ ὁ Κλέαρχος ἐν τοῖς περὶ ὕπνου φησὶν, περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς, ὡς ἄρα χωρίζεται τοῦ σώματος καὶ ὡς εἰσεῖσιν εἰς τὸ σῶμα καὶ ὡς χρῆται αὐτῷ οἷον καταγωγῆ· τῇ γὰρ ῥάβδῳ πλήξας τὸν παῖδα τὴν ψυχὴν ἐξείλκυσε καὶ οἷον ἄγων δι' αὐτῆς πόρρω τοῦ σώματος ἀκίνητον ἐνέδειξε τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἀβλαβὲς σωζόμενον ἀναισθητεῖν ... τοῦ σώματος ἐγγύθεν αὐτῆς ἀγομένης πάλιν τῆς ῥάβδου μετὰ τὴν εἴσοδον ἀπαγγέλλειν ἕκαστα. τοιγαροῦν ἐκ τούτων πιστεῦσαι τοὺς τε ἄλλους τῆς τοιαύτης ἱστορίας θεατὰς καὶ τὸν Ἀριστοτέλην χωριστὴν εἶναι τοῦ σώματος τὴν ψυχὴν; frg. 7 Tsitsiridis = Procl. *In Remp.* II.122-3). Cf. Dicaearchus' choice of a descendant of Deucalion as the main speaker of the dialogue entitled *Corinthi* (frg. 19 Wehrli = Cic. *Tusc.* I.10.21).

<sup>193</sup> Even here, however, Cicero's framing for the myth is lost, because the version in the manuscript tradition of Macrobius' commentary only begins with Scipio recounting the story: “When I went to Africa...” (*cum in Africam uenisset*...; VI.9).

<sup>194</sup> On the difference between universalizing and historicizing, see Armisen-Marchetti (2001: XXIX-XXX). Macrobius argues that Cicero, although believing Plato's story to be true (*ueri conscius*), preferred to turn the near-death experience into a vision of the dead in sleep to avoid the censure of idiots (*stolidae reprehensionis uitans*; I.1.8).

<sup>195</sup> Cicero compares his *Resp.*, where he himself is the narrator but “mute” (κωφὸν πρόσωπον, a style he associates with Heracleides), with his later works such as *Fin.* where he follows the “Aristotelian manner” in which the dialogue is given to a single main speaker (*quae autem his temporibus scripsi Aristotelium morem habent in quo ita sermo inducitur ceterorum ut penes ipsum sit principatus*; XIII.19.4). Cicero also mentions writing in *more Dicaearchi* (*Att.* XIII.30.2; cf. *Tusc.* I.10.21). Numenius composed at least *De bono* (Περὶ τὰγαθοῦ) as a dialogue (e.g. frgs. 3, 4a Des Places), although it seems rather stripped down, like Cicero's *Tusc.* At some point before Augustine (cf. *De civ. D.* VIII.23-6), works claiming the authority of Hermes Trismegistus were sometimes written as dialogues, of which the Latin *Asclepius* seems the most complex in its dialogic framing: in a certain sanctuary (*adytum*), Hermes Trismegistus instructs Asclepius to summon Tat, and allows him to bring in Hammon as well,

philosophical myths composed between Plato's death and the onset of the early Roman Empire—or even of philosophical dialogues in general.<sup>196</sup>

In contrast to all of these figures, Plutarch stands out as a broad and imaginative mythmaker. He imitates Plato extensively, such as through the positioning of myths in the dialogues: in *De genio*, it is placed in the center—like the *Phaedrus* and *Politicus*—while in *De facie* and *De sera*, it is placed at the end—like the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Respublica*. Even the authorizations of Plutarch's myth—the exotic framing of the narratives that mark them out as myths—reflect the two basic sorts of mythic authorization in Plato. Plato not only blends traditional names and images into his myths, but characteristically has his characters disclaim their own authority and appeal to ancient or exotic sources.<sup>197</sup> These sources seem broadly divided into two categories, based on the source of their greater claim to knowledge. Plato's Er, for example, is far from extraordinary in and of himself, but he experiences something strange and unusual that allows them a mythic vision outside the usual experience of embodied life. More often, the source's authority is derived from some sort of religious status, such as Diotima in the *Symposium*, a woman from the Arcadian town of Mantinea whose sacrifices, Socrates

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but no others, lest the most sacred of discourses (*religiosissimus sermo*), most replete with the majesty of the divine (*tota numinis maiestate plenissimum*), should be profaned by a large crowd (1a-b). Scott (1982) analyzes the Latin translation as a composition of three separate Greek works (51-61).

<sup>196</sup> Plutarch's friend Sarapion, the addressee of *De E* (384d) is praised elsewhere, however, for writing poetry "philosophically and austerely" (φιλοσόφως καὶ ἀσθηρῶς; *De Pyth. or.* 396f); cf. Bowie (2014: 182). Bremmer (2002) describes testimonies of two slightly later figures, Naumachius of Epirus and Cornelius Labeo, who describe journeys of the soul out of bodies (94-5). The evidence for other philosophical dialogues, with or without myths, is also scanty, which leads to grand dismissals such as Whittaker's (1923): "By the ancients Plato was of course admired, just as he is by the moderns, not only as a philosopher but as a supreme literary artist. In antiquity, however, no deep-going influence from him on imaginative literature, or on the modes of feeling expressed in it, had yet begun" (2).

<sup>197</sup> Most (2012) detects eight distinguishing features of Platonic myth: monological form, older age of the speaker, attribution of "older, explicitly indicated or implied, real or fictional oral source," lack of verifiability, authority based on traditionality, explicit psychagogic purpose, non-dialectic form, and position at the beginning or end of "an extended dialectical exposition" (24).

attests, delayed the Athenian plague for ten years.<sup>198</sup> The frame of the Atlantis in the *Timaeus* and *Critias* is perhaps too complex for this simple dichotomy, but it bears some affinities with both categories: Critias receives the story from his grandfather who heard it from his father who heard it from the great Solon, who learned it on a voyage to exotic Egypt.<sup>199</sup> But his source is a priest of Saïs, who claims to know the history of ancient Athens and Atlantis because of the longevity of his tradition—Egypt alone is free from periodic cataclysms, he claims, both watery and fiery—which allows his temple to possess written records; he proceeds to tell the story from memory, it seems, but claims that they can read the writings themselves together later.<sup>200</sup>

Plutarch thus deals extensively and seriously with both Plato’s criticisms of traditional myth and the with models he left for constructing imagistic myths more straightforwardly suitable for philosophical ends. In this study, therefore I focus on two aspects of Plutarch’s Platonism, both of which relate to myth. First, he continuously builds his philosophy upon Platonic “models” and “frameworks.” These are particularly obvious in the myths he weaves into his own dialogues, which are clear imitations of various Platonic myths; but different aspects of

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<sup>198</sup> “But the account of Eros, which I once heard from the Mantinean woman Diotima, a woman wise in these things and many others—and for the Athenians she delayed disease for ten years before the plague by sacrificing, she that taught me erotics—and she spoke this speech indeed” (τὸν δὲ λόγον τὸν περὶ τοῦ Ἔρωτος, ὃν ποτ’ ἤκουσα γυναικὸς Μαντινικῆς Διοτίμας, ἣ ταῦτά τε σοφῆ ἦν καὶ ἄλλα πολλά—καὶ Ἀθηναίοις ποτὲ θυμαμένοις πρὸ τοῦ λοιμοῦ δέκα ἔτη ἀναβολὴν ἐποίησε τῆς νόσου, ἣ δὴ καὶ ἐμὲ τὰ ἐρωτικά ἐδίδαξεν—ὄν οὖν ἐκείνη ἔλεγε λόγον; 201d). She is exotic in several respects, and this evidently justifies her authority for the story of the conception of Eros in the garden of Zeus (203a-4a). The appeal in the *Meno* to “priests and priestesses” (τῶν ἱερέων τε καὶ τῶν ἱερείων) and “Pindar and other inspired poets” (ἄλλοι πολλοὶ τῶν ποιητῶν ὅσοι θεῖοι) for the immortality of the soul is perhaps similar (81a-b). Cf. *Gorg.* 493a.

<sup>199</sup> “Go on and hear, Socrates, a very strange account, but entirely true, as the wisest of the Seven, Solon, once spoke” (ἄκουε δὴ, ὦ Σώκρατες, λόγου μάλα μὲν ἀτόπου, παντάπασί γε μὴν ἀληθοῦς, ὡς ὁ τῶν ἑπτὰ σοφώτατω Σόλων ποτ’ ἔφη; *Ti.* 20d-e). The older Critias related the story on the occasion of a festival when the speaker in Plato’s dialogue was a young boy (21a-b), at the behest of a character that emphatically asks, “what Solon said, and how, and from whom did he hear it was true” (τί τε καὶ πῶς καὶ παρὰ τίνων ὡς ἀληθῆ διακηκῶς ἔλεγεν ὁ Σόλων; 21d). Critias describes the Egyptian setting, claiming they call Athena by the name Neith (21e-2a) and that their priests knew vastly more about the past (22a-b).

<sup>200</sup> “We go through the precise and ordered account about these things later, in leisure, and read the writings themselves” (τὸ δ’ ἀκριβὲς περὶ πάντων ἐφεξῆς εἰσαῦθις κατὰ σχολήν, αὐτὰ τὰ γράμματα λαβόντες, διέξιμεν; 24a). Further on the writings: 22b-3a. The priest later attributes his knowledge of the Athenian victory over Atlantis to these writings (λέγει γὰρ τὰ γεγραμμένα...; 24e).

his thought are based upon Platonic models as well, such as the method of allegorically interpreting the names of the gods in the *Cratylus* and the formulation of teleological argumentation in the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*. Plato's myths, moreover, are particularly prominent models for Plutarch, both in mythic and dialectical passages. Second, Plutarch treats Platonic interpretation as a distinctive discourse, and appeals to it, either *in prima persona* or through characters in dialogues, in parallel to the discourses of mythmaking and interpretation of religious traditions. Interpretation of Plato, and especially the *Timaeus*, allows Plutarch and the characters of his dialogues to construct "likely accounts;" imagistic mythmaking is treated as another avenue to present "likely accounts," which are presented in parallel to those of Platonic interpretation.<sup>201</sup>

This study is divided into two parts. The first examines two aspects of Plutarch's philosophical method, particularly his attitude towards Plato and his principles of interpretation. Scholars such as Harold Cherniss have explained certain aspects of Plutarch's philosophy as the projection of his own religious or philosophical preconceptions back onto the founder of the Academy. I argue, to the contrary, that Plutarch's philosophical project is meaningfully based upon the interpretation of Plato. His attitude towards religion or theology is framed through the sort of piety Plato articulates, especially in book X of the *Leges*, while he draws his formulation of the highest end (*telos*) of ethics from the idea of the imitation of god insofar as possible for a human, which is discussed especially prominently in the *Theaetetus*. Plutarch is continuously returning to the Platonic dialogues and constantly interpreting Plato's myths, from the enigmatic cycles of cosmic disorder in the *Politicus* narrative to the vast "likely myth" of the world's nature and composition in the *Timaeus*. This exegesis is based on consistent principles, such as that

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<sup>201</sup> See also Smith (1985).



Plato is always consistent and best interpreted through other passages in Plato. These related principles enable to construct a coherent, dialectical discourse of Platonic interpretation, which he depicts as central to the life of his intellectual circle.

The second part takes Plutarch's own myths, made in imitation of various Platonic tales, as case studies. In the eschatological conclusion to *De sera numinis vindicta*, he presents a system of eschatological punishment with elements from the *Gorgias* and the *Respublica* but adapts them to the treatment of the incurably wicked from the *Phaedo*, which is rather unlike both. The myth strengthens arguments that were made in the rest of the dialogue about the nature of divine punishment. In the myth that concludes *De facie in orbe lunae*, Plutarch fashions a teleological account along lines described and demonstrated in the final portion of the *Phaedo*, while incorporating systems of thought from other Platonic dialogues, such as the idea of the human as a microcosm of the world in the "likely myth" of the *Timaeus* as well as the role of intermediates between the divine and the mortal in Diotima's speech in the *Symposium*. Rather than imitating a single Platonic myth in a single dialogue, as scholars from Rudolf Hirzel to Yvonne Vernière have understood Plutarch's mythmaking, he brilliantly weaves various concepts and images from across the Platonic corpus into each.<sup>202</sup> The over-determined exoticism of this myth's frame, I suggest, is meant to emphasize the hypothetical nature of its central speeches, which concern the nature of the physical world, about which certainty, for a Platonist, is impossible—the interlocutors have no choice but to be satisfied with the likely account.

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<sup>202</sup> Vernière (1977) aligns *De sera* with the myth of Er, *De fac.* with the *Ti.*, and *De gen.* with the *Phd.*, in no small part based on the appearance of Simmias in both (99-100), as does Hamilton (1934: 26). Vernière qualifies, however, "Ces sources sont loin d'être les seules, mais elles seront vraisemblablement les lignes de force de notre analyse" (101). Hirzel (1895) compares the two dialogues more broadly (149-51) but argues on the myths in particular: "Der attische wie der böotische Sokrates krönen ihr Reden mit einem Mythos und ziehen der wissenschaftlichen Geltung desselben wohl nicht zufällig die gleichen Grenzen" (150); he compares *Phd.* 108d with *De gen.* 589f (150n1), although *Grg.* 523a is much closer to Simmias' disclaimer in *De gen.*

## Chapter one. Plutarch of Chaeronea: philosopher, theologian, Platonist

The world reflected in Plutarch of Chaeronea’s corpus is one replete with both scholarly erudition and philosophical zeal. It gleams with the enthusiasm of the blooming phenomenon traditionally called Middle Platonism.<sup>1</sup> Both characters and the author *in prima persona* discuss poets, traditional myths, ritual practices, and philosophers from various persuasions, but above all Plato and the Academy. While Socrates in the *Phaedo* remarks, “many are the thyrsus-bearers, few the true initiates,” the character of Plutarch praises a companion as “one of those from the Academy, not a thyrsus-bearer but the most inspired celebrant of Plato.”<sup>2</sup> In *De sera*, he depicts himself beginning a theological speech with an almost hymnic appeal: “but first, beginning from the caution of the philosophers of the Academy towards the divine as if from an ancestral hearth, let us acquit ourselves of saying something about these things as if we surely know it.”<sup>3</sup> Plutarch presents himself and many of his characters as Platonists—although he still uses the language of the Academy rather than the slightly later term “Platonist”<sup>4</sup>—in the sense

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<sup>1</sup> Although the term “Middle Platonism” serves as a useful shorthand for the period, it has recently attracted criticism. Gerson (2013), for instance, deems it “basically vacuous” (5), in that he considers philosophers from Aristotle to Plotinus to all be essentially “Platonists.” It has been deemed misleadingly developmentalistic by Boys-Stones (2017), but it is still a useful shorthand for ‘a broad sort of Platonic philosophy that arose sometimes during the life of Cicero and ended sometime after Plotinus.’ Moreschini (2015) provides a useful and broad survey on the scholarship on Middle Platonism, described as a series of “revolutions” (15-25). A standard account of the broader issue—e.g. in Merlan (1967)—is that Plutarch, as a Middle Platonist, reflects a stepping away from the skepticism of Arcesilaus and Carneades and toward Neoplatonic dogmatism. Whittaker (1987) describes a “renaissance of dogmatic Platonism which undoubtedly took place in the first century B.C.” (81). Similarly, Lakmann (2017): “... wird die von Arkesilaos begründete skeptizistische Interpretation der Lehren Platons immer mehr in Frage gestellt” (3). Conversely, the (overly) strong case for Plutarch’s skepticism was made by Schröter (1911). Diogenes Laertius deems skepticism and dogmatism a major source of disagreement in the interpretation of Plato: “Since there is much conflict, both those who say he held dogma, and those who say he did not, come on and let us examine the question” (ἐπεὶ δὲ πολλὴ στάσις ἐστὶ καὶ οἱ μὲν φασὶν αὐτὸν δογματίζειν, οἱ δ’ οὐκ, φέρε καὶ περὶ τούτου διαλάβωμεν; III.51).

<sup>2</sup> οἴσθα γὰρ τὸν ἄνδρα τῶν ἐξ Ἀκαδημείας οὐ ναρθηκοφόρον ἀλλ’ ἐμμανέστατον ὀργιαστὴν Πλάτωνος (*Adv. Col.* 1107e-f). Cf. *Phd.* 69a-b.

<sup>3</sup> πρῶτον οὖν ὥσπερ ἄφ’ ἐστίας ἀρχόμενοι πατρῶας τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον εὐλαβείας τῶν ἐν Ἀκαδημείᾳ φιλοσόφων τὸ μὲν ὡς εἰδότες τι περὶ τούτων λέγειν ἀφοσιωσόμεθα (549e-f). Plutarch characterizes his mode of argument as “pursuing according to the likely through opinion and hypothesis” (ἀπὸ δόξης καὶ ὑπονοίας κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς μετιόντας; 549f). See further 549f-50c.

<sup>4</sup> Plutarch speaks for example of a “Platonic phrase” (Πλατωνικῆς φωνῆς; *Numa* XX.6) and a “Platonic character” (Πλατωνικοῦ χαρακτήρος; *Quaest. conviv.* VIII.2.718c), but only describes people as “Academics.” Galen (e.g. *In*

that they treat Plato as the superlative authority. Plutarch’s approach to Plato—and the approach he depicts of his intellectual community at large<sup>5</sup>—is extremely textual. In contrast, the Imperial Stoics tend to disclaim textual authority from the founders of their school.<sup>6</sup> Seneca, for instance, proudly proclaims his disdain for those who stick to only a single or few favorite philosophers.<sup>7</sup> Musonius Rufus, a philosopher who nearly joined Seneca as a Stoic martyr at the hands of Nero, recommends a simple education, without the use of too many proofs and emphasizing how the lessons are lived out in daily life.<sup>8</sup> Epictetus, his student, mocks those who think that erudition is the point of education, such as an adulterer who pleads, “but I am a scholar and I know the work of Archdemus.”<sup>9</sup> Plutarch is concerned with deeds as well, but also with the text of Plato in particular, as reflected by his dialogues, treatises, and particularly the two works dedicated solely

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*Tim.* frg. 6) and Lucian (e.g. *Nigr.* §2), not long after Plutarch, do speak of people as Platonists, as does whoever composed the epitome of Plut. *De an. proc.* (1030d). The significance of the Academy during the Imperial period is a source of scholarly controversy. See *infra* pg. 114.

<sup>5</sup> The corpus seems to reflect what some Medievalists have dubbed a “textual community,” particularly surrounding the *Ti.* See *infra* pg. 130. Cf. Charalabopoulos (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Cornutus could be an exception given his grammatical writings, although he does not cite much in *Theol. Graec.*, where he refers to myths, not writers. Cf. Boys-Stones’ (2018a) characterization of Roman Stoics as a “textual community” (9-12). Contrast Numenius’ description of the Epicureans (frg. 24 des Places = Euseb. *Praep. evan.* IV.5.3) and Sedley (1998) on Lucretius (62-92), as well as Sextus Empiricus (92-3). See also Cicero on the authoritativeness of Pythagoras’ words among the Pythagoreans (*Nat. D.* I.5.10).

<sup>7</sup> “I will show that this was approved by the Stoics as well, not because I affirmed a law for myself to commit to nothing against the word of Zeno or Chrysippus—because if anyone always follows one person, he is not senator but a rebellious factionary—but because the matter itself allows me to go into their opinions” (*hoc Stoicis quoque placere ostendam, non quia mihi legem dixerim nihil contra dictum Zenonis Chrysippiue committere, sed quia res ipsa patitur me ire in illorum sentiam, quoniam si quis semper unius sequitur, non in curia sed in factione est; De otio* III.1). Cf. Arr. *Epict. diss.* II.9.19-20.

<sup>8</sup> This is the topic of the first extant *Dissertatio*, perhaps compiled by a certain Lucius (cf. 19.15 Hense), that describes him. He concludes: “I say that it is necessary for the teacher, if he is a true philosopher, not to seek to go through a magnitude of discourses and proofs with students... and to follow them in life. This is the only way that someone will be improved by philosophy, if harmonious deeds are added to the healthy notions” (φημι δεῖν τὸν διδάσκαλον τὸν φιλόσοφον μὴ λόγων πλῆθος μῆδ’ ἀποδείξεων ζητεῖν διεξιέναι πρὸς τοὺς μανθάνοντας... τοῦτοις ἐπακολουθεῖν ἐν τῷ βίῳ. οὕτω γὰρ μόνως ἔσται τις ἐκ φιλοσοφίας ὠφελημένος, ἃν οἷς παραδέδεκται λόγοις οὐσιν ὑγιέσι τὰ ἔργα παρέχεται συνφωδᾶ; 5.3-6.3). Musonius—whom Tacitus describes as *studium philosophiae et placita Stoicorum aemulatus* (*Hist.* III.81.1), although cf. Inwood (2017)—is mentioned twice with praise by Plutarch (frgs. 36-7 Hense), who never mentions Epictetus. On Musonius’ conflict with Nero, see e.g. Philostr. *VA* IV.46.

<sup>9</sup> ἀλλὰ φιλόλογός εἰμι καὶ Ἀρχέδημον νοῶ (II.4.11). In a tract on progress in virtue (περὶ προκοπῆς), he mocks (ἐμπαίζεις; I.4.10) someone who thinks that virtue is gained by reading a lot of works by Chrysippus (ὁ πολλὰς Χρυσίππου συντάξεις ἀνεγνώκως; §6). Cf. §28-9. On Epictetus generally, see especially Long (2002), who emphasizes the “Socratic” element in his thought.

to exegesis—a treatise entitled *De procreatione animae in Timaeo* and the collection of ten *Quaestiones Platonicae*, both of which the next chapter examines further.<sup>10</sup>

Plutarch appeals not only to Plato, however, but also to traditional beliefs about the gods and their cults.<sup>11</sup> The dialogue *Amatorius* presents his approach as, to at least some serious extent, dogmatic.<sup>12</sup> The occasion of the dialogue, recounted by Plutarch’s son Autobulus, is a Thespian festival for Eros that Plutarch evidently attended with his newly married wife.<sup>13</sup> The topic eventually turns to the godhood of Eros, whom Pemptides considers an affliction (πάθος) rather than a god.<sup>14</sup> The character of Plutarch berates him for impiety, for disputing “our ancestral and traditional belief” (ἡ πάτριος καὶ παλαιὰ πίστις).<sup>15</sup> Once Pemptides has impeached the traditionality of one god, he has subjected every god to the same scrutiny, such that there can be

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<sup>10</sup> The former is divided between two parts: the first concentrates on how the temporal or sequential description of the composition is to be understood, and what the elements and order of the composition represent; the second is a series of three examinations, more in the style of the *Quaest. Plat.*, of the mathematical or harmonic section of the *Ti.* that follows. Cf. Hartman (1916: 589). The first portion extends through 1012b-27a, but all editors now, following Müller (1873), accept that 1017c-22e has been transposed in the manuscripts, and belongs after 1027e-f but before 1027f-30c, the final pages of the manuscript. Dörrie & Baltes (1993) include the relevant *Quaest. Plat.* alongside *De an. proc.* as “Kommentare zum Timaios,” but with the qualification “z. T. in kommentarartiger Form” (212-3). Cf. Tuominen’s (2009) monograph on ancient commentators on Plato and Aristotle: “Plutarch of Athens is to be distinguished from another, better known Plutarch from Chaeronea, a Platonist in the late first and early second centuries CE, the author of the lives of eminent men, moral treatises and many smaller philosophical works, some of which were critical of Stoic philosophy” (33). No mention is made of Plutarch’s exegesis, yet even as minute of an issue in the *Ti.* as the lack of void, and explication of physical processes that would seem to rely on void such as various sorts of suction, forms the topic for *Quaest. Plat.* VII, although the topic might seem to better suit the *Quaest. nat.* The *Ti.* is the second most cited Platonic dialogues in the Plutarchean corpus, as catalogued in Helmbold & O’Neil (1959: 62-3), behind the *Resp.* (60-1). Cf. Brouillette & Giavatto (2011) for a list of Platonic quotations sorted by Plutarchan works. I discuss these works in greater depth in the next chapter.

<sup>11</sup> On Plutarch’s theology, see especially Ferrari (1995).

<sup>12</sup> See also *De Is.* 359f-60a.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. 748f-9c. The dialogue playfully begins with an allusion to the famous setting of the *Phdr.* (749a). On the festival of Eros, the Erotidea, see Graf (2006). Autobulus emerges as a major figure in other works as well. See *infra* pg. 135 on his position as an addressee of *De an. procr.*

<sup>14</sup> 755e. Pemptides later argues that the gods are to be understood allegorically—Ares, for example, as “he who orders the passionate and courageous part of us” (ἀποκριναμένου δὲ τοῦ Πemptίδου θεὸν ἡγεῖσθαι τὸν Ἄρην κοσμοῦντα τὸ θυμοειδὲς ἡμῶν καὶ ἀνδρῶδες; 757c).

<sup>15</sup> 756b. There is some scholarly debate on what exactly Plutarch means by “belief” (πίστις). Moreschini (1996) understands it as “fede” which “possiede un ruolo fondamentale” in his thought (46). Kooten (2012), however, argues that it is fundamentally “non-fideistic” in this passage, as elsewhere. Frazier (2008) characterizes it somewhere in between, as a “foi philosophique... indémontrés et indémontrables,” which is meant to justify all belief in the divine (60).

no secure belief about the gods.<sup>16</sup> The subject of Plutarch’s contention is not the general belief in the gods, their care for humans, or the worth of rituals in general, but rather the reliability of the Hellenic tradition on the specific content of religion, not the framework in which he understands it.<sup>17</sup> He claims that all knowledge of the gods comes from three sources—the poets, the philosophers, and the lawgivers<sup>18</sup>—and appeals to the best (κράτιστοι) of each for the eminence of Eros—Hesiod, Plato and Solon.<sup>19</sup>

When Plutarch can marshal copious examples from all three sources—such as he can with Eros, rising from his cosmological role in the Hesiodic *Theogonia* to the erotic “madness” of Plato’s *Phaedrus*<sup>20</sup>—he weaves each into a coherent praise of the god, in this case befitting the occasion and topic of the dialogue. Yet what happens when the sources contradict, as Plutarch admits they often do?<sup>21</sup> Plutarch advises readers of poetry to be selective, taking to heart what coheres with his ethical and theological assumptions while rejecting what contradicts them.<sup>22</sup> The principles of discernment that allow him to construct a concordant system are, I argue in this

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<sup>16</sup> 756d.

<sup>17</sup> He defends Eros at one point on the grounds that he is “not now requesting his first altar and sacrifice, nor is he a foreigner from some barbaric superstition, such as some so-called Attises and Adonises” (οὐ γὰρ νῦν αἰτεῖ πρῶτον βωμόν ὁ Ἔρως καὶ θυσίαν οὐδ’ ἐπηλυς ἐκ τινος βαρβαρικῆς δεισιδαιμονίας, ὡσπερ Ἄτται τινὲς καὶ Ἀδόνιοι λεγόμενοι; 756c). He also mentions hermaphroditic celebrants in these non-Greek cults (δι’ ἀνδρογύνων). See also 763c-d on Xenophanes and Egyptian rituals.

<sup>18</sup> “Perhaps, friend, of everything we believe, except what comes into our thought through sense perception, derives its trust from myth, law, and reason. We have as leaders and teachers for the opinion about the gods, then, the poets, the lawgivers, and third the philosophers: they all hold in common that the gods exist, but they differ greatly with one another about their hierarchical arrangement, their nature, and their power” (ἴσως μὲν γὰρ, ὃ ἑταῖρε, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων, ὅσα μὴ δι’ αἰσθήσεως ἡμῖν εἰς ἔννοιαν ἦκει, τὰ μὲν μύθῳ τὰ δὲ νόμῳ τὰ δὲ λόγῳ πίστιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἔσχηκε· τῆς δ’ οὖν περὶ θεῶν δόξης καὶ παντάπασιν ἡγεμόνες καὶ διδάσκαλοι γεγόνασιν ἡμῖν οἳ τε ποιηταὶ καὶ οἱ νομοθέται καὶ τρίτον οἱ φιλόσοφοι, τὸ μὲν [οὖν] εἶναι θεοὺς ὁμοίως τιθέμενοι, πλήθους δὲ πέρι καὶ τάξεως αὐτῶν οὐσίας τε καὶ δυνάμεως μεγάλα διαφερόμενοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους; 763b-c).

<sup>19</sup> 763e. See also *De Is.* 369b.

<sup>20</sup> Hesiod: 756f; Plato: 758d-f. He summarizes the movement with an image: “Eros... is crowned, adorned, and conducted from Helicon into the Academy” (ὁ Ἔρως... ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἑλικῶνος εἰς τὴν Ἀκαδήμειαν ἐστεφανωμένος κατάγεται καὶ κεκοσμημένος; 763e-f).

<sup>21</sup> “The three factions thus hold different opinions about the gods. One votes one way, and the others do not easily accept the vote from the other” (οὕτως αἱ τρεῖς στάσεις αἱ περὶ θεῶν διχοφρονοῦσαι καὶ ψῆφον ἄλλην ἄλλη φέρουσαι καὶ μὴ δεχόμεναι ῥαδίως τὸν ἐξ ἑτέρας...; 763e). He compares the three factions of ancient Athens (τρεῖς στάσεις Ἀθήνησι, Παράλων Ἐπακρίων Πεδιέων; 763d). On Solon, cf. 769a-b.

<sup>22</sup> Plutarch demonstrates this tendency here too in rejecting Eur. frg. 595 Nauck (763f).

chapter, are fundamentally philosophical, rationalistic, and Platonic. In particular, it is based upon Platonic models, including the strictures of piety outlined in *Leges X*, the etymological allegories of the *Cratylus*, and the idea of the aim of virtue as the imitation of god insofar as is possible for a human, a concept that appears in several dialogues but especially the *Theaetetus* and *Timaeus*. While Plutarch does turn to traditional myths and rituals, namely the cult of Delphi and Egyptian religion, he interprets their images and symbols through philosophical hermeneutics to serve philosophical ends. He might prefer to abide the rituals set by the lawmakers, perhaps in a similar vein as Cicero's Cotta, but, should conflict arise, one faction will ultimately prevail in Plutarch's thought: the philosophers.<sup>23</sup>

A massive strain of scholarship, however, stretching from 19<sup>th</sup> century *Quellenforschung* to more recent standard accounts such as John Dillon's, seek to explain Plutarch's philosophical positions through the influence of "Eastern" religions.<sup>24</sup> In particular, Persian or Zoroastrian influence is often held to be Plutarch's impetus for a certain cosmological "dualism."<sup>25</sup> Philip

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<sup>23</sup> Cotta affirms that he "accepts the opinions about the gods which we received from the ancestors; I will defend the rites, celebrations, and obligations" (... *opinionones quas a maioribus accepimus de dis immortalibus, sacra caerimonias religionesque defenderem*; III.2.5). From Balbus, since he is a philosopher, on the other hand, he requires an account (*a te enim philosopho rationem accipere debeo religionis*; III.2.6).

<sup>24</sup> This approach is particularly prominent in the scholarship on Plut. *De fac*. See *infra* pg. 316.

<sup>25</sup> Dillon (1977): "Plutarch, as in all probability Ammonius before him, seems to have been stimulated in his interpretation of Plato (as perhaps was Plato himself in making the suggestion) by a study of Persian religion. At *De Is*. 396E, he bestows high praise on Zoroastrian theology, referring to it as the 'opinion of the majority of the wisest men'" (203). *De an. proc.*, moreover, includes a brief survey of names for dual principles, namely Empedocles' love and strife, Heraclitus' harmony, Parmenides' light and dark, Anaxagoras' mind and the unlimited, and "Zoroaster god and *daemon*, calling the former Oromasda and the latter Areiman" (1026b; cf. "Zaratas" in 1012e, and the list in *De Iside* 369d-71a). Cf. Zaehner (1961: 123-5). Most of the scholarly claims concern, as Alt (1993) labels it a "dualismus in der Deutung des Kosmos." Thévenaz (1938), for instance, deems Plutarch a Manichean: "passion-raison, il va défendre une sorte de dualisme manichéen pour lequel, avec un éclectisme assez facile, il cherchera appui à la fois dans la tradition philosophique et mythologique et dans les œuvres littéraires" (85). See also Froidefond (1987: 215-24), Dillon (2011), O'Brien (2015: 97-105), and Cacciatore (2016: 66-8). Chlup (2000), however, argues that it cannot, at least, be a dualism of two equal gods. Roig Lanzillotta (2011) discusses the issue in terms of Gnosticism and surveys the scholarship for that identification but concludes "for most of Plutarch's so-called Gnosticizing views there is always a precedent in Greek philosophy, mainly in Plato and Aristotle, and that Plutarch's interpretation has often parallels [*sic*] in the context of Middle Platonism" (416). Cf. Nilsson (1948): "Iranian dualism moves *in* this world, Greek dualism *between* this world and the supersensuous one... The origin of Greek dualism is not in the doctrine of Zarathustra concerning the contest between good and evil in the world, but in Plato's doctrine of the antithesis between the perishable and changeful world of phenomena and the eternal and higher world of the Forms" (137).

Hardie, in what is still the standard account of Plutarch's interpretation of myth, recognizes the coerciveness of his attitude to traditional stories, "which, an inevitable and central feature of Greek culture, nevertheless must adapt itself to the prior claims of religion in the field of piety and of philosophy in the field of rational inquiry."<sup>26</sup> He takes religion, however, to be "eventually more important for Plutarch" based on a description of Cleombrotus' aims in *De defectu oraculorum*—"he composed a history to serve as the material for a philosophy that aims toward theology, as he called its end."<sup>27</sup> This line culminates in the only book-length study on Plutarch's myths, Yvonne Vernière's 1977 *Symboles et mythes dans la pensée de Plutarque*.<sup>28</sup> She particularly emphasizes the role of the mysteries, which she thinks shapes Plutarch's approach to myth, including Platonic myth.<sup>29</sup> I argue, however, that Roger Miller Jones, who presented the first systematic investigation of Plutarch's approach to Plato with his 1916 dissertation book, indicatively entitled *The Platonism of Plutarch*, presented a fundamentally sounder approach. He concludes, after surveying other possible influences, "we find the point of view in Plutarch's philosophical works uniformly that of a Platonist, and whatever elements have been added from other sources, are not incompatible with his interpretation of Plato."<sup>30</sup> The nature of Platonism, of

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<sup>26</sup> 1992: 4743-4. He bases his interpretation of Plutarch's conception of myth by comparison with the mysteries, not just in their obscurity and requirement of interpretation: "A particular link is forged in the case of myths yielding a spiritual, eschatological interpretation that coincides with instruction in the mysteries concerning the afterlife" (4745). Cf. Heath (2013): "In Plutarch's view, therefore, the myth of Isis and Osiris and its associated religious rituals are symbolic expressions of the deepest truths of religion, which are also the most advanced truths of philosophy. It is clear why this dimension of Plutarch's thinking is not in evidence in *How to Read Poetry*: these deep truths are not appropriate for young people who have not yet begun their philosophical studies" (126).

<sup>27</sup> ... συνήγεν ιστορίαν οἷον ὕλην φιλοσοφίας θεολογίαν ὥσπερ αὐτὸς ἐκάλει τέλος ἐχούσης (410b).

<sup>28</sup> Vernière is the standard account of Plutarch's use of philosophical myth, and hence the only citation in Hardie (1992), the standard account of his interpretation of myth.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *De tran. an.* 477d: ὧν τὸν βίον μύησιν ὄντα καὶ τελετὴν τελειοτάτην.

<sup>30</sup> 1916: 9. Jones studied with the seminal Plato scholar Paul Shorey at the University of Chicago and spent most of his career at the University of California at Berkeley, where he taught Harold Cherniss, who in turn published prominently on Plato and Plutarch. See Tarán (2001: 668-9).

course, is increasingly contested<sup>31</sup>—does it mean inheriting part of the Neo-Pythagorean tradition from Alexandria? or the Stoics, or any of a number of religious traditions? Against these sorts of interpretations, I hold, George Boys-Stones offers a crucial correction: it is a return to the authority of Plato specific to the intellectual culture of the early Roman Empire.<sup>32</sup>

For Plutarch, moreover, religion is fundamentally rationalistic and based on consistent principles about the goodness of the divine, rather than broken into rational philosophy and faithful revelation. As Robert Flacelière argues, Plutarch refers to “la véritable théologie, celle qui est conforme à la raison.”<sup>33</sup> Rather than bending philosophy to religion, traditional religious materials such as myth provide the material to further support the assumptions of Platonic metaphysics, the highest part of philosophy. Although Plutarch betrays a sense of pious deference concerning specific aspects of religion, such as the names of the gods and the traditional form of rituals, the models he draws from Plato’s approach to religion and tradition allow him to maintain a broader framework of pious skepticism. He finds truth in mysterious or scandalous things and anchors tradition, as understood through philosophy, to his conception of the highest ethical ends.

In the first section, I argue that Plutarch develops a sense of philosophical piety as an intermediate stage between superstition and atheism, which is modeled especially after the

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<sup>31</sup> Much of the scholarship traces the emergence of Platonism to either the Stoic Posidonius, the Academic Antiochus, or the Neopythagorean Eudorus, all in the first century B.C.E., but Boys-Stones (2001) persuasively argues that it is a distinctively Imperial phenomenon. Some general surveys have begun to recently treat Plutarch as the earliest figure, such as Kenny (2004: 111-2). On Antiochus and Eudorus, see the survey in the first chapter; on Posidonius, the fourth.

<sup>32</sup> Especially (2001).

<sup>33</sup> 1974a: 280. He compares *De Is.* 355c and concludes, “On revient ainsi à ἱστορία, qui fait connaître les traditions religieuses des différents peuples, et à la φιλοσοφία, qui les interprète sainement pour conduire à la véritable θεολογία.” Goldschmidt (1950) considers whether θεολογία might mean simply represent “le sens de mythologie” in line with “que j’ai appelé ailleurs le platonisme populaire,” or, following Dodds, “le sens (aristotélicien) de métaphysique” (22n5). Cf. Flacelière (1974a: *passim*; 1974b: 101n2). Cleombrotus, as he points out, expresses contempt for the Δελφῶν θεολόγοι that literally interpret myths, such as the battle with Pytho, in *De def. or.* 417f-8a.



Athenian Stranger's theodicy in book X of the *Leges*.<sup>34</sup> Superstition, as Plutarch depicts it, consists in improper attitudes towards the divine, such as fear that evil can come from the divine or the belief in a mechanistic universe devoid of providential care, such as the Epicurean worldview. Many scholars, however, detect a tension in Plutarch's attitude towards religion, particularly in regard to fear of divine punishment, which he criticizes in *De superstitione* yet employs in his own myths such as that of *De sera*.<sup>35</sup> To resolve this apparent disparity, Frederick Brenk in particular constructs a many-parted developmentalist schema that distinguishes Plutarch's skeptical youth from his progressively more pious maturity. Plutarch's fundamental assumptions about religion, however, are ultimately rationalistic and Platonic. Even in *De superstitione*, the source of much of the controversy, he maintains a pious skepticism. Although he disclaims the possibility of certainty about what form every aspect of the providential care of the universe might take, he, like the Athenian Stranger in the tenth book of Plato's *Leges*, has no doubt that the gods exist, care about us, and are not won over through superstitious bribes.

Next, I argue that Plutarch, rather than changing his philosophy to fit religious preconceptions as some scholars argue, endeavors to show how traditional religious ideas

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Campbell (1898): "A kindred notion had been expressed by Plato himself in 'Laws' x.897" (372).

<sup>35</sup> The tension between rationality and irrationality in Plutarch's thought is central to Beck (1953). Russell (1972) characterizes Plutarch's attitude more persuasively: "he belongs to the continuous tradition of Hellenic piety and Hellenic skepticism..." (83). Barrow (1967), however, goes even farther in characterizing Plutarch's thought as sentimental: "Nor must a systematic account of Plutarch's philosophy be expected, because he was not a systematic thinker. ... Nor can we say that, since he was a Platonist, we can fill in the gaps for him from our knowledge of Platonism; for he was indeed an admirer of some aspects of Platonism, but he did not adopt the whole of it. ... What he borrowed he used together in the crucible not of thought but of feeling. If we put to him a problem of religion or ethics, he could tell us what views on it the philosophers had held, and he would give us his own judgment; his judgment would be informed and enlightened by his knowledge of philosophy, but it would spring ultimately from his own right feeling in the matter; it would not be derived from any closely articulated ethical theory which he had worked out for himself" (72-3). Russell's idea of Plutarch's unity of skepticism and piety is more sensible. Cf. Barrow (1967): "he meant that Reason, working on the accumulated knowledge and experience of men, will conduct a seeker up the steps towards and understanding of God and his Goodness; from that point Reason can take him no further; direct knowledge of God and communion with his spirit is for God and the soul" (76). See also Goldhill (2002): "Firmly avoiding the Scylla and Charybdis of religious and philosophical error, the reader's *synkritic* judgement, guided by reading Plutarch, leads to the grail of an educated, cultural self-control – the achievement of being Greek, with Plutarch" (280).

corroborate the insights of Plato. Although he uses several methods of interpretation, etymological allegory is a particularly prominent feature, which is used to show how ancient traditions signify intellectual or ontological truths. Isis, for example, “is a Greek word,” which Plutarch derives from εἰδέναι, to know—“as the name indicates, nothing is more appropriate to her than knowing and knowledge.”<sup>36</sup> This allows him to hymn the intellectual qualities of the goddess and to present philosophy as a life of searching out such knowledge. Gwyn Griffiths compares Plutarch’s etymological interpretations with nearly contemporary Stoic allegorists such as Cornutus and it is possible that Plutarch is at least in part spurred to allegory by competition with the Stoics.<sup>37</sup> The Platonist, however, treats Stoic interpretations as narrowly physical. Plutarch does present possible interpretations of the physical world in *De Iside*, but he ultimately rejects them in favor of intellectual or ontological understandings. Plato’s *Cratylus*, I argue, provides both a broader model for both cross-linguistic etymological inquiry and many examples of such derivations, which more closely resemble the examples that Plutarch emphasizes most authoritatively.<sup>38</sup> He particularly investigates elements of the cult of Apollo at Delphi and Egyptian religion in this way.<sup>39</sup> Plutarch presents the puzzles of ancient institutions and rituals as spurs to speculation, while subordinating myths, either Greek or foreign, to corroborate Plato.

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<sup>36</sup> ὡς τοῦνομά γε φράζειν ἔοικε, παντὸς μᾶλλον αὐτῇ τὸ εἰδέναι καὶ τὴν ἐπιστήμην προσήκουσαν. Ἑλληνικὸν γὰρ ἢ Ἴσις ἐστὶ καὶ ὁ Τυφών... (351f). He explains Typhon as being hostile (πολέμιος) because he has been “puffed up” (τετυφωμένος), recalling Plato’s etymological pun in the *Phdr.* (Τυφῶνος... μᾶλλον ἐπιτεθυμμένον; 230a). On the claim of a Greek origin for the name Isis, see Brenk (1999: 230-2) and Richter (2001).

<sup>37</sup> 1967: 82-3. He especially emphasizes “etymology, a favourite arm of the Stoics” (85), which he holds “Plato made light of in the *Cratylus*” (86). Heath (2013) also detects similarities with Stoics such as Cornutus: “But like the Stoics, Plutarch makes a distinction in principle between the ‘outrageous myths and empty fictions’ of poets and religious myths and rituals (especially mystery cults) that express deep truths in a symbolic or riddling way” (126). He sees another similarity in both Cornutus’ and Plutarch’s interest in non-Greek myths (127). Boys-stone (2001) argues for the influence of Stoic allegory in this period of Platonism generally, but cf. Tarrant’s review (2002).

<sup>38</sup> See further *supra* pg. 24.

<sup>39</sup> These two traditions evidently had particular significance for Plutarch, perhaps in part for personal reasons. He discusses his priesthood at Delphi in *An seni.* 792f and *Quaest. conv.* VII.2.700e. On the date and evidence for Plutarch’s priesthood, see Ziegler (1949: 23-6). On the epigraphic evidence for his priesthood, see Casanova (2012). Stadter (2005) compares the oracle in practice in the *Vit.* and in theory in the *Mor.* Plutarch discusses travelling to

Building upon this sketch of Plutarch’s theology, I proceed to characterize his ethical philosophy, and particularly his prominent appeals to the characteristic Middle Platonic definition of the aim of virtue as the imitation of god insofar as possible for a human. This concept, drawn explicitly from Plato, has a particularly expansive significance for Plutarch: in studying the order visible in the sky, the most manifest physical example of the demiurge’s ordering of the world, we straighten the motion in our souls; in contemplating and studying, we imitate the action of the divine intellect; and in seeking after causes we aim after the demiurgic act itself, insofar as possible for a human. Although Plutarch describes “theology” as the highest part of philosophy at certain points, the divine is shot through the entirety of his philosophy, from ethics and physics to the heights of ontology.

I then survey the scholarship on Middle Platonism and its relationship with the other philosophical schools. Plutarch denounces the Epicureans as pernicious “atheists,” dedicating three treatises explicitly to polemic as well as centering *De sera* against them.<sup>40</sup> He dedicates

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Egypt in *De Is.* 354d-e and *Quaest. conv.* V.5.678c. Plutarch’s direct knowledge of Egypt is often estimated to be low—e.g. by Griffiths (1970)—but cf. Meeusen (2017). Egypt is particularly prominent for Platonism given the ancient debate over its influence on Plato. The Early Academic Crantor, according to Proclus, claims that Plato was motivated to write the former by criticisms that he stole his model of government from the Egyptians: “There are those who say the whole speech about the Atlantians is bare history, such as the first interpreter of Plato, Crantor: he indeed says that Plato was mocked by men of the time for not inventing his own constitution, but instead taking over Egyptian things: so much care was taken of the mockers that he transferred the history of the Athenians and Atlantians over to the Egyptians, and that the Athenians were living then according to that constitution. And he says that the prophets of the Egyptians bear witness and say that these things are written on Egyptian steles, which as still preserved” (τὸν περὶ τῶν Ἀτλαντίνων σύμπαντα τοῦτον λόγον οἱ μὲν ἱστορίαν εἶναι ψιλὴν φασιν, ὥσπερ ὁ πρῶτος τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐξηγητὴς Κράντωρ· ὃς δὴ καὶ σκόπτεσθαι μὲν φησιν αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τῶν τότε, ὡς οὐκ αὐτὸν ὄντα τῆς πολιτείας εὐρετὴν, ἀλλὰ μεταγράψαντα τὰ Αἰγυπτίων· τὸν δὲ τοσοῦτον ποιήσασθαι <τὸν> τῶν σκωπτόντων λόγον, ὥστε ἐπὶ Αἰγυπτίους ἀναπέμψαι τὴν περὶ Ἀθηναίων καὶ Ἀτλαντίνων αὐτὴν ἱστορίαν, ὡς τῶν Ἀθηναίων κατὰ αὐτὴν ζησάντων ποτὲ τὴν πολιτείαν· μαρτυροῦσι δὲ καὶ οἱ προφήται φησι τῶν Αἰγυπτίων ἐν στήλαις ταῖς ἔτι σωζομέναις ταῦτα γεγράφθαι λέγοντες; *In Tim.* I.75.30-6.10). On Proclus’ possible sources for Crantor, see Tarrant (2007: 168n307). Cf. Plut. *Amat.* 764a-b. Colotes, also according to Proclus, claims that Plato stole the myth from a work he attributes to Zoroaster, entitled *On Nature* (περὶ φύσεως), apparently with an introduction (προοίμιόν) is reminiscent of the myth of Er (II.109.14-16). Wiener (2004) takes this criticism to motivate the character Plutarch’s choice of Protogenes as his intermediary for the *De Sera* myth: “die Gewährsleute sind vertrauenerweckend und gehören zu Plutarchs Bekanntenkreis” (59), citing *Amat.* 763d. Stausberg (2007), on the other hand, discusses Colotes’ attribution of the myth of Er to Zoroaster and Proclus’ response (188), and usefully compares Clement’s testimony (187).

<sup>40</sup> I discuss Plutarch’s polemics against the Epicureans, and Colotes in particular, in the third chapter.

three works to explicit refutation of the early Stoics, argues against their physics in *De facie*, and takes various opportunities to swipe at central parts of the philosophy.<sup>41</sup> Particularly, he objects that Stoics end up attributing everything, including evil, to providence.<sup>42</sup> He is usually less overtly hostile to Aristotle, but distinguishes his concepts from Plato's rather than adopting these concepts and terminology as some Middle Platonists do.<sup>43</sup> Many scholars characterize various of Plutarch's positions, however, as being shaped by interactions and polemic with Stoics, Aristotelians, or Neopythagoreans, such that his positions are determined to whatever extent by these schools. Although these schools might have some saliency in Plutarch's motivations, little in what results is un-Platonic. I suggest, rather, that he is consciously returning to Plato, as well as, to a lesser extent, the Academic Xenocrates, as he sometimes portrays himself.<sup>44</sup> Plutarch emerges as an engaged defender, interpreter, and imitator of Plato, willing to draw on subsequent Academics but always returning to the dialogues.

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<sup>41</sup> *De Stoicorum repugnantiis, Stoicos absurdiora poetis dicere, De communibus notitiis aduersus Stoicos*; on *De facie*, see further *infra* pg. 316, especially on Posidonius.

<sup>42</sup> "Introducing evil from non-existence without cause and without generation..." (τὸ κακὸν ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἀναιτίως καὶ ἀγενήτως ἐπεισάγοντας; *De an. proc.* 1015b). Similarly, he argues that "if it is natural for nothing to come about without cause, and if the good could not provide a cause of evil, then it is necessary for nature to bear the proper origin and source of evil, as of good" (εἰ γὰρ οὐδὲν ἀναιτίως πέφυκε γίνεσθαι, αἰτίαν δὲ κακοῦ τάγαθόν οὐκ ἂν παράσχοι, δεῖ γένεσιν ἰδίον καὶ ἀρχὴν ὥσπερ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ τὴν φύσιν ἔχειν; *De Is.* 369d). See also 369a and Cicero's conclusion for Cotta's refutation of the Stoics (*Nat. D.* III.39.92-3).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. particularly Alcinous and Apuleius, on whom see further *infra* pg. 104. Plutarch's approach to Neopythagoreans is perhaps similar.

<sup>44</sup> He presents Xenocrates as developing the *Ti.* in important ways which he follows, such as in the role of intermediate objects in the cosmology of the *De fac.* myth. See *infra* pg. 306. On hermeneutics, however, Plutarch criticizes the Academic's interpretation of the composition of the world soul in the *Ti.* at length in *De proc. an.* See *infra* pg. 136. See also Brenk (2017: 46-8, 55). Plutarch cites Xenocrates rather often and provides many testimonies (nos. 6-7, 18, 28, 32-5, 37-41, 47, 60-3, 68, 71, 73-4, 79 Dorandi), and his influence is detected further in Plutarch's metaphysics, such as by Krämer (1964: 93-101). Dillon (1999) draws attention to Plutarch's lack of concern with the other prominent Early Academics, Speusippus and Polemon, as well as later Academics (305, cf. *Cic.* IV.1-3). Dillon suggests this is partly because Xenocrates was "the true systematiser of Platonic doctrine" but more importantly his "concern with the harmony of the cosmos as a structure put together from diametrical opposites, and with the various agencies that preside over this harmony" (305-6). Cf. Heinze (1892): "denn er legt, offenbar seinem Autor folgend, den ganzen Mythos den Dämonen des Kronos in den Mund, schreibt diesen aber hervorragende litterarische Bildung zu, indem er sie Platon und Xenokrates citieren lässt" (126).

Finally, I return to the issue of Plutarch's assessment of the relationship between dialectic and myth, which will be a recurrent theme throughout the rest of the study. There is a substantial line of scholarship that holds, however, that Plutarch's philosophical myths somehow transcend the limits of logical or dialectical discourse, which is rooted in the idea of the mysteries.<sup>45</sup> Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, in a companion article dedicated to Plutarch and religion, for instance, argues that the "original creations of Plutarch lead the reader in a visionary way into a realm that is impenetrable to descriptive discourse: the world of the divine and the hereafter." While logical discourse cannot reach "the realm of pure truth," Hirsch-Luipold argues, mythic narratives uniquely allow Plutarch a way of "transcending the realm of the corporeal."<sup>46</sup> *Logos* and *mythos* differ for Plutarch in important respects, as they do for Plato—for example, myth tends to be told by the old to the young, it is noted for its pleurability, but also lesser precision<sup>47</sup>—yet both can, at best, only constitute a "likely account."<sup>48</sup> Plutarch's conception of a parallel relationship between imagistic mythmaking and dialectical interpretation, itself drawn from Plato, is especially apparent in the debate on many worlds in *De defectu*. His continuous return to Plato for models and frameworks, however, is evident throughout his thought, whether in theology, hermeneutics, or ethics.

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<sup>45</sup> One motivation is probably the similar line of scholarship in the scholarship on Plato's myths. See *supra* pg. 12.

<sup>46</sup> 2014: 172-3. He cites, for instance, *De sera* 563b, yet the passage does not present the myth as certain. Rather, Olympichus smiles (*διαμεδιάσας*) and playfully jeers the character of Plutarch, "we do not praise you, lest we seem to let you pass by the myth, on the grounds that the speech is sufficient for the explanation. Rather, we will give our decision whenever we hear these things also" (*οὐκ ἐπαινοῦμέν σε... ὅπως μὴ δόξωμεν ἀφιέναι τὸν μῦθον, ὡς τοῦ λόγου πρὸς ἀπόδειξιν ἰκανῶς ἔχοντος, ἀλλὰ τότε δώσομεν τὴν ἀπόφασιν, ὅταν κάκεινον ἀκούσωμεν*). See also *De def. or.* 418c: "but if something should partake in truth..." (*εἰ δ' ἀληθείας τι μετέχει...*).

<sup>47</sup> Smith (1986) elucidates a list, "probably not exhaustive," of distinct philosophical functions that myth might play for Plato, including helping to "keep the dialogues 'undogmatic,'" "shifting one's attention from the World of Becoming to 'worlds beyond,'" and drawing "together many of the concerns and images of the dialogue as a whole" (21). See also Kahn (1996: 67).

<sup>48</sup> There is little indication that Plato believes transcendental certainty is attainable for humans, at least in this embodied life. Cf. *Phdr.* 273e-4a.

*Atheism, superstition, and philosophical piety*

Many have approached Plutarch's philosophy as a religious philosophy in particular, sometimes rendering it a sort of mirror for different dispositions over time.<sup>49</sup> The Byzantine scholar John Mauropous, the teacher of Michael Psellus, composed an epigram in prayer for Plato and Plutarch, whom he seems to consider the pagans to have come closest to the Christian truth.<sup>50</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson confesses in the introduction to Goodwin's multi-volume translation of Plutarch that he found "a more sweet and reassuring argument on the immortality than in the *Phaedo* of Plato; for Plutarch always addresses the question on the human side, and not on the metaphysical."<sup>51</sup> Charles William King, eighteen years after a study of Gnostic occultism and the history of its influence up to contemporary Freemasons, published selected dialogues of Plutarch as "Theosophical Essays."<sup>52</sup> E. R. Dodds, however, contrasts the decadent and superstitious "new religious attitude" of the second century C.E. with Plutarch's adherence to "the traditional Greek belief in a rational world-order, wherein men and gods have each their appointed stations."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> E.g. Hani (1976): "... c'est comme philosophe, comme penseur religieux et come théologien que Plutarque retient l'attention" (7). On the reception of Plutarch more generally, see Goldhill (2002: 246-93).

<sup>50</sup> "An epigram for Plato and Plutarch. If you want some of the others to spared from what you threaten, my dear Christ, would that you spare for me Plato and Plutarch. For both were by nature most fit for your laws, both in word and character" (Ἐπίγραμμα εἰς τὸν Πλάτωνα καὶ Πλούταρχον. εἴπερ τινὰς βούλοιο τῶν ἀλλοτρίων / τῆς σῆς ἀπειλῆς ἐξελέσθαι, Χριστέ μου, / Πλάτωνα καὶ Πλούταρχον ἐξελοῖο μοι. ἄμφο γὰρ εἰσι καὶ λόγον, καὶ τὸν τρόπον / τοῖς σοῖς νόμοις ἔγγιστα προσπεφυκότες; XLII.987-91, *PG* 120.1150 Minge). See further Whittaker (1981: 61) and Mossman (2014) on Dryden (592-3). Cf. Dillon (1977): "His views on the origin of the world became a notorious heresy for the Neoplatonists, all the worse for its resemblance to the doctrine of the Christians..." (230).

<sup>51</sup> 1878: ix-x, specifically citing *Con ad uxor.* and *Non posse*. He compares Plutarch's religiosity to Montaigne (xii) and Goethe (xi). Emerson's friend, the poet and scholar Arthur Clough, lavished much attention on the *Moralia* as well in his introduction to the *Vitae* (1859: e.g. xxii-viii) to characterize his philosophical outlook: "His mind in his biographic memoirs is continually running on the Aristotelian Ethics and the high Platonic theories, which formed the religion of the educated population of his time" (xxvii). According to Richard (2014), however, Emerson's knowledge of and preference for the *Moralia* is unparalleled in early America (607-8).

<sup>52</sup> 1864, 1882. His next work (1888) was a collection surrounding Julian's "theosophical essays." Plutarch's *De Is.* is a key source for the foundational theosophic text, Blavatsky (1877: e.g. 65-7).

<sup>53</sup> 1933: 102. Dodds' conception of the history of Greek religion is influenced by Murray's (1925) postulation of a Hellenistic "failure of nerve." See also Smith's (1978) categories of "locative" and "utopian" religion (e.g. 185-9). In his youth, Dodds wrote poetry in a more mystic vein, such as "The Moon-Worshippers" (1919).

Some scholars, however, detect a tension in Plutarch's work, especially between his mythic dialogues, which, like some of Plato's, imagistically depict the journeys of the soul after death, including sights of the punishments of the wicked, and the treatise *De superstitione*.<sup>54</sup> The latter laments, among other things, that the superstitious fear absurd punishments after death. The contradiction, however, is only ostensible: Plutarch grounds his depictions of afterlife punishment in his view of the goodness of divine providence, which would only carry out just punishments; the superstitious, in contrast, fear morally arbitrary punishments, which the goodness of the world would not allow. Plutarch develops his conception of pious philosophy as a sort of middle ground, as he puts it, between atheism and superstition. Although some scholars detect changes in his attitude toward religion over time, I argue that this he is broadly consistent in how he understands providence, religion, and leading life in accordance to the characteristically Middle Platonic idea of the imitation of god. This reflects a conception of piety that is best understood through Plato's own attacks on atheism and superstition, which is reflected in Adeimantus' critique of poetic education in book II of the *Respublica*, but systematically deployed in the Athenian Stranger's denunciations in book X of the *Leges*.

In *De superstitione*, Plutarch similarly takes aim at two vices: irrational fear of the divine and atheistic materialism. He contrasts "someone who thinks that atoms and void are the elements" (ἀρχαῖς)—that is to say, an Epicurean, who has a "false belief" but one that does not necessarily entail wild and disordered passions—with the self-inflicted miseries of a

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<sup>54</sup> I refer to *De superst.* as a treatise, but there is a trend in the scholarship of reading it as a "diatribe," usually related to a "Cynico-Stoic" tradition, such as Moellering (1962: 21-6) and Smith (1975: 7-8). More generally, Russell (1968) lists generic characteristics—"Analogies, direct speech, asyndeton, quotations"—but suggests that Plutarch added "the play of allusion and comparison, the wide and well-chosen vocabulary, the mastery of the periodic style" (140). The generic distinction in *De Superst.* is not relevant for this discussion, but another way of resolving the apparent tension in Plutarch's ideas was to suppose that one set of ideas, not sincerely held by Plutarch, were taken over from his sources, as e.g. Erbse (1952) argues: "Dem Kern der Abhandlung liegt aber eine kynische Diatribe zugrunde" (299).

superstitious man (δεισιδαίμων).<sup>55</sup> The latter is so miserable that he finds sleep, which is so soothing for most, to be completely miserable because superstition fills his dreams with ghosts, apparitions, and tormenting punishments.<sup>56</sup> While others are able to dismiss these dreams of undeserved punishments through mockery and reason, the superstitious man seeks out exotic and ecstatic ritual experts and does anything they say<sup>57</sup>—not unlike Theophrastus’ portrait of “the superstitious man.”<sup>58</sup> We must escape superstition, Plutarch concludes, but take caution: “some thus flee superstition but fall into equally savage atheism, leaping over the piety that lies in between.”<sup>59</sup> Atheism is clearly treated as a formidable risk in the treatise, which perhaps explains why the Lamprias catalogue, an ancient list of Plutarch’s works, lists the title “On Superstition Against Epicurus.”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> ἀτόμους τις οἶται καὶ κενὸν ἀρχὰς εἶναι τῶν ὄλων· ψευδῆς ἢ ὑπόληψις, ἀλλ’ ἔλκος οὐ ποιεῖ οὐδὲ σφυγμὸν οὐδ’ ὀδύνην ταράττουσαν (164e-f).

<sup>56</sup> “Slaves forget their masters when they sleep, sleep lightens the chains of prisoners, and the inflammations around wounds and brutal ulcers of flesh and excessive pains of sleepers are removed: ‘dear charm of sleep, helper against sickness, how sweetly you come to me in need.’ Superstition does not allow one to say this (for it alone does not make peace with sleep, nor does it allow the soul to regain breath and courage and to thrust away the bitter and heavy opinions about the divine), but it rouses the horrible phantoms and monstrous apparitions and some punishments in the sleep of the superstitious as if in a place of the unholy, and it distresses the unhappy soul and banishes the dreams from sleep, whipped and flogged by itself as if by another, and receives strange and portentous ordinances” (οἱ δοῦλοι τῶν δεσποτῶν ἐπιλανθάνονται καθεδόντες, τοῖς πεδήταις ἐπελαφρύνει τὸν δεσμὸν ὁ ὕπνος, φλεγμοναὶ περὶ τραύματα καὶ νομαὶ σαρκὸς θηριώδεις καὶ περιωδυνίαι κοιμωμένων ἀφίστανται· “ὦ φίλον ὕπνου θέλητρον ἐπίκουρον νόσου, / ὡς ἡδύ μοι προσῆλθες ἐν δέοντί γε” [Eur. *Or.* 211-2]. τοῦτ’ οὐ δίδωσιν εἰπεῖν ἢ δεισιδαιμονία (μόνη γὰρ οὐ σπένδεται πρὸς τὸν ὕπνον, οὐδὲ τῇ ψυχῇ ποτε γοῦν δίδωσιν ἀναπνεῦσαι καὶ ἀναθαρρῆσαι τὰς πικρὰς καὶ βαρείας περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ δόξας ἀπωσαμένη), ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἐν ἀσεβῶν χώρῳ τῷ ὕπνῳ τῶν δεισιδαιμόνων εἶδωλα φρικώδη καὶ τεράστια φάσματα καὶ ποινὰς τινὰς ἐγείρουσα καὶ στροβοῦσα τὴν ἀθλίαν ψυχὴν ἐκδιώκει τοῖς ὀνείροις ἐκ τῶν ὕπνων, μαστιζομένην καὶ κολαζομένην αὐτὴν ὑφ’ αὐτῆς ὡς ὑφ’ ἑτέρου, καὶ δεινὰ προστάγματα καὶ ἀλλόκοτα λαμβάνουσαν; 165e-f).

<sup>57</sup> “When they rise and do not dismiss or mock it, nor realize that not one of the rousing things was true, but cannot flee any evil shadow of deceit that bears a dream, and trick and waste time and consume themselves, finding begging priests and witches...” (εἴτ’ ἐξαναστάντες οὐ καταφρόνησαν οὐδὲ κατεγέλασαν, οὐδ’ ἤσθοντο ὅτι τῶν ταραζάντων οὐδὲν ἦν ἀληθινόν, ἀλλὰ σκιὰν φεύγοντες ἀπάτης οὐδὲν κακὸν ἐχούσης ὕπαρ ἐξαπατῶσιν ἑαυτοὺς καὶ δαπανῶσι καὶ ταράττουσιν, εἰς ἀγύρτας καὶ γόητας ἐμπεσόντες...; 165f-6a).

<sup>58</sup> δεισιδαίμων (*Char.* XVI). It begins, “superstition would certainly seem to be cowardice in the face of the divine” (ἀμέλει ἢ δεισιδαιμονία δόξειεν <ἀν> εἶναι δειλία πρὸς τὸ δαιμόνιον; §1). See also Adeimantus in Pl. *Resp.* II.364b-5a.

<sup>59</sup> οὕτω γὰρ ἔνιοι φεύγοντες τὴν δεισιδαιμονίαν ἐμπίπτουσιν εἰς ἀθεότητα τραχεῖαν καὶ ἀντίτυπον, ὑπερπηδήσαντες ἐν μέσῳ κειμένην τὴν εὐσέβειαν (171f). He compares people fleeing from danger heedless tumbling down a pit or a cliff (171e-f).

<sup>60</sup> Περὶ δεισιδαιμονίας πρὸς Ἐπίκουρον (no. 155). On the Catalogue, see Ziegler (1951: 696-702) or, more summarily, Lamberton (2001: 22). Allegations of secret atheism are common against Epicurus, such as Cotta’s in



Superstition, however, leads to irrational fear of what we should feel the most love towards—the gods. The superstitious man, Plutarch argues, especially fears punishment after death, which can even extend to eternal torment:

Why is it necessary to speak at length? “Death is the limit of life for humans”—but not limit of superstition, which extends the boundaries beyond life, making fear longer than life and attaching thought of undying evils to death—even when things begin to cease, superstition makes it seem that the ones that do not cease are beginning. The high gates of Hades lie open, and rivers of fire are mixed together with branches of Styx, the darkness is filled with some phantoms of much fantasy, which inflict hard sights and pitiable sounds, and there are judges and punishers and chasms and nooks full of a million evils. Ill-fated superstition does not realize it subjects itself to awful things of every sort by its excessive caution about everything that seems awful.<sup>61</sup>

Plutarch uses traditional images of the underworld to emphasize how fearsome everything and every place is to the truly superstitious, but his argument is not against all kinds of fear of afterlife punishment. He specifies fears of eternal torments for scrutiny.<sup>62</sup> Plutarch’s idea of divine vengeance is based on a curative conception of punishment, which is beneficial for the person suffering the punishment, with some distinct end. The sort of punishment the superstitious fear, however, is purely retributive and not at all curative: this implies that the gods could act amorally or even unjustly, which is an unacceptable and disastrous premise in Plutarch’s eyes.<sup>63</sup> Grievous superstition, he argues, completely undoes this deeply held

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Cic. *Nat. D.*: “This is because your Epicurus does not seem to put up a good fight concerning the immortal gods. He surely does not dare to deny that the gods exist, lest he stumble into hatred and punishment” (*quia mihi uidetur Epicurus uester de dis immortalibus non magnopere pugnare: tantum modo negare deos esse non audet ne quid inuidiae subeat aut criminis*; III.1.3).

<sup>61</sup> τί δεῖ μακρὰ λέγειν; “πέρας ἐστὶ τοῦ βίου πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ὁ θάνατος” (Dem. XVIII.97), τῆς δὲ δεισιδαιμονίας οὐδ’ οὕτως, ἀλλ’ ὑπερβάλλει τοὺς ὄρους ἐπέκεινα τοῦ ζῆν, μακρότερον τοῦ βίου ποιοῦσα τὸν φόβον καὶ συνάπτουσα τῷ θανάτῳ κακῶν ἐπίνοιαν ἀθανάτων, καὶ ὅτε παύεται πραγμάτων, ἄρχεσθαι δοκοῦσα μὴ παυομένων. Ἄιδου τινὲς ἀνοίγονται πύλαι βαθεῖαι, καὶ ποταμοὶ πυρὸς ὁμοῦ καὶ Στυγὸς ἀπορρώγες ἀνακεράννυνται, καὶ σκότος ἐμπύλαται πολυφαντάστων εἰδώλων τινῶν χαλεπὰς μὲν ὄψεις οἰκτρὰς δὲ φωνὰς ἐπιφερόντων, δικασταὶ δὲ καὶ κολασταὶ καὶ χάσματα καὶ μυχοὶ μυρίων κακῶν γέμοντες. οὕτως ἡ κακοδαίμων δεισιδαιμονία τῇ περιττῇ πρὸς ἅπαν τὸ δοκοῦν δεινὸν εὐλαβείᾳ λανθάνει ἐαυτὴν ὑποβάλλουσα παντοίοις δεινοῖς (166f-7a).

<sup>62</sup> See *infra* pg. 225.

<sup>63</sup> Dale (2009) similarly argues that Plutarch insists “that fear of gods and daimons is impious because it attributes shameful behavior and emotions to divine beings, who because they are superior to human beings cannot be inferior morally” (97). He also discusses the foreignness Plutarch stresses on excessive ritual throughout the treatise (94-97).

assumption and makes people “believe that the good is evil.”<sup>64</sup> These punishments have no ethical benefit, and the sort of exotic ritual solutions the superstitious seek do nothing to improve their moral character or address the real concern of punishment and reward.

Many, however, find the treatise incongruous with the religiosity of the rest of the corpus. Scholars particularly object that Plutarch ostensibly contradicts himself by dismissing the punishments that the superstitious fear after death in this treatise yet depicting afterlife punishments in the Platonizing myths. This led Jacobus Hartman to doubt its authenticity, although he detected some kindred elements with Plutarch’s thought.<sup>65</sup> Morton Smith revives and strengthens the argument against the treatise’s authenticity, partly on philological grounds, but largely because it contradicts a number of “his particular beliefs—in divine admonitions, rewards and punishments, the allegorical significance of myths, and so on.”<sup>66</sup> Smith even goes so far as to

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<sup>64</sup> ἡ δὲ δεισιδαιμονία πολυπάθεια κακὸν τὸ ἀγαθὸν ὑπονοοῦσα (167e). The superstitious are anxious even where they should feel the safest: “Do not drag the superstitious man from the shrines: for it is there that he is chastised and punished” (μὴ ἀπόσπα τὸν δεισιδαίμονα τῶν ἱερῶν· ἐνταῦθα κολάζεται καὶ τιμωρεῖται; 166e-f). In the conclusion to *De tran. an.*, he contrasts what he takes to be the correct demeanor for every festival, “full of delight and joy” (εὐθυμίας δεῖ μεστὸν εἶναι καὶ γήθους) with the laments and so on of the many (ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοὶ; 477d).

<sup>65</sup> Hartman (1916): “Quisquis fuit qui Plutarchi scripta collegit, hic certe eius mentem bene cognitam habuit. Nihil enim Plutarcho magis fuit persuasum quam certissimum ire qui medio eat” (112); “... superstitiosum magis etiam impium esse quam τὸν ἄθεον (169F). Si usquam, ibi Plutarchi vivam audis vocem” (113). Moellering (1962) strenuously argues for the authenticity of the treatise (particularly *contra* Hartman in 17n6), and defends against various charges, such as the “startling preference of atheism” given the vehemence against atheism in *De Is.* (106-14), which he explains as rhetorical exaggeration. On eschatological punishment, he argues that Plutarch accepts it as a means of moral correction: “One can see why Plutarch, the believer, dare not disperse the supernatural, including the fear of hell... At the same time it is distressing to suspect that he may be engaged in pious dissimulation with his myth of Thespesius” (149).

<sup>66</sup> The philological arguments (1) largely concern the manuscript and an unusual use of the third person “Plutarch” in an illustrative argument (170a). Smith’s most weighty philosophical objection is that Plutarch does not distinguish between benevolent and harmful *daemones* (3). Dale (2009) argues that the only salient contradiction in the treatise is between “the things he said about daimons” (93; see further 98-107). Cf. Brenk (2017): “Though M. Smith recently has had doubts about its authenticity, and his observations should not be dismissed lightly, the ideas and thought patterns in it are reflected again and again” (22). Russell (1972) rightly rejects this sort of argumentation: “The... commoner view is that Plutarch changed his mind and became more pious as he grew older, and that *Superstition* is an unusually early work. There is no independent argument of this, and it is circular to deduce difference of date from difference of doctrine. The most probable solution is that we must try to reconcile the two points of view. Nor is this so difficult after all. The prospect of rewards after death is only a hope; but what is certain, and removes all cause for panic, is the fairness and goodness of God” (80-1).

characterize the “piety” of the treatise as “Epicurean,” contending that it would better fit Lucretius than the Plutarch of the rest of the corpus.<sup>67</sup>

Developmentalist approaches to the apparent tension, however, are more common. *De superstitione*, both because of its content and its rhetorical style, is held to be an “early” work. Rudolf Hirzel, for instance, presents a narrative of a young, skeptical Plutarch who develops a sense of piety as he ages.<sup>68</sup> Others, such as Konrat Ziegler, deem its rhetorical style and intensity a marker of early composition.<sup>69</sup> Frederick Brenk, although initially arguing that the differences between the periods were not as stark as many scholars hold, has more recently constructed a complex, eight-part account of Plutarch’s development. He places the *De superstitione*—“puzzling for its criticism of the superstitious practices later tolerated by the author, but meant to represent a balance between atheism and superstition”—in the second phase, after a youthful fascination with all things “Pythagorean,” such as vegetarianism and numerology.<sup>70</sup> There is

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<sup>67</sup> 1975: “the gods exist, and men should believe in them, but they are indifferent to human opinion and harm no one, so the unbeliever is afflicted only by his own blindness” (6). He further compares Lucretius’ “extended, systematic attack on all forms of the fear of the gods, including fear of retribution after death.” See also Dodds (1933: 101-2); cf. Boulogne (2003: 18). The attitude toward the good of religion in human life in *De superst.* is decidedly un-Epicurean. Compare Lucretius’ description of the rites of the Magna Mater (II.610-60) with *De superst.* 169d: “but the pleasantest things for humans are festivals and feasts in the presence of the divine, and mysteries and rites, and prayers and adoration of the gods (ἥδιστα δὲ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἑορταὶ καὶ εἰλαπῖναι πρὸς ἱεροῖς καὶ μῆσεις καὶ ὄργιασμοὶ καὶ κατευχαὶ θεῶν καὶ προσκυνήσεις). Plutarch further laments that the superstitious are fearful in temples, the last place anyone should be afraid (169e). In *Quomodo adul.*, Plutarch similarly compares people who fear what is immoral in poetry too much to those that feel dread because of superstition (ὕπὸ δεισιδαιμονίας ἐν ἱερῶ) in a holy place (26b).

<sup>68</sup> 1912: “Am stärksten äußert sich diese Skepsis dem höchsten Problem gegenüber, der Frage nach der Natur der Gottheit; hier wird sie im Gefühl menschlicher Schwäche zur Demut und schlägt in eine der Frömmigkeit nahe verwandte Stimmung um. Nicht umsonst wird von Plutarch die skeptische Behutsamkeit in der Behandlung göttlicher Dinge mit demselben Wort bezeichnet (εὐλάβεια), das in der späteren Gräzität ganz allgemein, in der christlichen wie der heidnischen, die Frömmigkeit bezeichnet;” thus “Plutarch ein frommer Mann geworden” (9). See also Fox (1987: 95-6); cf. Nikolaidis (1994: 216).

<sup>69</sup> 1951: “Aber Form und Inhalt erweisen sie als in die Jugendperiode P.s gehörig. Die form ist ausgeprägt rhetorisch” (826). Cf. van der Stockt (1992): “The chronology of Plutarch’s writings, both absolute and relative, is another serious problem. For although some clearly bear the stamp of a young and rhetorical author, and others can be dated to a later stage of his life, the problem is nevertheless so far from a satisfactory solution that it is virtually impossible to sketch the evolution of Plutarch’s opinions with a sure hand” (11).

<sup>70</sup> Tsekourakis (1986) surveys some earlier positions (129). Cf. Harrison (1992): “... the leading middle Stoic (Seneca) and the middle Platonist (Plutarch), both seminal for the later development and transmission of their schools of philosophy, avowed neo-Pythagorean doctrines when young, even to the extent that both became

some warrant for the latter. In one rare autobiographical explanation, in the dialogue *De E apud Delphos*, Plutarch has Eustrophus urge the young Plutarch to give a numerological argument for the identity of the letter as “five,” which he, as the older narrator, explains as seriously meant (ὁ παίζων), because “I was, at the time, obsessively disposed to mathematics, although I would soon come to honor the ‘nothing in excess’ when I came into the Academy.”<sup>71</sup> Brenk connects this phase with the vegetarianism of several of Plutarch’s tracts to form the earliest phase before *De superstitione*, then places “dialogues with strong eschatological overtones”—such as *De sera* and *De facie*—in the eighth and last phase.<sup>72</sup> There is, however, no way to verify any developmentalistic schema for Plutarch: as Christopher Jones has shown, almost none of the datable works were composed before 96 C.E., the last twenty-five years or so of his life.<sup>73</sup>

The tensions that these proposals are meant to ameliorate, however, are only ostensible. They fail to distinguish between punishments for moral harms, which have a curative effect, and superstitious punishments that serve no moral purpose, even if they might involve a ritual

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vegetarians. There is a palpable, although so-far uncharted, subliminal influence of neo-Pythagoreanism on their thinking” (4662).

<sup>71</sup> ἐπεὶ τῆνικαῦτα προσεκέμην τοῖς μαθήμασιν ἐμπαθῶς, τάχα δὴ μέλλων εἰς πάντα τιμήσειν τὸ “μηδὲν ἄγαν” ἐν Ἀκαδημαίᾳ γινόμενος (387f). Plutarch indeed relates the distinctively Pythagorean identification of male with oddness and female with evenness (387f-8b), which he claims lead them to call five “marriage” (γάμον οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι προσεῖπον) because it is the first combination of an even and an odd number (388c). He similarly describes Ammonius as “holding not the least part of philosophy in mathematics” (ὁὐ τὸ φαυλότατον ἐν μαθηματικῇ φιλοσοφίας τιθέμενος; 391e). From this, Whittaker (1969) claims Ammonius “had Pythagorean interests,” bolstered by the argument that he is Egyptian (188n5-6). Dillon (1977) is more specific: “a fascination with number symbolism, presumably of a Pythagorean nature, is a part of the intellectual background of the young Plutarch” (341).

<sup>72</sup> 2017: 15. Brenk usefully summarizes earlier scholarship (17-24). Boulogne (2003), however, argues against developmentalist readings that see Plutarch’s *De superst.* as a young work: “À aucun moment de son existence il n’a été séduit par leurs thèses. Jamais il ne s’est senti obligé par certains de leurs arguments de remettre en question ses propres conceptions” (19). Cf. Brenk (1977): “There is, therefore, good reason to maintain that *De superstitione* is an early work of Plutarch, but it is probably not as important for the development of his thought as sometimes believed. At least many sentiments in his later writings which reflect those in *De superstitione*, suggest that there is often as much continuity as discontinuity between the later writings and *De superstitione*. At least, the skeptical, ‘atheistic’ side of the essay has been exaggerated” (14).

<sup>73</sup> 1966. See also Russell (1968: 134-5). Evidently his biographies of the Caesars, however, were as early as Vespasian’s reign, as Stadter (2015) argues from their dedication to Florus (67-9).

oversight or mistake.<sup>74</sup> The latter goes against Plutarch’s conception of providence, even as presented in *De superstitione*, which seems rooted in the theodicy of *Leges X*.<sup>75</sup> There, although the rustic interlocutors agree with the Athenian Stranger that atheism should be unthinkable in the new city, three contentions are laid out to be defended further: the gods exist, the gods care about us, and the gods cannot be won over (εὐπαραμύθητοι) by sacrifices and prayers as if bribes.<sup>76</sup> Plato describes this three-part theodicy particularly systematically in the *Leges*, but these same concerns feature more broadly into his critique of the Greek tradition, such as in Adeimantus’ criticism of the effect of poetry on education in *Respublica II*.<sup>77</sup> His most immediate concern is “what the souls of the young should make of it when they hear” traditional tales of punishment and reward<sup>78</sup>—whether “spoken by the poets or in ordinary conversation”<sup>79</sup>—which culminates in the fear lest they conclude that even the most unjust should be able to stave off divine punishment by offering some of their ill-gotten gains to “beggar-priests and seers” who “go to the doors of the rich and persuade them that the retribution

<sup>74</sup> Moellering (1962) hints at such a distinction but does not develop it further or examine its philosophical impact: “in *De Superstitione* we see that the persons terrified by fear are pitiable wretches rather than the criminally inclined who might profitably be restrained by dread of punishments to come” (151n203). Vernière (1977), in contrast, distinguishes what she takes to be Plutarch’s late works from “*De superstitione*, le *De audiendis poetis* ni le *De latenter vivendo*, qui stigmatisaient sans nuances les aspects terrifiants de la mythologie...” (40).

<sup>75</sup> Clinias tells the stranger how he would appeal to atheists to desist their disbelief: “first then the earth and the sun and stars and everything and the careful orderings of the seasons: and that all, both Greeks and non-Greeks, believe the gods exist” (πρῶτον μὲν γῆ καὶ ἥλιος ἄστρα τε τὰ ζῦμπαντα καὶ τὰ τῶν ὥρῶν διακεκοσμημένα· καὶ ὅτι πάντες Ἕλληνές τε καὶ βάρβαροι νομίζουσιν εἶναι θεούς; 886a). This book forms something of a self-contained episode, if not a “preface” or even “prefatory hymn” (προοίμιον) to the rest of the long work, in that the characters claim that the laws will be impotent unless the citizenry believes the gods exist, care about humans, and are unpersuaded by bribes (887a-c). Cf. Mayhew (2010): “The opening word of the *Laws* is ‘god’ (*theos*). The existence and nature of the gods is of central importance in this dialogue, and the focus of attention is Book 10... arguably the most philosophically challenging of the dialogue’s twelve books” (197). On the significance of the *Leg.* for Plato’s religious thought, see Campbell (1898: 354-60), Kenny (2004: 294-6), and especially Van Riel (2013). Cf. Vernière (1977: 18-21).

<sup>76</sup> 888b-c. See also 885b, *Eythphr.* 14e-5a, and *Resp.* III.390e. Cf. Meijer (2007: 122-6).

<sup>77</sup> See further *supra* pg. 18.

<sup>78</sup> ... τί οἰόμεθα ἀκουούσας νέων ψυχὰς ποιεῖν ... (365a).

<sup>79</sup> ... ἄλλο αὖ εἶδος λόγων περὶ δικαιοσύνης τε καὶ ἀδικίας ἰδίᾳ τε λεγόμενον καὶ ὑπὸ ποιητῶν ... (364a).

decreed by the gods can be circumvented through pleasurable feasts...<sup>80</sup> He concludes with a dichotomy:

Surely if there are no gods, or if they do not care about human affairs, then there is no need for anxiety over eluding their notice. But if they do exist, and they care, we know of them only through either what we have heard or from those discourses and genealogies of the poets. They themselves, however, say that we are able to appease and persuade them with sacrifices and gentle prayers and dedications. We must believe one or the other. If it is to be believed, we must act unjustly and sacrifice from the unjust profits.<sup>81</sup>

Adeimantus grounds this argument in an appeal to the authority of traditional myths and argues that, whatever should turn out to be the truth, it is better to be unjust. The premise that both or neither must be true, however, is a false dichotomy, as Plato shows by separating the assumptions in the theodicy of *Leges* X. That the gods exist, care for us, yet are not susceptible to bribes are treated as a coherent set of theological precepts. The source for this claim, however, is not an appeal to the authority of tradition, but philosophy, as represented by the Athenian Stranger's complicated cosmological arguments apparently meant to solve the problem of evil.<sup>82</sup>

Plutarch refers several times, with approval, to the Athenian Stranger's tripartite set of requirements for piety.<sup>83</sup> The Athenian Stranger rejects superstition, atheism, and deism. Plutarch reinforces both parts of these contentions in *De superstitione*. His framing of the atheist is firmly

<sup>80</sup> ἀγύρται δὲ καὶ μάντιες ἐπὶ πλουσίων θύρας ἰόντες πείθουσιν ὡς ἔστι παρὰ σφίσι δύναμις ἐκ θεῶν ποριζομένη θυσίας τε καὶ ἐπωδαῖς, εἴτε τι ἀδίκημά του γέγονεν αὐτοῦ ἢ προγόνων, ἀκεῖσθαι μεθ' ἡδονῶν τε καὶ εορτῶν (364b-c).

<sup>81</sup> οὐκοῦν, εἰ μὲν μὴ εἰσὶν ἢ μηδὲν αὐτοῖς τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων μέλει, τί καὶ ἡμῖν μελητέον τοῦ λανθάνειν; εἰ δὲ εἰσὶ τε καὶ ἐπιμελοῦνται, οὐκ ἄλλοθὲν τοι αὐτοὺς ἴσμεν ἢ ἀκηκόαμεν ἢ ἔκ τε τῶν νόμων καὶ τῶν γενεαλογησάντων ποιητῶν, οἳ δὲ αὐτοὶ οὗτοι λέγουσιν ὡς εἰσὶν οἳοὶ θυσίας τε καὶ εὐχολαῖς ἀγανῆσιν καὶ ἀναθήμασιν παράγεσθαι ἀναπειθόμενοι, οἷς ἢ ἀμφοτέρα ἢ οὐδέτερα πειστέον. εἰ δ' οὖν πειστέον, ἀδικητέον καὶ θυτέον ἀπὸ τῶν ἀδικημάτων (365e).

<sup>82</sup> 893b-8c. See Mohr (1978).

<sup>83</sup> Plutarch tends to reference Plato's old age while writing the dialogue, such as before introducing the idea of the adverse soul in *De Is.* (370f) and as when he compares his position on the center of the world to that of the Pythagoreans in the *Num.* (ταῦτα δὲ καὶ Πλάτωνά φασι πρεσβύτην γενόμενον διανοησῆσθαι...; XI.2). Plutarch is perhaps spurred by the tradition preserved in Diogenes Laertius that the *Leg.* were transcribed by Phillip of Opus and "left on the wax" (ὄντας ἐν κηρῷ; III.37), which would make them Plato's last dialogue, or by the Stranger's explanation that the tirade against atheists was given "youngly" and "most zealously because of my desire to conquer evil men" (καὶ μὴν εἴρηνται γέ πως σφοδρότερον διὰ φιλονικίαν τῶν κακῶν ἀνθρώπων... προθυμία μὲν δὴ διὰ ταῦτα νεωτέρως εἰπεῖν ἡμῖν γέγονεν; X.907b-c).

rooted with Epicureans in mind, who either fall into the category of those who deny the gods or, more charitably, just deny that they care about humanity.<sup>84</sup> Plutarch's treatment of superstition, conversely, reflects Plato's concern over the belief that the gods could be won over by bribes, even by unjust men. The actions of the divine are based on its providential care, not the ritual actions of humans. As Plutarch has Solon put it in the *Convivium septem sapientium*, "the abstention from eating flesh, as they attribute to the Orpheus of old, is a sophistry rather than an escape from the unjust things of food; there is only one escape and purification, to come completely into independent and self-sufficient righteousness."<sup>85</sup> In the *Amatorius*, Plutarch depicts his younger self similarly remarking, "it is a good thing indeed, friend, to partake in the rite at Eleusis; but I see that the fate is better for their celebrants and initiates of Eros."<sup>86</sup> This is depicted as the life spent in pursuit of wisdom and virtue, conversing and pursuing the beautiful together—what Plato describes in the *Phaedrus* as the best sort of pederasty, which Plutarch warmly extends to the best sort of marriage in the *Amatorius*.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Apul. *De deo Soc.* III.122-3. In later polemic, the Platonist Atticus (frg. 3 = Euseb. *Praep. Evang.* XV.5) accuses Aristotle of being as much an atheist as Epicurus, concerning his position on providence stopping at the moon (§7-8). At least Epicurus was open about his atheism, he concludes (§13-4). On this fragment, see further Boys-Stones (2016). For Stoic arguments, see Cic. *Nat.d.* II.1.3 and Meijer (2007) on Cleanthes (59-65).

<sup>85</sup> τὸ δ' ἀπέχεσθαι σαρκῶν ἐδωδῆς, ὡσπερ Ὀρφέα τὸν παλαιὸν ἱστοροῦσι, σόφισμα μᾶλλον ἢ φυγὴ τῶν περὶ τὴν τροφὴν ἀδικημάτων ἐστί. φυγὴ δὲ μία καὶ καθαρμὸς εἰς δικαιοσύνην τέλειος αὐτάρκη καὶ ἀπροσδεῖα γενέσθαι (159c).

<sup>86</sup> ὄθεν ἀγαθὸν μὲν, ὃ ἐταῖρε, τῆς ἐν Ἐλευσίνι τελετῆς μετασχεῖν· ἐγὼ δ' ὀρῶ τοῖς Ἔρωτος μοῖραν οὔσαν ὀργιασταῖς καὶ μύσταις... (761f-2a). He later develops a metaphor between marital intimacy and initiation further (ὡσπερ ἱερῶν μεγάλων κοινωνήματα; 769a).

<sup>87</sup> Marriage is central to the dialogue. The drama concerns one particularly beautiful young man, the desire of many men, as well as a wealthy widow that fell in love with him and proposed marriage. The festival becomes a sort of court between the advocates of pederasty and those of marriage (750a-4e), although in the end the widow succeeds (754e-5a) and the outraged men comically set out like a war band to assault the door (755a-c, 771d-e). Plutarch was evidently one of the advocates of marriage (cf. 770c), which he defends by articulating a certain kind of moderate sexual love as a unifying and integral part of marriage, while Plato, in the *Phdr.* especially, principally defends a purely chaste kind of erotic attraction (256a-d). On the latter, cf. Nussbaum (1999: 310-21) and Kraut (2011). Cf. *Resp.* III.403b-c. Plutarch, however, integrates erotic love centrally in marriage, although in a distinctively Platonic way. See Rist (2001). Plato himself, however, was at times extremely critical of traditional marriage. In the *Resp.*, Socrates suggests, for the guardian class, that "sacred marriages" (γάμους... ἱερὸς) be undertaken (apparently temporarily) at festivals, ostensibly by lot but secretly plotted by the rulers (V.458d-60a), lest jealousy arise. Cf. Plut. *Conj. prae.* 141d-f, 767d-e (modifying Plato's position but still using the distinctive term συντήκειν from Pl. *Symp.* 192e). See Grube (1927) on the summary in *Ti.* 18c-e. In the *Leg.*, the Athenian Stranger declares that "each

Plutarch does, however, assume that there are good reasons behind religious taboos and rituals which would match his own sense of Platonic piety, just as he does with much the poetry of Greek tradition.<sup>88</sup> Towards the beginning of *De Iside et Osiride*—Plutarch’s extensive exegesis of Egyptian myth and ritual, addressed to Clea, evidently a priestess at Delphi and at least an initiate in Egyptian cults<sup>89</sup>—he explains the abstentions of priests as nothing so surprising or mysterious as some evidently think: “the true cause for all of these things is to be found in the writing of Plato: ‘it is impermissible for the impure to touch the pure.’”<sup>90</sup> All of the strangeness of the cult of Isis, shaved heads and all, is rationally comprehensible as different means to avoid as much contact with corrupting materiality, an idea clear to us as distinctively Greek and distinctively drawn from the *Phaedo*, but to Plutarch, universal and manifest to anyone, Greek or non-Greek, who considers the issue carefully. He assumes that the founders of pious, non-superstitious rituals similarly instituted their rules for rationally comprehensible reasons, as the next section argues further.

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must seek a marriage that is beneficial to the state, not the most pleasing to himself” (τὸν γὰρ τῆ πόλει δεῖ συμφέροντα μνηστεύειν γάμον ἕκαστον, οὐ τὸν ἥδιστον αὐτῷ; VI.773b), which means marrying someone of opposite qualities rather than for wealth or power (773a-e). Punishments are, moreover, set for bachelors past the age of thirty-five (774a-b). The Stranger praises the principle of legislating private as well as public affairs (778e-9c) and indeed lays out a system of public shame and punishment for either having children for too long or failing to have children, as well as adultery (783d-5b). Erotic desire is thus framed as a potentially disruptive sickness (νοσήματα) that must be controlled for the public good rather than for personal pleasure (782d-3b, cf. *Resp.* V.461b-c). In the *Symp.*, however, Diotima thematizes procreation as a desire for immortality (208b; cf. 179b-c, 206e-7a, *Leg.* VI.773e). Plato’s lack of concern for marriage may have motivated the extremely positive depiction of it at the end of Xenophon’s *Symp.* (9.2-7)—a pantomime of the marriage of Dionysus, so moving that “the unmarried swear to wed” (οἱ μὲν ἄγαμοι γαμεῖν ἐπώμνυσαν) and the married hurry home (§6)—as Thesleff (1978) suggests. The early Peripatetic Dicaearchus more explicitly and vehemently criticized the *Phdr.* for sexual vulgarity (ἐπιμέμφεται ὡς φορτικόν; frg. 42 Wehrli = DL III.38).

<sup>88</sup> On his treatment of Homer, see *infra* pg. 216.

<sup>89</sup> 364d-e, 351e. See further Griffiths (1970: 253-4 and 430-1). Bowerstock (1965) examines the epigraphic and prosopographic evidence for Clea in greater detail (267-8). Hani (1976) collects epigraphic evidence for the cult’s spread to Chaeronea (11n3).

<sup>90</sup> ἢ δ’ ἀληθῆς αἰτία μία πάντων ἐστί· “καθαροῦ γάρ,” ἢ φησιν ὁ Πλάτων, “οὐ θεμιτὸν ἄπτεσθαι μὴ καθαρῷ” (352d, quoting *Phd.* 67b).



Plutarch is consistently firm, nevertheless, in rejecting both atheism and superstition. In *De Iside*, often considered a late work, he formulates piety as a means between these extremes no less than in *De superstitione*:<sup>91</sup>

Hear things about the gods in this way, accepting the myth from pious and philosophical interpreters, always doing and safeguarding the traditions of the temples, but do not think that there is any sacrifice nor any pleasing offering you could make than to bear true opinion about the gods—may you flee superstition, no less an evil than atheism!<sup>92</sup>

Although Plutarch enjoins the priestess Clea to still perform the traditional rites of the gods, he has formulated philosophical piety as the highest form of religious dedication. Since the truth is to be found both in Plato and in tradition, interpretation becomes a crucial form of philosophical inquiry. As the next section examines, however, the interpretation of traditional religion, when conducted with this sort of pious skepticism, amounts to reading ancient myths and rituals through Platonism.

### *Interpretation and truth shrouded in tradition*

Inquiry into the myths and rituals of the past appears throughout Plutarch's corpus, both in collections of potential solutions to Platonic quandries and in complex dialogues.<sup>93</sup> This interest often has a philosophical significance because he assumes that the founders of the

<sup>91</sup> In sharp contrast to *De superstitione*, the *De Iside* is usually considered a late, or even “very late” work, partly based on prosopographical grounds. Jones (1966) assigns the work to *circa* 115 (73), one of his latest suggestions.

<sup>92</sup> οὕτω δὲ τὰ περὶ θεῶν ἀκούσασα καὶ δεχομένη παρὰ τῶν ἐξηγουμένων τὸν μῦθον ὁσίως καὶ φιλοσόφος, καὶ δρῶσα μὲν αἰεὶ καὶ διαφυλάττουσα τῶν ἱερῶν τὰ νενομισμένα, τοῦ δ' ἀληθῆ δόξαν ἔχειν περὶ θεῶν μηδὲν οἰομένη μᾶλλον αὐτοῖς μήτε θύσειν μήτε ποιήσειν κεχαρισμένον, οὐδὲν ἂν ἔλλατον ἀποφεύγοιο κακὸν ἀθεότητος δεισιδαιμονίαν (355c-d); “there is nothing irrational nor mythic, as some people think, induced into their rights by superstition, but they bear ethical and practical causes...” (οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄλογον οὐδὲ μυθῶδες οὐδ' ὑπὸ δεισιδαιμονίας, ὥσπερ ἔνιοι νομίζουσιν, ἐγκατεστοιχειοῦντο ταῖς ἱερουργίαις, ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν ἠθικὰς ἔχοντα καὶ χρειώδεις αἰτίας...; 353e). See also 378a, cf. 379b-80a. On this idea in both *De superstitione* and *De Iside*, see further Gasparro (2009: 119-40).

<sup>93</sup> The extensive *Quaestiones Graecae* and *Quaestiones Romanae* are still extant, but according to the Lamprias catalogue, he also composed a lost *Quaestiones barbaricae* (no. 207). There is some allegorical interpretation in these works—e.g. *Quaest. Rom.* 52 (277a-c)—but far less than in Plutarch's Delphic or Egyptian inquiries.

ancient rituals had good—Platonic—reasons for what they did.<sup>94</sup> His interpretations evidently endeavor to show how the ancient religious founders preempted Plato’s ideas in the rituals and symbols they instituted.<sup>95</sup> Antiquarian research and interpretation provides him a way of both corroborating Plato and proving the coherence of traditional wisdom, as he is formulating it—an impulse shared with the middle Platonist Numenius, then Porphyry and subsequent Neoplatonists, who would elaborate yet more complex systems of exegesis.<sup>96</sup> Plato’s *Cratylus*, it seems, provides a productive tool for interpretation, although Plutarch does not rely on it exclusively, in the form of etymological allegories.<sup>97</sup> The model of explaining the nature of the gods by their names has a particular significance.<sup>98</sup> In a symposiastic vignette, the character of Plutarch gives the concluding speech on nature of the Muses, following Ammonius, by invoking such a passage: “even Plato himself thinks that he discovers the powers of the gods through their names, as if tracks; let us similarly set the first of the Muses in the heavens (*ouranos*), concerned

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<sup>94</sup> In *De an. proc.*, for instance, Plutarch argues that statues of the gods were intended to be understood through philosophical symbolism: “and the theologians of old, truly the oldest of philosophers, were placing musical instruments into the hands of statues, not because they thought the gods would somehow play the lyre or flute, but because they thought there to be no instrument of the gods beyond harmony and concord” (οἱ τε πάλαι θεολόγοι, πρεσβύτατοι φιλοσόφων ὄντες, ὄργανα μουσικὰ θεῶν ἐνεχειρίζον ἀγάμασιν, οὐχ ὡς λύραν που καὶ αὐλοῦσιν ἀλλ’ οὐδὲν ἔργον οἰόμενοι θεῶν οἷον ἁρμονίαν εἶναι καὶ συμφωνίαν; 1030a-b). See also e.g. *Cons. ad uxor.* 612a-b and frg. 157 Sandbach; on the latter, van Nuffelen (2011: 50-5). Hardie (1992) lists more examples (4757n60).

<sup>95</sup> In *De E*, young Plutarch remarks, “it appears that someone earlier than Plato realized this and therefore established five for the god, an indication and symbol of the number of everything” (ἔφθη δὴ τις ταῦτα πρότερος συνιδῶν Πλάτωνος, διὸ εἶ καθιέρωσε τῷ θεῷ, δῆλωμα καὶ σύμβολον τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τῶν πάντων; 391c). In the same dialogue, Ammonius refers to these founders as simply “the wise men” (τοὺς σοφοὺς... ἄνδρας; 391f).

<sup>96</sup> Porphyry’s *De antr. nymph.*, a work that crucially preserves much of what we know of Numenius’ exegesis, develops this idea more explicitly: “whether [Homer] described it as it really is or whether he added something of his own, the inquiry nevertheless remains: to track down the intention of those who established it that of the poet making an addition, because the ancients did not establish sacred things without mystic symbols, nor does Homer haphazardly describe things of this sort” (εἴτε δ’ οὕτως ἔχον ἀφηγήσατο εἴτε καὶ αὐτός τινα προσέθηκεν, οὐδὲν ἥττον μένει τὰ ζητήματα τὴν βούλησιν ἢ τῶν καθιδρυσαμένων ἢ τοῦ προσθέντος ποιητοῦ ἀνιχνεύοντι, ὡς ἂν μήτε τῶν παλαιῶν ἄνευ συμβόλων μουσικῶν τὰ ἱερὰ καθιδρυσαμένων μήτε Ὀμήρου ὡς ἔτυχε τὰ περὶ τούτων ἀφηγουμένου; §4). See also *Abst.* II.28 on “the founders” (τοῖς ἰδρυσαμένοις) of the bloodless “altar of the pious” (εὐσεβῶν κέκληται βωμός) on Delos, comparing the Pythagoreans.

<sup>97</sup> See *supra* pg. 24.

<sup>98</sup> Nicostratus in *Quaest. conv.* VII.10, for instance, quotes the derivation of (οἶνος) from *Crat.* 406c (οἶεσθαι νοῦν ἔχειν; 715a). See also *De superst.* 171e, *De Is.* 362d. Cf. Plutarch in *De E* (391a-b).

with heavenly things (*ourania*).<sup>99</sup> These sorts of distinctively Platonic interpretations argue that divine names signify intellectual qualities, such as with Zeus’ forebearers, as well as ontological ones, such as in Socrates’ interpretation of Hestia, which Plutarch modifies in *De Iside et Osiride*, rather than physical elements.<sup>100</sup> The procedure allows Plutarch to show how bits of lore, familiar and exotic, reinforce important points of Platonic metaphysics when understood correctly.<sup>101</sup> In this section, I examine his interpretations of the cult of Apollo in *De E apud Delphos* and his exegesis of Egyptian religion, especially in *De Iside and Osiride*, after introducing the relatively simple treatment in the *Amatorius*.<sup>102</sup> In each case, he uses

<sup>99</sup> καὶ Πλάτων αὐτὸς ὥσπερ ἴχνησι τοῖς ὀνόμασι τῶν θεῶν ἀνευρίσκειν οἶεται τὰς δυνάμεις, καὶ ἡμεῖς ὁμοίως μὲν τιθῶμεν ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ περὶ τὰ οὐράνια μίαν τῶν Μουσῶν (*Quaest. conv.* IX.746b). He goes on to explain the rest, still utilizing etymologies, through the psychological distinction in *Phdr.* 237d. Plutarch’s etymologies, like Plato’s, are often lamented by scholars, such as by Babbitt (1936): “One matter which will seem very unscientific to the modern reader is Plutarch’s attempts to explain the derivation of various words... but in this respect he sins no more than Plato” (4).

<sup>100</sup> *Crat.* 401c-d in *De Is.* 375d. Plato does, however, discuss the popular derivation of Hera from *aer*: “perhaps the name-giver was doing natural science when he hid the word air and named her Hera, placing the beginning at the end. You would understand if you say the name Hera over and over again” (ἴσως δὲ μετεωρολογῶν ὁ νομοθέτης τὸν ἀέρα “Ἥραν” ὠνόμασεν ἐπικρυπτόμενος, θεὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐπὶ τελευτῆν: γνοίης δ’ ἄν, εἰ πολλάκις λέγοις τὸ τῆς Ἥρας ὄνομα; 404c).

<sup>101</sup> There is a disagreement among scholars of Plato about whether the name-givers in the *Crat.* are meant to be historical figures, as Sedley argues, or whether they are more of a metaphor, as Barney argues. This is related to the larger argument of the seriousness of the dialogue as a whole. As for Plutarch, given his interpretations of the intentions of cult founders, it seems more likely that he assumes the historicity of such figures. This is similar to the Stoic conception of the development of language—e.g. Cornutus §35—and opposed to the Epicurean—e.g. Lucr. V.1028-58.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Roskam (2015b): “it was the enigmatic aspect of the Egyptian religion that made it so interesting for Plutarch, and that he there found many fascinating starting points for further philosophical thinking. In this respect, the mysterious E on the Apollo temple at Delphi and the enigmatic Egyptian religious tradition were not so different after all” (231). The prestige of Egyptian lore, however, appears extensively in the corpus. *De gen.* presents a strange example: Pheidolaus knows that the Spartan king Agesilaus had discovered Egyptian texts in the grave of Alcmena and sent them to Egypt for translation (577f-8a). He did not know the results, but it just so happened that another character, Simmias, was in Egypt with Plato, engaged in philosophical conversation (συμφιλοσοφοῦντες διετρίβομεν) with the priest to whom the texts were entrusted (578e-f). The text, dated to the time of “king” Proteus and Hercules based on the script, instructs men to avoid conflict (perhaps surprisingly, given the bloody conclusion to Plutarch’s dialogue) and worship the muses (579a). A mishap involving the ignorance of certain Delians in geometry (also described by Theon in *De E* 386e) leads Plato to conclude that the god was rebuking the Greeks for their utter lack of education (ἔφη τὸν θεὸν Ἑλλήσιν ὀλιγοροῦσι παιδείας; 579b-c). For a derisive account of the latter, see Parker (2010). That this subplot in the early part of the dialogue might deepen the Pythagorean flavor brought on by Theon is possible, but the setting at Memphis with a distinctively Egyptian priest (Χόνουφιν τὸν προφήτην) suggests a blending of multiple threads. See also Phaedimus in *De soll. an.*: “I will introduce neither opinions of philosophers nor Egyptians myths or unattested stories of Indians” (οὔτε δόξας φιλοσόφων οὔτ’ Αἰγυπτίων μύθους οὔτ’ ἀμαρτύρους Ἰνδῶν ἐπαγόμενος ἢ Λιβύων διηγήσεις; 975d).

interpretation, whether through allegory or dialectical argument, to construct Platonic expositions on the qualities of the divine, which, as I argue in the next section, plays a fundamental ethical role in the conception of virtue as the imitation of god.

Plutarch clarifies the relationship between traditional myth and philosophy particularly in the *Amatorius*, when he contrasts two paths to truth, both of which evidently extend beyond the unnamed ancients who founded the Greek rituals:<sup>103</sup>

I do not believe the myths, no indeed, nor do I disbelieve them entirely. They speak well and by some divine luck touch on the truth when they say that lovers possess a path upwards from Hades into the light. They do not know the path, since they missed the straight path which Plato, first of men, discovered through philosophy. There are, however, certain subtle and murky effluences of the truth scattered in the mythology of the Egyptians, but they require a clever hunter to draw substantial things from tiny ones.<sup>104</sup>

Plutarch emphasizes his preference for Plato, who first discovered the truth with clarity through his philosophy, but, unlike Lucretius' Euhemeristic praise for Epicurus in the proem to book V, he allows for an alternative sort of second path to the same truth as the master's:<sup>105</sup> some Egyptian mythology, although it requires clever interpretation, hints at the same truth, although in a murkier manner.<sup>106</sup> He begins by attributing a distinction familiar from Plato's *Symposium*

<sup>103</sup> Egypt recurs elsewhere in the dialogue, for instance in Pemptides' anecdote about a conflict over an omen (755e).

<sup>104</sup> ... οὐτι τοῖς μύθοις πειθόμενος οὐ μὴν οὐδ' ἀπιστῶν παντάπασιν· εὖ γὰρ δὴ λέγουσι, καὶ θεία τινὶ τυχῆ ψαύουσι τοῦ <ἀληθοῦς> οἱ λέγοντες καὶ Ἄιδου τοῖς ἐρωτικοῖς ἄνοδον εἰς φῶς ὑπάρχειν, ὅπη δὲ καὶ ὅπως ἀγνοοῦσιν, ὥσπερ ἀτραποῦ διαμαρτόντες ἦν πρῶτος ἀνθρώπων διὰ φιλοσοφίας Πλάτων κατεῖδε. καίτοι λεπταὶ τινες ἀπορροαὶ καὶ ἀμυδραὶ τῆς ἀληθείας ἔνεισι ταῖς Αἰγυπτίων ἐνδιεσπαρμένα μυθολογίαις, ἀλλ' ἰχνηλάτου δεινοῦ δέονται καὶ μεγάλα μικροῖς ἐλεῖν δυναμένου (762a).

<sup>105</sup> "He was a god, famed Memmius, a god, who first discovered this method of life that is called wisdom, who through his art raised life from such storms, such shadows, and placed it in so much calming, clear light" (... *deus ille fuit, deus, inclyte Memmi, / qui princeps uitae rationem invenit eam quae / nunc appellatur sapientia, quique per artem / fluctibus et tantis vitam tantisque tenebris / in tam tranquillo et tam clara luce locavit*; 8-12).

<sup>106</sup> Plutarch also introduces a trichotomy for Greek sources of traditional authority: poets, lawgivers, and philosophers. Soclarus calls Plutarch back to the comparison between Plato and Egyptian mythology (764a-b). Slightly later, Plutarch allows two potential sources of knowledge for the poets: "For the most part, poets write and sing of the god in such a way that they seem to be mocking him or indulging in drunken revelry, but a few things have been said seriously by them that touch on the truth, whether because they write with reason and consideration or because they have the help of the god" (τὰ μὲν οὖν πολλὰ ποιηταὶ προσπαίζοντες εἰκόασιν τῷ θεῷ γράφειν περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἄδειν ἐπικωμάζοντες, ὀλίγα δ' εἴρηται μετὰ σπουδῆς αὐτοῖς, εἴτε κατὰ νοῦν καὶ λογισμὸν εἴτε σὺν θεῷ τῆς ἀληθείας ἀψαμένους; 765d-e).

between “vulgar and heavenly Eros” to the Egyptians, as well as a “third Eros”—“the sun.”<sup>107</sup>

This relationship ought not be understood literally, Plutarch cautions, but through analogies, because the sun has the potential to “turn our judgement from intelligible to visible things by the charm and light of vision.”<sup>108</sup> The sun is visible and influences bodies, while Eros is intelligible and attracts souls. Recalling the analogy of the sun in the *Respublica*, Plutarch argues that mortal eyes, unless they are habituated over time, cannot stare at the star without suffering damage, just as neither can “the character of an uneducated soul bear Eros without harm;”<sup>109</sup> conversely, “the radiance of the sun carries nourishment, light, and growth to bodies, that from Eros to souls.”<sup>110</sup>

Both parts of Egyptian *mythologia* are significant. There is the *mythos*, the identification of Eros and the sun, and the *logos*, the proportionate or analogical relationship necessary to understand the metaphorical connection between the qualities of each. Plutarch treats Egyptian mythology as a source for philosophical speculation, but only when read in a distinctive sort of way.

The intentions of the founders of the cult of Apollo at Delphi provides the topic for *De E apud Delphos*, a dialogue which Plutarch addresses to the poet Sarapion as the first of several *Pythikoi logoi*.<sup>111</sup> The work centers around puzzlement over the significance of an epsilon that

<sup>107</sup> δεομένων δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἔφη ὁ <πατήρ>, ὡς Αἰγύπτιοι δύο μὲν Ἑλλησι παραπλησίως Ἔρωτας, τὸν τε πάνδημον καὶ τὸν οὐράνιον, ἴσασι, τρίτον δὲ νομίζουσιν Ἔρωτα τὸν ἥλιον (764b-c). Cf. Pl. *Symp.* 209c-e.

<sup>108</sup> ἀποστρέφει γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν νοητῶν ἐπὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ τὴν διάνοιαν, χάριτι καὶ λαμπρότητι τῆς ὄψεως γοητεύων (764e). In *De Pyth. or.*, the sun is similarly described as an image that has the danger of being mistaken for the god himself (400d). See *infa* 323.

<sup>109</sup> καὶ μὴν οὐτε σώματος ἀγύμναστος ἕξις ἥλιον, οὐτ’ Ἔρωτα δύναται φέρειν ἀλύπως τρόπος ἀπαιδεύτου ψυχῆς (764c). As a result, “each similarly suffers and ails, blaming the power of the god and not its own weakness” (ἐξίσταται δ’ ὁμοίως ἐκάτερον καὶ νοσεῖ, τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δύναμιν οὐ τὴν αὐτοῦ μεμφόμενον ἀσθένειαν).

<sup>110</sup> ... αὐγὴ ... ἢ μὲν ἀπ’ ἐκείνου φερομένη σώματι παρέχει τροφήν καὶ φῶς καὶ αὔξησιν, ἢ δ’ ἀπὸ τούτου ψυχαῖς (764b). Cf. *Resp.* 509b.

<sup>111</sup> “Dear Sarapion, I am sending to you, through your friends there, some of our Pythian discourses as if first-fruits; I confess that I expect discourses in turn from you, which will be greater and better, because you have the advantage of both a great city and a greater abundance of leisure among many books and all sorts of lectures” (ὃ φίλε Σαραπίων... ἐγὼ γοῦν πρὸς σὲ καὶ διὰ σοῦ δὲ τοῖς αὐτόθι φίλοις τῶν Πυθικῶν λόγων ἐνίους ὥσπερ ἀπαρχὰς ἀποστέλλων, ὁμολογῶ προσδοκᾶν ἐτέρους καὶ πλείονας καὶ βελτίονας παρ’ ὑμῶν, ἅτε δὴ καὶ πόλει χρωμένων μεγάλη καὶ σχολῆς μᾶλλον ἐν βιβλίοις πολλοῖς καὶ παντοδαπαῖς διατριβαῖς εὐπορούντων; 384d-e, cf. *Dem.* 2.2). On the text of *De E*, see Obsieger (2013). Sarapion, a significant character in *De Pyth. or.*, is evidently an Athenian, related to Plutarch through the latter’s honorary membership in the same phyle (*Quaest. conv.* I.10.628a-b). *De E* is

had apparently been carved on the temple alongside the more famous “know thineself” (γνώθι σεαυτόν) and “nothing in excess” (μηδὲν ἄγαν). The character of Plutarch is reluctant to answer, but he is sure that whatever the reason is it is good:

It is likely that this letter alone came to this position of honor by the god not by chance or lot... rather, it is likely that those who philosophized about the god in the beginning used the symbol because they realized some singular or extraordinary power in it, and so put it forward.<sup>112</sup>

Spurred on by wonder over the intentions of the founders of Delphi, the dialogue recounts an earlier discussion at Delphi between Plutarch, his brother Lamprias, their teacher Ammonius, and others, who propose a total of seven potential solutions to the mystery of the epsilon. The last two, however, are each longer than the previous answers combined and far more complex. The penultimate is the younger Plutarch’s own mathematical explanation, from the identification of epsilon and five. He begins by expounding numerological qualities—five is the sum of the first even number and the first odd number, for instance, not counting one<sup>113</sup>—but then appeals to its significance in Plato: there are the five worlds and geometrical solids of the *Timaeus*, the five kinds of the *Sophista*, and the five causes and categories of the *Politicus*.<sup>114</sup> Ammonius then takes

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often grouped together with *De Pyth. or.* and *De def. or.*, such as by Flacelière (1974), as “Dialogues pythiques.” Other dialogues, such as *De sera*, have been suggested as further candidates. See *infra* pg. 227.

<sup>112</sup> τοῦτο γὰρ εἰκὸς οὐ κατὰ τύχην οὐδ’ οἷον ἀπὸ κλήρου τῶν γραμμάτων μόνον ἐν προεδρία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ γενέσθαι... ἀλλ’ ἡ δύναμιν αὐτοῦ κατιδόντας ἰδίαν καὶ περιττὴν ἢ συμβόλῳ χρωμένους πρὸς ἕτερόν τι τῶν ἀξίων σπουδῆς τοῦς ἐν ἀρχῇ περὶ τὸν θεὸν φιλοσοφῆσαντας οὕτω προθέσθαι (384f-5a).

<sup>113</sup> 387f-8c. He also appeals to its quality of its products ending in five or ten (389c-d), “its own number or a perfect one” (τουτέστιν ἢ τὸ οἰκειὸν ἢ τὸ τέλειον; 388e); five, moreover, “by being multiplied to itself it ends in itself” (τῷ πολλαπλασιασμῷ πάλιν εἰς ἑαυτὸν περαίνων), the unique property of its exponential products ending in five (388c-d). He also discusses harmonics (389d-f). Plutarch seems to break the “arithmetical and mathematical encomia of epsilon” (ὁ τῶν ἀριθμητικῶν καὶ ὁ τῶν μαθηματικῶν ἐγκωμίων τοῦ εἴ λόγος; 391e) to compare the epithets of Dionysus (388e-9c).

<sup>114</sup> 389f-90a, 391b, 391b-d; cf. 391a-b, Obsieger (2013): “Schon die unplatonische Bezeichnung der μέγιστα γέννη des Σοφιστής als κοριώταται ἀρχαί geht wohl absichtlich darüber hinweg, daß mit mehr Recht die Idee des Guten und die unbestimmte Zweiheit als wichtigste platonische Prinzipien zu geltend haben” (28). Plutarch also cites Homer (390c), Euripides (390c), and a line of *Orphica* (391d), but ends on a skeptical note after Nicander demures from revealing the cause behind a point of ritual: “I smiled and said, ‘until, then, when the god allows us, becoming holy men, to know the truth, it is fitting for this too to be said on behalf of the five’” (“οὐκοῦν,” ἔφην ἐγὼ μειδιάσας, “ἄρχι οὗ τάληθές ἡμῖν ὁ θεὸς ἱεροῖς γενομένοις γνῶναι παράσχη, προσκείσεται καὶ τοῦτο τοῖς ὑπὲρ τῆς πεμπάδος λεγομένοις;” 391e). On the evidence for the specific point of Delphic *realia* in question, cf. Obsieger (2013: 298).

up the next speech and gives an ontological interpretation by taking the single letter to represent the diphthong εἶ, the second-person of εἶναι, “you are:”

The god bids “know thyself” to each of us as we approach here, as if welcoming us, for it is no worse perhaps than “greetings;” we respond to the god in turn by saying “you are,” because we return the only really true appellation for him, the fitting for him alone, of being.<sup>115</sup>

This, he argues, brings worshippers to contemplate the strong Platonic sense of true “being” that belongs to the divine, the sort of stable and unchanging existence which is unlike embodied life or anything else subject to change in the world of becoming.<sup>116</sup> This conception of purely unchanging “being,” reminiscent especially of the *Timaeus*, allows Ammonius to hymn qualities of the god through etymologizing the traditional names of Apollo: “for he is Not-many (*Apollon*), because he rejects the many and denies multitude, he is Singular (*Ieios*) because he is one and unique, and he is Bright (*Phoebus*) because the men of old used to call everything pure and undefiled by this name.”<sup>117</sup> Ammonius uses these etymologies to reinforce, rather than transcend, the dialectical arguments he makes at length about unity and being.

Although *De E* does not explicitly endorse any speech, the finale attributed to Ammonius seems more likely to be the culmination of the dialogue.<sup>118</sup> Although he is delighted by Plutarch’s mathematical display, the teacher cautions against the central premise on the grounds that mature philosophers should be wary of youthful enthusiasm for numerology because any number can

<sup>115</sup> ὁ μὲν γὰρ θεὸς ἕκαστον ἡμῶν τῶν ἐνταῦθα προσιόντων οἷον ἀσπαζόμενος προσαγορεύει τὸ γινῶθι σαυτόν, ὃ τοῦ χαῖρε δήπουθεν οὐδὲν μεῖον ἐστίν· ἡμεῖς δὲ πάλιν ἀμειβόμενοι τὸν θεόν “εἶ” φαμέν, ὡς ἀληθῆ καὶ ἀψευδῆ καὶ μόνην μόνῃ προσήκουσαν τὴν τοῦ εἶναι προσαγόρευσιν ἀποδιδόντες (392a).

<sup>116</sup> 393b; more extensively: 392c-3a. Brenk (1977) detects a discrepancy in Ammonius’ treatment of *daemones* between *De def. or.* and *De E*, which reflect, in his view, different stages in Plutarch’s development (104).

<sup>117</sup> Ἀπόλλων μὲν γὰρ οἷον ἀρνούμενος τὰ πολλὰ καὶ τὸ πλῆθος ἀποφάσκων ἐστίν, Ἰήιος δ’ ὡς εἷς καὶ μόνος· Φοῖβον δὲ δήπου τὸ καθαρὸν καὶ ἀγνὸν οἱ παλαιοὶ πᾶν ὠνόμαζον (393c). Ammonius also deems the god “complete in itself” (αὐτοτελής).

<sup>118</sup> For Ammonius’ speech as authoritative, see e.g. Brenk (2012): “Plutarch appears in the dialogue as a brilliant but confused young man—as students often are—who has to be corrected by his teacher” (81). See also Moreschini (1997: 63). Obsieger (2013) surveys this line of scholarship further (38-9). Flacelière (1974), however, considers the question to ultimately be “un problème insoluble” (8).

provide these sorts of potentially coincidental parallels.<sup>119</sup> Ammonius also seems to correct Plutarch's formulation of the relationship between deities:<sup>120</sup> while the student treated Dionysus as a parallel to Apollo, Ammonius argues that the god, or *daemon*, responsible for generation and decay must be distinct from Apollo, as the Delphic letter hymns the unchanging nature of this god.<sup>121</sup> He again uses etymology, reminiscent of Plato's *Cratylus*, to distinguish bright Apollo from shadowy Hades.<sup>122</sup> The most recent commenters, Hendrick Obsieger and Tobias Thum, however, both argue that the dialogue is ultimately aporetic, whether because Ammonius' speech is more playful than it might seem or the earlier speeches more serious.<sup>123</sup> Some answers, nevertheless, are explicitly marked as less plausible than others. An unnamed Delphic interlocutor relates the theory of a "babbling Chaldean stranger" (Χαλδαῖος ἐφλυᾶρει ξένος),

<sup>119</sup> "Ammonius delighted in the speech, because he also set not the least part of philosophy in mathematics, and said, 'It is not fitting to speak too strictly against young men on this issue, except that each of the numbers provides much to praise and hymn to whoever desires it. What else must be said about the other numbers? The sacred seven of Apollo will eat up the day before we can fully describe all of its powers in a speech'" (ὁ δ' Ἀμμώνιος, ἄτε δὴ καὶ αὐτὸς οὐ τὸ φαυλότατον ἐν μαθηματικῇ φιλοσοφίας τιθέμενος, ἤσθη τε τοῖς λεγομένοις καὶ εἶπεν "οὐκ ἄξιον πρὸς ταῦτα λίαν ἀκριβῶς ἀντιλέγειν τοῖς νέοις, πλὴν ὅτι τῶν ἀριθμῶν ἕκαστος οὐκ ὀλίγα βουλομένοις ἐπαινεῖν καὶ ὑμεῖν παρέξει. καὶ τί δεῖ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων λέγειν; ἢ γὰρ ἱερὰ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος ἑβδομάς ἀναλώσει τὴν ἡμέραν πρότερον ἢ λόγῳ τὰς δυνάμεις αὐτῆς ἀπάσας ἐπεξελεθεῖν;" 391e-f). Ammonius is similarly amused (ἐπιμειδιάσας) but skeptical of explaining the number of muses by the qualities of the number nine in *Quaest. conv.* IX.14 (744b).

<sup>120</sup> Ammonius also doubles down on the earlier speech's authorities, such as when he invokes Heraclitus twice (392c-d), while Plutarch cited him once (388e).

<sup>121</sup> "It seems especially right to me to address the god with the phrase 'you are,' which testifies against this account, because there is nothing of becoming or differentiation or change in the god, but rather, to act and change in the operation of the decay and generation in nature belongs to another god or *daemon*" (καί μοι δοκεῖ μάλιστα πρὸς τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ἀντιπατόμενον τὸ ῥῆμα καὶ μαρτυρούμενον "εἶ" φάναι πρὸς τὸν θεόν, ὡς οὐδέποτε γινομένης περὶ αὐτὸν ἐκστάσεως καὶ μεταβολῆς, ἀλλ' ἐτέρῳ τινὶ θεῷ μᾶλλον δὲ δαίμονι τεταγμένῳ περὶ τὴν ἐν φθορᾷ καὶ γενέσει φύσιν τοῦτο ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν προσῆκον; 393f-4a). Plutarch had earlier attributed changes (μεταβολαῖς ἑαυτοῦ χρώμενος) to the god (388e-f).

<sup>122</sup> "... as their names make clear, as they are directly contradictory" (ὡς δὴλόν ἐστιν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀνομάτων εὐθὺς οἶον ἐναντίων ὄντων καὶ ἀντιφώνων; 393f-4a). The contradictory epithets include Apollo (not many) and Pluto (abounding), Delius (clear) and Aidoneus (hidden), and Phoebus (bright) and Scotius (dark).

<sup>123</sup> Obsieger (2013): "Der Gewinn, den der Leser an unserer Schrift haben kann, besteht nicht in einer philosophischen Erkenntnis, auch nicht in einem Verstehen, was es mit dem delphischen Epsilon auf sich habe, sondern in der Freude, dabei zuzusehen, wie zunächst jugendliche Sprecher sich mit Humor und Bezug auf die ganze philosophische Tradition an einer Deutung des Epsilon versuchen, und schließlich Ammonios mit allen in der gegebenen Situation zu Gebote stehenden Mitteln eine Epsilon vorträgt, wobei es möglich ist, in allen Reden Scheinargumente und logische Unsauberkeiten aufzudecken. Daran braucht der Leser nicht Anstoß zu nehmen, sondern im Gegenteil, er soll sich darüber amüsieren. So handelt es sich bei unserer Schrift um einen heiteren literarischen Gruß nach Athen" (46). Thum (2013): "die Mehrstimmigkeit und Multiperspektivität einer philosophischen Betätigung, für die eine Beschäftigung mit dem delphischen Epsilon exemplarisch zu stehen scheint, ausdrücklich thematisiert" (363).



who argued that epsilon is the second of seven vowels, which means that it corresponds to the second planet, the sun: “and all Greeks, so to speak, consider Apollo to be one and the same as the sun.”<sup>124</sup> As Ammonius later cautions, while there are good reasons to praise the sun and analogically compare it to the god, such a direct identification is mistaking the thing itself for something like to it; the physical sun is, at most, a physical “image” of the divinity that can only be grasped intellectually:

It is right to feel affection for those who consider Apollo and the sun the same because of their goodness in disposition, that they place their conception of the god in what they honor most of all they know and desire. But let us rouse them now, as if they are dimly dreaming of the god in the most beautiful of dreams, and let us beckon them to carry on upward and to gaze upon the true form and essence of him—to honor the image and revere the generative power of it, insofar as it is possible for what is stable and intellectual to appear to what is sense perceptible and in flux, however it happens, with the image shining through impressions and likenesses of the favor and blessedness of the god.<sup>125</sup>

Ultimately the Delphic symbol does not constrain philosophical thought, but spurs the interlocutors to seek multiple solutions—the longest two of which are both firmly rooted in Platonism.<sup>126</sup> Before the rounds of speeches, Ammonius claims that the sort of wonder these

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<sup>124</sup> ἡλίω δ' Ἀπόλλωνα τὸν αὐτὸν ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν πάντας Ἕλληνας νομίζειν (386b). The unnamed character relating the story (ἕτερος δὲ τις ἔφη τῶν παρόντων) deems this entirely foolish (παντάπασιν ἐκ πίνακος καὶ πυλαίας; 386a-b). Cf. Thum (2013: 109-13).

<sup>125</sup> τοὺς δ' Ἀπόλλωνα καὶ ἥλιον ἡγουμένους τὸν αὐτὸν ἀσπάζεσθαι μὲν ἄξιόν ἐστι καὶ φιλεῖν δι' εὐφύιαν, ὃ μάλιστα τιμῶσιν ὧν ἴσασι καὶ ποθοῦσιν, εἰς τοῦτο τιθέντας τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν ἐπίνοιαν· ὡς δὲ νῦν ἐν τῷ καλλίστῳ τῶν ἐνυπνίων τὸν θεὸν ὄνειροπολοῦντας ἐγείρωμεν καὶ παρακαλῶμεν ἀνωτέρω προάγειν καὶ θεάσασθαι τὸ ὕπαρ αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν, τιμᾶν δὲ καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τήνδε καὶ σέβεσθαι τὸ περὶ αὐτὴν γόνιμον ὡς ἀνυστόν ἐστιν αἰσθητῶ νοητοῦ καὶ φερομένου μένοντος ἐμφάσεις τινὰς καὶ εἰδῶλα διαλάμπουσαν ἀμωσγέπως τῆς περὶ ἐκεῖνον εὐμενείας καὶ μακαριότητος (393c-d). In *De def. or.*, Lamprias similarly distinguishes those that identify Apollo and the sun from those that “honor the analogy” (τιμῶντες ἀναλογίαν) between sight and intellection (433d-e). On the status of images in Plato, see *supra* pg. 34. Imitation is also central to Numenius' metaphysics, especially in his explanation of the relationship between the highest god, the demiurge, and the world: “the first god is good-itself, while the good demiurge is an imitation of it. ... the beautiful universe is an imitation of him, having been made beautiful by participation in the beautiful” (ὁ μὲν πρῶτος θεὸς αὐτοάγαθον· ὁ δὲ τούτου μιμητὴς δημιουργὸς ἀγαθός... ἡς μίμημα ὁ καλὸς κόσμος, κεκαλλωπισμένος μετουσίᾳ τοῦ καλοῦ; 16.14-17). In other fragments, he explains the relationship between the first two through participation (e.g. 19.8-11 and 20.10-2).

<sup>126</sup> Thum (2013) identifies Plato as the primary inspiration for the speeches of both Ammonius and Plutarch (especially 207-42 and 274-347). Obsieger (2013), however, identifies Plutarch's speech, based largely on the explicitly Pythagorean identification with five and γάμος (388c)—“eine These pythagoreischen Stils” (23). Whittaker (1969) argues that Eudorus is the main influence in Ammonius' speech (189-92). Cf. Donini (1986).

traditional symbols provoke is the beginning of philosophy proves to be programmatic, even if no final answer is firmly endorsed.<sup>127</sup>

Some older studies, such as Rudolf Hirzel's monograph on Plutarch, take Delphi to be central to Plutarch's thought.<sup>128</sup> Egyptian religion especially, however, also attracted his interest, although his attitude is complex.<sup>129</sup> Some, such as Erich Gruen, find Plutarch to be sincerely sympathetic to and curious about the foreign culture;<sup>130</sup> others, such as Simon Goldhill, see it as a sort of Hellenizing cultural imperialism.<sup>131</sup> He is interested in subordinating Egyptian culture, I would agree, but more specifically to Platonism rather than general Hellenism—no less than the quintessentially Greek cult of Delphi is interpreted to accord with this philosophy.<sup>132</sup> Plutarch

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<sup>127</sup> “Since to inquire is the start of philosophy and wondering and puzzling is that of seeking, it is fitting that many of the things about the god appear to be hidden in riddles, requiring some account of why and some elucidation of its origin” (ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῦ φιλοσοφεῖν... τὸ ζητεῖν <ἀρχή, τοῦ δὲ ζητεῖν> τὸ θαυμάζειν καὶ ἀπορεῖν, εἰκότως τὰ πολλὰ τῶν περὶ τὸν θεὸν ἔοικεν αἰνίγμασι κατακεκρύφθαι [καὶ] λόγον τινὰ ποθοῦντα διὰ τί καὶ διδασκαλίαν τῆς αἰτίας; 385c). Cf. Pl. *Tht.* 155d; Thum (2013: 87-96).

<sup>128</sup> 1912: “Delphi und Athen waren von früh auf die beiden Brennpunkte, zwischen denen sich das geistige Leben Plutarchs bewegt” (9).

<sup>129</sup> He is wary of arguments that Egypt is the origin of Greek religion (377c-8a), which seems to be his salient complaint about Herodotus' second book in *De malignitate Herodoti*, where the Chaeronean engages the “lover of barbarians” (φιλοβάρβαρος; 857a) to defend the glory of Greece and particularly his native Boeotia (854e-f). The second example is a survey of Herodotus' praise for “all religiosity and justice among the Egyptians” (πᾶσιν Αἰγυπτίοις θεϊότητα πολλὴν καὶ δικαιοσύνην...; 857a-b), leading him to survey the claims in book II that Greek gods were originally Egyptian and conclude, “he upturns the most sacred and most holy things of Greek religion for Egyptian nonsense and fable-weaving” (ταῖς Αἰγυπτίων ἀλαζομείαις καὶ μυθολογίαις τὰ σεμνότατα καὶ ἄγνότατα τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν ἱερῶν ἀνατρέπων; 857d). Cf. Froidefond (1988: 93-4). Many, such as Emerson (1878: xv), find the essay embarrassing.

<sup>130</sup> 2011: “Plutarch sought comprehension, not condemnation, of Egyptian religion—at least comprehension in his own terms. The scholar and philosopher endeavored to find in his subject rational underpinnings” (112).

<sup>131</sup> 2002: “And far from allowing the antiquity, knowledge, or exoticism of Egypt to ruffle his Greekness, Plutarch – firmly resisting the sly manipulations of Herodotus – evaluates, dismisses and organizes this Egyptian other from a perspective centered on Delphi. Plutarch suggests that the divine in all its manifestations is open to the same (Greek) understanding, and plays the same role in men's lives” (278). Plutarch depicts one character, however, being mocked for his chauvinism in the discussion of whether one should deliberate serious matters at a symposium: “He said that earlier he did not care very much when it seemed to be a Persian custom, but now since it has been discovered to be Greek, there must be an account to defend it against the immediately obvious strangeness” (ἔφη πρότερον οὐ πᾶν μέλειν αὐτῷ Περσικοῦ τοῦ πράγματος εἶναι δοκοῦντος· ἐπεὶ δὲ νῦν Ἑλληνικὸν ὄν πεφώραται, δεῖσθαι λόγου βοηθοῦντος αὐτῷ πρὸς τὴν αὐτόθεν φαινομένην ἀτοπίαν; *Quaest. conv.* VII.10.714d). Lamprias' caustic but humorous mockery follows (715a-6c).

<sup>132</sup> See also Meeusen (2017: 216). There is a fraught historical question about the salient influences in the culture of Hellenistic Egypt: what part is Greek, what part Egyptian? See e.g. Bull (2018) on the history of scholarship on the *Hermetica* (4-11). For Plutarch, however, the truth contained in the collected tradition is ancient yet confirms his own thought.

presupposes the universality of religion and argues that the gods are the same objects of worship throughout the world, even where they have different names, rituals, and associated taboos:<sup>133</sup>

And it is nothing strange if they keep gods in common with us and do not make them the property of the Egyptians alone, nor the Nile and that land which the Nile irrigates with those names alone. Nor do they take the marshes nor the lotuses as god-made things, saying this to turn the rest of mankind from the great gods, to whom there is no Nile nor Botus nor Memphis. Rather, they all know Isis and the the other gods that they bear, some of whom they have learned to call by names of the recent Egyptians, the power of each that they knew and honored from the beginning.<sup>134</sup>

Plutarch accordingly sets out to interpret the Egyptian cult of Isis through the traditional methods of interpretation. He rejects certain “Egyptian” interpretations, in a critique reminiscent of Plato’s in the *Respublica*, for literally attributing evil to the divine. He introduces Greek interpretations, however, both in the form of Euhemeristic rationalization—the idea that the names of the gods were originally those of prominent mortals, such as great monarchs or inventors of things<sup>135</sup>—and Stoic physical allegorization—understanding Osiris as the Nile and Isis as the earth, for example, “just as the Greeks that allegorically call Cronus time and Hera air”<sup>136</sup>—but these are both eventually rejected.<sup>137</sup> Plutarch claims that the interpretations of the

<sup>133</sup> See also e.g. *De Is.* 362a-b and Parker (2017: 58).

<sup>134</sup> καὶ δεινὸν οὐδέν, ἂν πρῶτον μὲν ἡμῖν τοὺς θεοὺς φυλάττωσι κοινούς καὶ μὴ ποιῶσιν Αἰγυπτίων ἰδίου μηδὲ Νεῖλον ἢν τε Νεῖλος ἄρδει μόνην χώραν τοῖς ὀνόμασι τούτοις καταλαμβάνοντες μηδ’ ἔλη μηδὲ λωτοὺς † μὴ θεοποιίαν λέγοντες ἀποστερῶσι μεγάλων θεῶν τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους, οἷς Νεῖλος μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν οὐδὲ Βοῦτος οὐδὲ Μέμφις, Ἰσιν δὲ καὶ τοὺς περὶ αὐτὴν θεοὺς ἔχουσι καὶ γινώσκουσιν ἅπαντες, ἐνίους μὲν οὐ πάλαι τοῖς παρ’ Αἰγυπτίων ὀνόμασι καλεῖν μεμαθηκότες, ἐκάστου δὲ τὴν δύναμιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐπιστάμενοι καὶ τιμῶντες (377c-d). Babbitt’s (1936) Loeb prints μόνην for † μὴ in Sieveking’s (1935) Teubner. See also 364d-e on Osiris and Dionysus.

<sup>135</sup> “There are those that think that the many things and immense sufferings that are related and depicted belong to the many sorts of kings and tyrants on account of their overwhelming virtue, power or reputation, who are remembered with the belief of godhood... and they transfer these things from the gods to humans” (πολλῶν δὲ τοιούτων λεγομένων καὶ δεικνυμένων οἱ μὲν οἰόμενοι βασιλέων ταῦτα καὶ τυράννων δι’ ἀρετὴν ὑπερφέρουσαν ἢ δύναμιν ἢ ἀξίωμα δόξαν θεότητος... ἔργα καὶ πάθη δεινὰ καὶ μεγάλα διαμνημονεύεσθαι... ἀπὸ τῶν θεῶν ἐπ’ ἀνθρώπους μεταφέρουσι...; 359d-e). On Euhemerus, see further *infra* pg. 273.

<sup>136</sup> ὥσπερ Ἕλληνας Κρόνον ἀλληγοροῦσι τὸν χρόνον, Ἦραν δὲ τὸν ἀέρα, γένεσιν δὲ Ἡφαίστου τὴν εἰς πῦρ ἀέρος μεταβολὴν, οὕτω παρ’ Αἰγυπτίους Νεῖλον εἶναι τὸν Ὅσιριν Ἰσιδι συνόντα τῇ γῆ... (363d). The wiser priests (σοφώτεροι τῶν ἱερέων), he claims, generally call Osiris “the entire principle and force that produces moisture” (ἅπασαν τὴν ὑγροποιὸν ἀρχὴν καὶ δύναμιν; 364a). He also describes those that “mix” (μιγνύντες) physical explanations with astronomical ones (τῶν ἀπ’ ἀστρολογίας μαθηματικῶν; 367c).

<sup>137</sup> Plutarch denies the Euhemeristic theory, for instance, on the grounds that “I shrink from the moving of what is immovable” (ὀκνῶ δέ, μὴ τοῦτ’ ἢ τὰ ἀκίνητα κινεῖν; 359e-f). He introduces the Stoic comparison with an

Egyptian gods as *daemones* is “better” than Euhemerism, because he finds it absurd to attribute suffering to the gods.<sup>138</sup> Yet the last sort of interpretation that Plutarch introduces, the metaphysical, seems to be the most promising to him.<sup>139</sup> Towards the end of the treatise, Plutarch interprets the name Isis differently than his earlier derivation from the εἰδέναι root: she represents “ensouled and intelligent motion” when understood through the Greek etymologies—“for the name is not barbaric”—from “to hasten (ἴεσθαι) with knowledge” and “being” (οὐσίαν), citing the etymologies in Plato’s *Cratylus*.<sup>140</sup> Properly understood through Platonic etymologizing, the traditional names of the gods symbolically represent ontological or intellectual aspects of reality, as Plutarch’s interpretations of the *De Iside et Osiride* affirm.<sup>141</sup>

While Plutarch maintains some pious deference towards religious tradition, it is intrinsically tied to his philosophy and must be understood through it. The symbols of the cult of Delphi provoke wonder and lead the right sort of observers to understand the intent behind them philosophically, while the scandalous violence of the myth of Isis and Osiris requires interpretation to find the concealed truth beneath the shadowy surface. In a fragment attributed by some to Plutarch, preserved by Eusebius under the title “On the statues in Plataean Festivals,” the author groups various strands of tradition together and treats each as constituting a certain

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adversative (ἀλλὰ) and later objects to their conception of providence for attributing evil to god (369a). He also objects to “dragging Jewish things into the myth” (τὰ Ἰουδαϊκὰ παρέλκοντες εἰς τὸν μῦθος; 363d).

<sup>138</sup> “Those who think that the things sufferings that are said about Typhon, Isis, and Osiris do not belong to gods but great *daemones*, then, are better” (βέλτιον οὖν οἱ τὰ περὶ τὸν Τυφῶνα καὶ Ὅσιριν καὶ Ἴσιν ἱστορούμενα μῆτε θεῶν παθήματα μῆτ’ ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ δαιμόνων μεγάλων εἶναι νομίζοντες; 360d). He appeals to a variety of Greek philosophers for the concept of *daemones*, but especially Plato and Xenocrates (361a-c).

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Roskam’s (2015b) discussion of this part of the dialogue as an instance of Plutarch’s use of the “genre of ζητήματα” (224-5).

<sup>140</sup> διὸ τὸ μὲν Ἴσιν καλοῦσι παρὰ τὸ ἴεσθαι μετ’ ἐπιστήμης καὶ φέρεσθαι, κίνησιν οὔσαν ἔμψυχον καὶ φρόνιμον· οὐ γὰρ ἔστι τούνομα βαρβαρικόν, ... οὕτω Πλάτων φησὶ (*Crat.* 401c) τὴν οὐσίαν δηλοῦν[τοζ] τοὺς παλαιοὺς ἰσίαν καλοῦντας (375c). Cf. the citation of *Crat.* 403a-4a in *De Is.* 362d.

<sup>141</sup> In other passages, he distinguishes the gods by their level of being. He associates Isis with the “receptacle” in *Pl. Ti.* (τιθήνη καὶ πανδεχῆς ὑπὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος; 372e). Cf. O’Brien (2015): “Plutarch’s interpretation of the *Timaeus* shapes his reaction to the Isis myth. Despite the fluidity of the allegory, Plutarch distinguishes the Platonic triad of First Principles: Matter (Isis), Forms (transcendent Osiris) and a sort of World-Soul (immanent Osiris)” (105).

mode of ancient encoding, which requires physical allegory to yield a comprehensible interpretation.<sup>142</sup>

Ancient natural science, both among Greeks and non-Greeks, was a physical account hidden in myths, concealed in most cases through riddles and allegories, as well as theology like that of the mysteries, in which what is said is less clear to the many than what is kept silent and what is kept silent is more suggestive than what is said. Clearly it is the same in the Orphic poems and the accounts of the Egyptians and the Phrygians. Yet the rituals of initiation and the things done symbolically in rites reveal the intention of the ancients more than anything.<sup>143</sup>

Certain types of myth, namely that of Orphic poetry and exotic ancient Egypt, are explained as using an encoding similar to the symbolic signification of the mysteries. This passage is Yvonne Vernière's best evidence for the claim that Plutarch understands all myth, including Platonic myth, through the mysteries. Even this fragment, however, never attributes this sort of intentional obscurantism to Plato, or even Delphic symbolism. That comparison only seems to gain expression and prominence with the later Platonist Numenius, who was very influential over the Neoplatonists, particularly on mythic signification.<sup>144</sup> Scholars have, however, questioned where this fragment occurred in the work since Plutarch elsewhere disclaims the kind of physical—distinctively Stoic—allegorizations that follow. If it is part of a dialogue, which is possible given that the fragment refers to Euboea as “here” (ἐνταῦθα), there is no reason to

<sup>142</sup> Περὶ τῶν ἐν Πλαταιαῖς Δαιδάλων (*Praep. evang.* III.pref.5 = Lamprias catalogue no. 201); cf. Vernière (1977: 45). The second book of Eusebius' work is centered around refutation of Egyptian and Hellenic mythology, while the third attacks the practice of allegorical interpretation. Plutarch's *De Is.* is a source for the latter (3.11-7), although Porphyry is the most prominent (e.g. the long summary of Περὶ τῆς ἐκ λογίων φιλοσοφίας that begins in 14.4). Wallace-Hadrill (1960) surveys Eusebius' attitude to Greek philosophy, especially Plato—for “Eusebius was a disciple of Origen, and no man could claim to be such without being in some degree beholden to Platonism” (139)—and Carriker (2003) includes Plutarch in his survey of Eusebius' quotations (112-4). Wallace-Hadrill detects more engagement with Plutarch (149-53) but concludes, “There was probably a more intimate kinship between Plutarch and Origen, but ... Eusebius adopted less of pagan thought, following his master as far as he dared” (153).

<sup>143</sup> ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἡ παλαιὰ φυσιολογία καὶ παρ' Ἑλλήσι καὶ βαρβάροις λόγος ἦν φυσικὸς ἐγκεκαλυμμένος μῦθος, τὰ πολλὰ δι' αἰνιγμάτων καὶ ὑπονοιῶν ἐπίκρυφος, καὶ μυστηριώδης θεολογία τὰ τε λαλούμενα τῶν σιγῶμενων <ἀ>σαφέστερα τοῖς πολλοῖς ἔχοντα καὶ τὰ σιγῶμενα τῶν λαλουμένων ὑποπτότερα, κατὰ δὲ τὸν ὄρον ἐστὶ τοῖς Ὀρφικοῖς ἔπεσι καὶ τοῖς Αἰγυπτιακοῖς καὶ Φρυγίοις λόγοις· μάλιστα δὲ οἱ περὶ τὰς τελετὰς ὀργασμοὶ καὶ τὰ δρώμενα συμβολικῶς ἐν ταῖς ἱεροουργίαις τὴν τῶν παλαιῶν ἐμφαίνει διάνοιαν (III.1.1 = frg. 157.1 Sandbach).

<sup>144</sup> See *infra* pg. 206. See also Hani (1976: 476).

assume that the speaker is authoritative.<sup>145</sup> Plutarch would not disagree, in either case, that these kind of myths and symbols from traditional religion can be usefully interpreted in a certain manner, as he exemplifies in *De Iside* especially. As the next section argues, through the idea of virtue as the imitation of god, these sorts of theological exegeses help, along with the text of Plato, to orient every other part of Plutarch's philosophy, from physics to ethics.

### *Virtue as imitation of the Platonic god*

Plutarch's conception of the philosophical life is indelibly tied to his conception of Platonic theology, which is, for him, the highest part of metaphysics. This god is transcendent, unmired in matter and beyond the world. As he puts it in *Ad principem ineruditum*, taking aim at Stoic materialism in even a political treatise:

It is neither likely nor fitting, as some philosophers say, for god to be mixed in matter, which is passive and subject to a multitude of necessity and fortune and change. But god is somehow above, connected to that nature which is always the same according to the same principles, seated upon sacred pedestals, as Plato says: he proceeds with a straight course by nature.<sup>146</sup>

Plutarch uses language from Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Leges* to describe god as always consistent and self-same, in contrast to the world of sense-perceptible matter, which is definitionally subject to change.<sup>147</sup> The unchanging course is even reflected, he continues, in the course of the sun in the heavens, "an entirely beautiful image of him through a mirror," which he established so that humans could become blessed and wise by forming themselves in imitation "of the most

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<sup>145</sup> §3. This was postulated first by Dechame (1898). See also van Nuffelen (2011: 54-5). Cf. Boys-Stones (2018: 31-2) and especially Scannapieco (2012). I would add that Eusebius, in selecting this passage, as with the Stoic passages of *De Is.* which Plutarch ultimately rejects, is not motivated by fidelity to the pagan Platonists, but by his interest in overturning physical allegorization in particular.

<sup>146</sup> οὐ γὰρ εἰκὸς οὐδὲ πρέπον, ὥσπερ ἔνιοι φιλόσοφοι λέγουσι, τὸν θεὸν ἐν ὕλῃ πάντα πασχούσῃ καὶ πράγμασι μυρίας δεχομένοις ἀνάγκας καὶ τύχας καὶ μεταβολὰς ὑπάρχειν ἀναμειγμένον· ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἄνω που περὶ τὴν αἰὲν κατὰ ταῦτά ὡσαύτως φύσιν ἔχουσιν ἰδρυμένος ἐν βάθροισι ἀγίοις ἢ φησι Πλάτων, εὐθείᾳ περαίνει κατὰ φύσιν περιπορευόμενος (781f). Cf. 780a. See also Brenk (1977: 29). Catanzaro (2017) compares Dio Chrys. *Or.* III.

<sup>147</sup> ἐν ἀγνῶ βάθρῳ (*Phdr.* 254b); εὐθείᾳ περαίνει κατὰ φύσιν περιπορευόμενος (*Leg.* IV.716a).

beautiful of things” through philosophy.<sup>148</sup> Although this god transcends matter, Plutarch argues that “the god established the exceedingly beautiful sun and moon as an image of himself in the heavens.”<sup>149</sup> Human rulers, through aiming well at justice and orienting themselves towards god’s virtue, similarly serve as “an image of the god that orders the world.”<sup>150</sup>

While *Ad principem ineruditum* focuses narrowly on rulers, Plutarch expands it in *De sera numinis vindicta* to all humans as the ideal for a philosophical life. He again appeals to this concept of becoming like to god as the aim (*telos*) of philosophy, which Plato formulated in several prominent passages throughout the corpus. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates claims that the only potential escape from the evils of the world is becoming like to god or the divine insofar as possible for a human.<sup>151</sup> Towards the end of the *Timaeus*, likeness to the divine mind is said to be the ethical aim of human life and the process to attain it is said to be ordering oneself by

<sup>148</sup> οἷον δ’ ἥλιος ἐν οὐρανῷ μίμημα τὸ περικαλλές αὐτοῦ δι’ ἐσόπτρου εἶδωλον ἀναφαίνεται τοῖς ἐκεῖνον ἐνορᾶν δι’ αὐτοῦ δυνατοῖς, οὕτω τὸ ἐν πόλεσι φέγγος εὐδικίας καὶ λόγου τοῦ περὶ αὐτὸν ὥσπερ εἰκόνα κατέστησεν, ἦν οἱ μακάριοι καὶ σώφρονες ἐκ φιλοσοφίας ἀπογράφονται πρὸς τὸ κάλλιστον τῶν πραγμάτων πλάττοντες ἑαυτοῦς (781f-2a).

<sup>149</sup> οἷον δ’ ἥλιον ἐν οὐρανῷ περικαλλές εἶδωλον ἑαυτοῦ καὶ σελήνην ὁ θεὸς ἐνίδρυσε (780f).

<sup>150</sup> δίκη μὲν οὖν νόμου τέλος ἐστί, νόμος δ’ ἄρχοντος ἔργον, ἄρχων δ’ εἰκὼν θεοῦ τοῦ πάντα κοσμοῦντος (780e). He further compares the “ruler, such an image and light in the cities” (τοιοῦτον ἐν πόλεσι μίμημα καὶ φέγγος ἄρχων) with the heavenly bodies (780f). The wrong way to imitate god, however, is either with the symbols from art (οὐ σκιῆτρον οὐδὲ κεραυνὸν οὐδὲ τρίαιναν), or power over nature (βροντὰς καὶ κεραυνούς καὶ ἀκτινοβολίας): “god is pleased with those who emulate his virtue and make themselves like to his nobility and love of humanity; he raises them up and gives them a share of his orderliness and justice and truth and gentleness, than which nothing is more divine, not fire nor light nor the course of the sun...” (τοὺς δὲ τὴν ἀρετὴν ζηλοῦντας αὐτοῦ καὶ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν καὶ φιλόανθρωπον ἀφομοιοῦντας ἑαυτοῦς ἠδόμενος αὔξει καὶ μεταδίδωσι τῆς περὶ αὐτὸν εὐνομίας καὶ δίκης καὶ ἀληθείας καὶ πραότητος· ὧν θεϊότερον οὐ πῦρ ἐστὶν οὐ φῶς οὐχ ἡλίου δρόμος; 780f-1a).

<sup>151</sup> φυγὴ δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι (176b). Sedley (2010) discusses the import of the “[d]igression which stands at the dialogue’s exact center” (69) for an ethical reading of the broader dialogue, with a novel definition of “*sōphrosunē*” as the intellectual virtue of self-knowledge rather than constancy or temperance (71-2). Carone (2005) concludes her monograph on Platonic metaphysics by invoking this formulation of the *telos*: “If this ideal is what it is to be god, then there may be much of value, even (and perhaps especially) from a practical perspective, in Plato’s suggestion that we should endeavour to ‘be like god insofar as it is possible’” (195). Van Riel (2013) compares passages from the *Eythphr.*, *Leg.*, and *Phdr.* (19-23) and concludes that “the Platonic assimilation to god preserves an irreducible difference between gods and humans, based on the recognition that god, rather than humankind, is the measure of all things,” which he contrasts from the “Aristotelian” idea of “to think god’s thoughts” (23). Dillon (1977) contrasts this idea, which “became the general definition among Middle Platonists” for the *telos*, with Antiochus’ “formula ‘Concordance with Nature:’” “not properly a doctrine of Plato, but was developed in the Old Academy, particularly by its last head, Polemon, and then taken up by Zeno, the founder of Stoicism” (9-10).

observing the harmony of the world.<sup>152</sup> Socrates in the *Respublica* suggests that one who is “eager and willing to become just and practice virtue is made like to god to such an extent as it is possible for a human.”<sup>153</sup> Finally, in the *Leges*, Clinias claims that “everyone should have it in mind to become as one of those following god,” which the Athenian stranger explains as the process of being like to god by developing the virtues.<sup>154</sup>

The dialogues present other formulations of the relationship between the *telos* of human life and the divine, such as the idea of following god, which is explicitly appealed to in the *Timaeus* and imagistically depicted in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>155</sup> This conception of virtue as becoming like to god, however, proved particularly influential. As Harold Tarrant puts it, it proved to be the “standard goal of Middle Platonism,” the characteristic ethical position.<sup>156</sup> It is certainly

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<sup>152</sup> “It is necessary for each to follow these (cycles), straightening the cycles in our heads that were confounded at birth, through learning the harmonies and the cycles of the world, for that which thinks to become like that which is thought in accordance with its ancient nature; for becoming like it attains the aim of what has been appointed as the best life by god, for the present and for subsequent time (ταύταις δὴ συνεπόμενον ἕκαστον δεῖ, τὰς περὶ τὴν γένεσιν ἐν τῇ κεφαλῇ διεφθαρμένας ἡμῶν περιόδους ἐξορθοῦντα διὰ τὸ καταμανθάνειν τὰς τοῦ παντὸς ἀρμονίας τε καὶ περιφοράς, τῷ κατανοουμένῳ τὸ κατανοοῦν ἐξομοιωῶσαι κατὰ τὴν ἀρχαίαν φύσιν, ὁμοιώσαντα δὲ τέλος ἔχειν τοῦ προτεθέντος ἀνθρώποις ὑπὸ θεῶν ἀρίστου βίου πρὸς τε τὸν παρόντα καὶ τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον; 90d).

<sup>153</sup> ... ὅς ἂν προθυμεῖσθαι ἐθέλη δίκαιος γίνεσθαι καὶ ἐπιτηδεύων ἀρετὴν εἰς ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀνθρώπῳ ὁμοιοῦσθαι θεῷ (X.613a-b).

<sup>154</sup> ὡς τῶν ζυνακολουθησόντων ἐσόμενον τῷ θεῷ δεῖ διανοηθῆναι πάντα ἄνδρα (IV.716b). The Athenian Stranger claims that “like is dear to like when it is truly moderate” (τῷ μὲν ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον ὄντι μετρίῳ φίλον; cf. Hom. *Od.* XVII.218) and argues that someone possessing each of the virtues, such as a temperance, is “dear and like to god” (ὁ μὲν σώφρων ἡμῶν θεῷ φίλος, ὁμοιος γάρ; 716c-d).

<sup>155</sup> ζυνεπόμενον ἕκαστον δεῖ (*Ti.* 90d); τῷ δ' ἔπεται στρατιὰ θεῶν τε καὶ δαιμόνων (*Phdr.* 246e).

<sup>156</sup> 2007: 419. See also Hatzimichali (2011: 90-4) and Boys-Stones (2016: 333-6). Cf. Annas (1999): “This theme displays the greatest distance between ancient and modern readers of Plato. For the ancient Platonists it was one of the most important and stressed features of Platonic ethics. For modern readers it is invisible” (6). Many studies of Plato’s ethics indeed skip over this idea entirely, such as Gould (1955). Annas’ chapter focuses on the tension between Plato’s practicality and otherworldliness, as well as the Middle Platonic reception (52-71); Russell (2004) is similarly focused on otherworldliness, but with an eye toward Stoicism. Reydams-Schils (2017) argues that all Platonists of the period are participating in a debate with various Stoics, although only the *Tht.* commentator is explicit. Some of these links are tendentious, such as the Stoic preference for the ‘active life’ (152-154), which is certainly not unique to that school, or presented in a distinctively Stoic manner. In the case of Plutarch (in this section of the *De sera*), her argument hinges upon an identification of “assimilation to god” and the providential care of the entire world, which she however points out is already an element of the divine in *Leg. X* (148-149). Cf. Silverman (2010) on the motif in Plato and Aristotle, Erler (2009) on Epicureans. Tarrant (2007) argues that, for the author of Stobaeus *Ecl.* 2.7.3f, “Plato wants us to divinize ourselves through wisdom (*phronêsis*), Aristotle through intelligence (*nous*), Zeno through virtue and reason, with all insisting on the central role of virtue. So the three great founders of Greek philosophical schools are differing in terminology rather than in substance” (423).



prevalent in the scattered remains.<sup>157</sup> The Middle Platonic *Didaskalikos*, now usually attributed to an otherwise unknown Alcinous, describes “the soul contemplating the divine and the thoughts of god” as nothing other than “becoming like to the divine;”<sup>158</sup> the anonymous *Commentarius in Platonis Theaetetus* contrasts likeness to god as Plato’s basis of justice against the Stoic natural affinity.<sup>159</sup> Even Cicero tersely argues in his *Leges* that “truly virtue is common to man and god, present in no other sort beyond this; virtue is nothing other than nature perfected and brought to its heights; therefore it is, for a human, likeness with god.”<sup>160</sup> The prominence of this concept persists among the Neoplatonists, as well as the Neronian Stoics Seneca and Musonius Rufus.<sup>161</sup>

This idea could, however, be understood in multiple ways.<sup>162</sup> A complex but intriguing example appears in part of a doxography quoted by Stobaeus, attributed to the enigmatic

<sup>157</sup> See also Apul. *De dog. Plat.* II.23 and Diog. Laert. III.78.

<sup>158</sup> ἡ ψυχὴ δὴ θεωροῦσα μὲν τὸ θεῖον καὶ τὰς νοήσεις τοῦ θείου... τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ὁμοιώσεως (II.2). Later, in the markedly ethical portion (XXVII.1), an entire section is dedicated to likeness to god as Plato’s proposal as the *telos* of humanity (τέλος ἐξέθετο ὁμοίωσιν θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν), comparing the various places in the Platonic corpus the idea is explicated (XXVIII.1-4). The daemones too, according to Alcinous, imitate the demiurge (XV.2).

<sup>159</sup> ὅθεν οὐκ ἀπὸ τῆς οἰκειώσεως εἰσάγει ὁ Πλάτων τὴν δι[κα]ϊσύνην, ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τῆς πρ[ὸ]ς τὸν θεὸν ὁμοίω[τ]ητο]ς δεῖξομεν (7.14-20). The commentary also describes Socrates as likening himself to god (εἰκάζει ἑαυτὸν θεῶν) by disabusing people of false ideas (58.39-49, *ad Tht.* 151c-d).

<sup>160</sup> *iam uero uirtus eadem in homine ac deo est neque alio ullo in genere praeterea; est autem uirtus nihil aliud nisi perfecta et ad summum perducta natura; est igitur homini cum deo similitudo* (I.8.25). On the Platonic context, see Tarrant (2007: 421-3).

<sup>161</sup> This idea becomes authoritative for later Platonists, and even appears as a gloss for philosophy itself in a marginal note in a manuscript of the Byzantine Neoplatonist Michael Psellus (φιλοσοφία ἐστὶν ὁμοίωσις θεῶν κατὰ δυνατόν ἀνθρώπων; Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, *suppl. gr.* 655, *fol.* 72v). Similarly, Hermias, a fellow-student of Syrianus along with Proclus, identifies it with happiness (εὐδαιμονία δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῶν· ὁμοιούμεθα δὲ θεῶν τῶν αὐτῶν ἐφαπτόμενοι· τῶν αὐτῶν δὲ ἐφαπτόμεθα τὸ νοητὸν κάλλος θεασάμενοι; 44.101). On its role in Plotinus’ thought, see Song (2009). More proximately to Plutarch, it also appears in the Imperial Stoicism, although reflecting a different—exclusively immanentistic—view of the divine. Seneca, for instance, emphasizes Stoic determinism: “An unalterable course draws human and divine affairs equally. He himself, the creator and master of everything, although he set the fates, he follows them; he always obeys, but once issued them” (*irreuocabilis humana pariter ac diuina cursus uehit. ille ipse conditor et rector scripsit quidem fata, sed sequitur; semper paret, semel iussit; Prov.* V.8). Musonius Rufus (e.g. *Diss.* 17.13-33 Hense, frg. 38, and *apud Arr. Epic.* II.14.11-13) and Seneca (e.g. *Prov.* I.5-6, *Ep.* 92.29-31, and *NQ* I.pref.17) both adapt Plato’s idea and language, while glossing over the κατὰ δυνατόν element, perhaps because divine and human virtues and knowledge are equivalent rather than similar, an idea for which Proclus chides earlier Stoics (*in Tim.* I.106f = *SVF* III.252). Justin Martyr, however, presents the Platonic end very differently in his description of the end of his pre-conversion education: “and out of idiocy, I was hoping to look upon god immediately—for this is the aim of the philosophy of Plato” (καὶ ὑπὸ βλακειᾶς ἤλπιζον αὐτίκα κατοψεσθαι τὸν θεόν· τοῦτο γὰρ τέλος τῆς Πλάτωνος φιλοσοφίας; *Dial.* II.6). Cf. Edwards (1991).

<sup>162</sup> In *De Is.*, the crocodile is said to be “an imitation of god, being the only tongue-less creature: for the divine reason has no need for voice...” (κροκόδειλος... μίμημα θεοῦ λέγεται γεγονέναι μόνος μὲν ἄγλωσσος ὦν· φωνῆς γὰρ ὁ θεῖος λόγος ἀπροσδεῆς ἐστι...; 381b).

“Didymus.” The source is sometimes held to be the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E. Neopythagorean Eudorus of Alexandria, although this is based solely on a comparison between Plato and Pythagoras, as there is no explicit evidence for the authorship.<sup>163</sup> It begins summarily: “Socrates and Plato, the same things as Pythagoras, the aim is likeness to god.”<sup>164</sup> Pythagoras, the text argues, had formulated the idea already with the simpler exhortation, “follow god,” but Plato added the qualification “insofar as possible” (κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν) to indicate that this process is only a theoretical one, possible only through the faculty of wisdom.<sup>165</sup> This leads the author to argue that Plato formulates the imitation of good as tripartite to correspond to a common Hellenistic division of philosophy:

It is formulated by Plato according to the tripartite division of philosophy: in the *Timaeus*, he says it in a physical manner (and I will add also a Pythagorean manner), plentifully signifying his previous observation; in the *Respublica*, in an ethical manner; and in the *Theaetetus*, in a logical manner. He expresses the following of god both clearly and plentifully in the fourth book of the *Leges*. This is because Plato has many voices, <not many opinions>.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>163</sup> Dillon (1977) ascribes the text thus to trace a neat line from Eudorus to Philo and subsequent Platonists such as Plutarch, e.g.: “When we turn to later Alexandrian Platonism, however, in the person of Eudorus, we find that the Stoic-Antiochian definition has been abandoned in favour of a more spiritual, and perhaps more truly Platonic, ideal of ‘Likeness to God...’ and this formula remained the distinctive Platonic definition of the *telos* ever afterward” (44). See further 122-3 and 192-3. Stobaeus’ passage does not appear, however, in Mazzarelli’s (1985) collection of certain (“A”) fragments of Eudorus. Bonazzi (2007: 366-7) argues that the appeal to Pythagoreas is insufficient to identify the text as Eudorean. See also Hatzimichali (2017: 90-1). Tarrant was once confident of the attribution (2000: 72-4), but has since become more skeptical: “going back to perhaps Eudorus... though we should not feel certain of this” (2007: 419). On the scholarly pursuit of this shadowy figure, see further *infra* pg. 104.

<sup>164</sup> Σωκράτης, Πλάτων ταῦτά τῷ Πυθαγόρᾳ, τέλος ὁμοίωσιν θεῷ (II.7.3f.49.8-9 Wachsmuth). The provenance of this doxography much disputed. From the citations of Philo of Larissa and Eudorus elsewhere, Hatzimichali (2017) dates it “plausibly, but admittedly without full certainty” to “the two centuries roughly between 100 BCE and 100 CE” (86). She emphasizes the central topic of ethics and the juxtaposition of Platonism and Stoicism (90-1, 98-9).

<sup>165</sup> “Plato articulated it most clearly by applying the phrase ‘insofar as possible,’ since it is only possible with wisdom, which is living according to virtue. For in god there is the property of making the world and governing the world, while in the wise man there is the settling and carrying through of life. This is what Homer riddlingly relates when he says, ‘he goes through the tracks of god.’ Pythagoras, following him, says to ‘follow god.’ Clearly this does not mean to follow the visible and the obvious, but rather the intellectual and the harmony of the good order of the world” (σαφέστερον δ’ αὐτὸ διήρθρωσε Πλάτων προσθεὶς τὸ “κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν,” φρονήσει δ’ ἐστὶ μόνως δυνατόν, τοῦτο δ’ ἦν τὸ κατ’ ἀρετὴν ζῆν. Ἐν μὲν γὰρ θεῷ τὸ κοσμοποιῶν καὶ κοσμοδιοικητικόν· ἐν δὲ τῷ σοφῷ βίου κατάστασις καὶ ζωῆς διαγωγή· ὅπερ αἰνίζασθαι μὲν Ὀμηρον εἰπόντα [*Od.* V.193] “κατ’ ἔχνηα βᾶινε θεοῖο” Πυθαγόραν δὲ παρ’ αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν· ἔπου θεῷ· δῆλον ὡς οὐχ ὀρατῶ καὶ προηγουμένῳ, νοητῶ δὲ καὶ τῆς κοσμικῆς εὐταξίας ἀρμονικῶ). On the image of following god, cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 247a-8c, 266b.

<sup>166</sup> εἴρηται δὲ παρὰ Πλάτωνι κατὰ τὸ τῆς φιλοσοφίας τριμερές, ἐν Τιμαίῳ μὲν φυσικῶς (προσθήσω δὲ καὶ Πυθαγορικῶς), σημαίνοντος ἀφθόνως τὴν ἐκείνου προεπίνοιαν· ἐν δὲ τῇ Πολιτείᾳ ἠθικῶς· ἐν δὲ τῷ Θεαιτήτῳ

Stobaeus' source defends the unity of Plato while attributing different expositions of the idea of likeness to god to different parts of philosophy. In each connection between an instance of the adage and a sphere of inquiry, its interpretation is thoroughly theoretical.

This emphatically conceptual vision of becoming like to god, however, contrasts sharply with Plutarch's main treatment, which characteristically evokes becoming like to god as both theoretical and practical.<sup>167</sup> Early on in *De sera*, the character of Plutarch describes one form of this process as observing the order of the visible divine in the harmonious motions of the heavens, and straightening out the defects in one's own soul accordingly:

But see first that, according to Plato, the god sets himself everywhere as the example of everything noble, and he gives human virtue—that is, the likening to himself in some way or other, to those capable of following god. For the nature of the world, being disorderly before, bears the source of change and coming into being as an ordered world (*kosmos*), by some likening of and participation in the form and excellence of the divine. And the man himself says that our nature enkindles vision also, in order that the soul, accustomed by the sight of things borne in the heavens and by wonder to welcome and embrace the elegant and the orderly, to hate the unharmonious and the wandering passions, and to flee the random and arbitrary as the source of all evil and disharmony. For there is nothing greater for a man than to have enjoyment of god, to imitate and pursue the good and noble things about him and to be established into virtue.<sup>168</sup>

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λογικῶς· περιπέφρασαι δὲ κἀν τῷ τετάρτῳ περὶ Νόμων ἐπὶ τῆς ἀκολουθίας τοῦ θεοῦ σαφῶς ἅμα καὶ πλουσίως. τὸ δὲ γε πολύφωνον τοῦ Πλάτωνος <οὐ πολύδοξον>. The source further argues, “there things about the aim have been said by him in many ways, since he has a diversity of expression because of his eloquence and lofty speech, which comes together into a coherency and harmony of thought. This is living according to virtue. In turn, this is the attainment and employment of perfect virtue. And he considers this the ‘aim,’ calling it by that name in the *Timaeus*” (εἴρηται δὲ καὶ τὰ περὶ τοῦ τέλους αὐτῷ πολλαχῶς. καὶ τὴν μὲν ποικίλιαν τῆς φράσεως ἔχει διὰ τὸ λόγιον καὶ μεγαλήγορον, εἰς δὲ ταῦτὸ καὶ σύμφωνον τοῦ δόγματος συντελεῖ. τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ κατ’ ἀρετὴν ζῆν. τοῦτο δ’ αὖ κτήσις ἅμα καὶ χρήσις τῆς τελείας ἀρετῆς· ὅτι δὲ “τέλος” αὐτὴν ἠγεῖται, τέταχεν ἐν Τιμαίῳ <εἰπὼν> καὶ τοῦνομα).<sup>167</sup> Cf. Bonazzi (2012): “Only the gods can ensure true salvation: the philosopher has no option but to turn his gaze towards them and endeavor to help others do the same, being the full-fledged model—inasmuch as possible—of the virtuous union between *theoria* and *praxis*” (161); Hatzimichali (2017): “What the reportage does offer us is indications of the key debates that would be taken forward by more partisan authors: Galen on passions and parts of the soul, Platonists such as Plutarch on the ‘practical’ side of ‘becoming like god’ and on the metaphysical role of Platonic Forms as principles etc.” (98).

<sup>168</sup> ἀλλὰ σκοπεῖτε πρῶτον ὅτι κατὰ Πλάτωνα πάντων καλῶν ὁ θεὸς ἑμαυτὸν ἐν μέσῳ παράδειγμα θέμενος τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην ἀρετὴν, ἐξομοίωσιν οὖσαν ἀμωσγέπως πρὸς αὐτόν, ἐνδίδωσιν τοῖς ἐπεσθαι θεῶν δυναμένους, καὶ γὰρ ἡ πάντων φύσις, ἄτακτος οὖσα, ταύτην ἔσχε τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ μεταβάλλειν καὶ γενέσθαι κόσμος, ὁμοιότητα καὶ μεθέξει τινὶ τῆς περὶ τὸ θεῖον ιδέας καὶ ἀρετῆς· καὶ τὴν οὖν αὐτὸς οὗτος ἀνὴρ ἀνάψαι φησὶν τὴν φύσιν ἐν ἡμῖν ὅπως ὑπὸ θέας τῶν ἐν οὐρανῷ φερομένων καὶ θαύματος ἀσπάζεσθαι καὶ ἀγαπᾶν ἐθιζομένη τὸ εὐσχημον ἢ ψυχὴ καὶ τεταγμένον ἀπεχθάνηται τοῖς ἀναρμόστοις καὶ πλανητοῖς πάθεσι καὶ φεύγει τὸ εἰκῆ καὶ ὡς ἔτυχεν ὡς κακίας καὶ

Plutarch explains likening to god, also described as following god, as a process of imitating the order of the divine and rendering one's own soul more orderly and harmonious by active imitation of the divine. The emphasis on the visible order in the motions of the stars harkens back to Plato's conception of the role of sight and astrology in the *Timaeus* and the allusion to the primordial, unordered world soul—a controversial but central element of Plutarch's interpretation of the *Timaeus*<sup>169</sup>—draws further attention to the specific figure of the demiurge, the architect of the world and of human virtue as well.<sup>170</sup> In *De tranquillitate animae*, Plutarch describes the world as a “superlatively holy and marvelous temple,” which each “human enters through birth as a spectator, not of things wrought by human hand but unalterable images, as many as the divine intellect made as visible imitations of intellectual objects, as Plato says,” referring to the sun, moon, stars, and so on.<sup>171</sup> The orderliness of the intellectual world, being unchanging and eternal, is clearly imitated, for Plutarch, in the motion of the celestial objects, which allow human spectators in this divine temple to study that world through the material one.

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πλημμελείας ἀπάσης γένεσιν. οὐ γάρ ἐστιν ὁ τι μῆζον ἄνθρωπος ἀπολαύειν θεοῦ πέφυκεν ἢ τὸ μιμήσει καὶ διώξει τῶν ἐν ἐκείνῳ καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν εἰς ἀρετὴν καθίστασθαι (550d-e). Tarrant (2007) finds skeptical significance in the modifier ἀμωσγέπως: “Being less keen on the Stoics at least, and influenced by traditional Academic caution in matters of interpretation, Plutarch will only declare that Plato made human virtue ‘in some way or other’ an assimilation to god... This seems to show awareness of current disputes about the Platonic doctrine” (423n11).

<sup>169</sup> See *infra* pg. 160.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. *Ad princ. inerud.* 781a. Another *locus classicus* for the former idea is the line of conversation that Glaucón starts in *Resp.* VII.529a: “for it seems entirely clear to me that it (astronomy) forces the soul to look toward the above and leads it there, away from the things here” (παντὶ γὰρ μοι δοκεῖ δῆλον ὅτι αὕτη [ἀστρονομία] γε ἀναγκάζει ψυχὴν εἰς τὸ ἄνω ὄραν καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἐνθὲνδε ἐκεῖσε ἄγει). See also *Leg.* X.886a, [Pl.] *Epin.* 981e-3c, and Alcinous VII.3-4. Seneca also emphasizes the role of contemplation of the astral motions in causing the mind wonder about the divine, until it “breaks forth the walls of the sky, not content any longer to know what remains spread out before it” (*cogitatio nostra caeli munimenta perrumpit nec contenta est id, quod ostendit, scire*; *Otio* V.6, cf. *Lucr.* I.72-74, III.14-7). Boethius, early on in the *Cons.* (and therefore early in the character's philosophical journey, so to speak), recalls his earlier relationship with Philosophy as “when you were forming our customs and the method of all life to fit the example of the order of the heavens” (*cum mores nostros totiusque uitae rationem ad caelestis ordinis exempla formares?*; I.p.4). Epicureans, on the other hand, tend to distinguish competing sorts of motion, which deprives Platonic or Stoic cosmology of its upward turn (e.g. Epicurus *Ep. Pyth.* §91-7, *Lucr.* V.509-33).

<sup>171</sup> ἱερὸν μὲν γὰρ ἀγίωτατον ὁ κόσμος ἐστὶ καὶ θεοπρεπέστατον· εἰς δὲ τοῦτον ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰσάγεται διὰ τῆς γενέσεως οὐδὲ χειροκμήτων οὐδὲ ἀκινήτων ἀγαλμάτων θεστής, ἀλλ’ οἷα νοῦς θεῖος αἰσθητὰ μιμήματα νοητῶν, φησὶν ὁ Πλάτων, ... ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην καὶ ἄστρα καὶ ποταμοὺς (477c-d).

It is that intellectual order, it seems, that he bids readers to imitate in their own souls, through the intermediacy of the visible divine in the heavens.

The meaning of this imitation is based on based on his understanding of the *Timaeus* as presenting a macrocosm—i.e. the soul of the world—and microcosm—the human soul.<sup>172</sup> Just as the world soul has two parts, so does the human soul—the rational and orderly part, and an irrational part. Plutarch interprets Plato’s conception of the soul as entailing both motion and cognition.<sup>173</sup> In *De animae procreatione*, he initially characterizes the soul as lacking “magnitude in units and points and lengths and breadths, which befit bodies, and are characteristic of bodies rather than souls;” rather, it “is the cause and source of motion, but mind of the ordering and

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<sup>172</sup> See further *infra* pg. 294.

<sup>173</sup> Plutarch thus combines two threads of ancient thought on the soul, both of which appear in Plato. Aristotle, in the doxographical portion of *De anima*, however, distinguishes two useful aspects for considering the potential function of the soul: “ensouled things seem to differ from soulless things in two respects most of all: in motion and perceiving” (τὸ ἔμψυχον δὴ τοῦ ἀψύχου δυοῖν μάλιστα διαφέρειν δοκεῖ, κινήσει τε καὶ τῷ αἰσθάνεσθαι; 403b25-7). He claims to have nearly (σχεδὸν) adopted (παρειλήφαμεν) this distinction exactly from philosophical forbearers (403b27-8). Some of Aristotle’s predecessors, he claims, saw capacity for motion—and particularly the unique capacity for self-motion—as the “primary” characteristic of soul: “For they say primarily and fundamentally, soul is the moving thing; and they think that what does not move itself is not able to move anything else, they supposed soul to be something of those things that move themselves” (φασὶ γὰρ ἔνιοι καὶ μάλιστα καὶ πρώτως ψυχὴν εἶναι τὸ κινεῖν, οἰηθέντες δὲ τὸ μὴ κινούμενον αὐτὸ μὴ ἐνδέχεσθαι κινεῖν ἕτερον, τῶν κινουμένων τι τὴν ψυχὴν ὑπέλαβον εἶναι, 403b28-32; reiterated: 404b8-9). Others saw soul as primarily intellectual and cognitive, particularly through the explanation that it is an *archê* of everything, and so it alone can understand everything, by the principle of “like understands like;” (ὅσοι δ’ ἐπὶ τὸ γινώσκειν καὶ τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι τῶν ὄντων, οὗτοι δὲ λέγουσι τὴν ψυχὴν τὰς ἀρχάς, οἱ μὲν πλείους ποιοῦντες, οἱ δὲ μίαν ταύτην, ...; 404b9-11, cf. Pl. *Ti.* 45c, Alcinous XIV.2). Others still took both elements, the capacity for movement and particularly self-motion along with the epistemic capacity, to be essential to soul (ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ κινήτικὸν ἐδόκει ἡ ψυχὴ εἶναι καὶ γνωριστικὸν, οὕτως ἔνιοι συνέπλεξαν ἐξ ἀμφοῖν, ἀποφηνάμενοι τὴν ψυχὴν ἀριθμὸν κινεῖν ἑαυτον; 404b28-30). Both elements can be found in Plato’s *Timaeus*, although Aristotle associates that dialogue with the ‘like understands like’ sort of theory (404b16-18). Iamblichus’ *De an.* begins with an explicit appeal to Aristotle’s categories, but adds a third: “subtlety of essence” (λεπτότητα οὐσίας; §1).

harmony concerning the motion.”<sup>174</sup> Plutarch thus interprets Plato’s soul as fundamentally bipartite, based on the discussion of the composition of the world soul in the *Timaeus*.<sup>175</sup>

Plutarch interprets the embodied human, however, as essentially tripartite. The soul gives all motion, whether chaotic or orderly, to the body, while the mind, at least when there is harmony between all of the human parts, exerts an ordering influence upon the soul’s motions. Matters of cogitation, which include both practical virtue and theoretical wisdom, are described through their kinetic effects on the soul.<sup>176</sup> While Plutarch identifies the human soul as a microcosm of the cosmic soul, as described in *Leges X* and the *Timaeus*, the human intellect, it seems, is a microcosm of the divine intelligence in the world. This part of a human, the immortal

<sup>174</sup> ... οὔτε πλῆθος ἐν μονάσει καὶ στιγμαῖς οὔτε μήκη καὶ πλάτη λέγεσθαι νομιστέον, ἃ σώμασι προσήκει καὶ σωμάτων μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐστίν... ψυχὴ γὰρ αἰτία κινήσεως καὶ ἀρχή, νοῦς δὲ τάξεως καὶ συμφωνίας περὶ κίνησιν (1014d, 1015e). On the former, the context is the *Ti.*’s concept of *περὶ τὰ σώματα*... μεριστήν (35a, cf. 1023b-d). Cf. Johansen (2004): “the soul material may stretch inside and outside the spherical world body without itself being ‘thick’. Similarly, one might imagine an infinitesimally thin layer of paint spread across the surface of the world body and the bodies with in it” (141).

<sup>175</sup> Babut (1969): “On remarquera que c’est sur le *Timée* que P. s’appuie... pour attribuer à Platon une division binaire de l’âme plus fondamentale que la tripartition adoptée dans la *République*” (136-7). Lanzillotta (2012) takes Plutarch’s criticism of Aristotle in *De virt. mor.* 442b-c to mean “Plutarch more closely followed Aristotle’s philosophy in allotting the two latter parts to an irrational part that resulted in the bipartition into rational and irrational halves” (8), without noting that Plutarch is distinguishing Aristotle’s own tripartition of the irrational part into the “perceiving or nurturing and vegetative part of the soul” (τὸ αἰσθητικὸν ἢ τὸ θεραπευτικὸν καὶ φυτικὸν τῆς ψυχῆς μέρος). See also Sandbach (1982: 221).

<sup>176</sup> *De virt. mor.*, for instance, further describes the faculty of practical reason (*phronêsis*) as managing matters caught up in erraticness (*πλάνης*... *ταραχῆς*), and its response is described in equally kinetic terms: it needs an impulse (*ὄρμης γὰρ δέονται*), uses the motions (*κινήσεισι χρῆται*) of passion when proper, and limits this sort of motion when excessive (*ὀρίζων τὴν παθητικὴν κίνησιν*; 444a-c). The capacity for practical virtue, as opposed to that of *sophia*, or theoretical virtue, is distinguished in 443e-f. Cf. 443d, 449c. Plutarch argues that, whether or not it is possible to remove passion entirely, such a removal would regardless be detrimental for a human (*ἢ δ’ ἀναγκαῖα διὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ δεομένη τῆς παθητικῆς ὥσπερ ὀργανικῆς ὑπηρεσίας ἐπὶ τὸ πρακτικόν, οὐκ οὔσα φθορὰ τοῦ ἀλόγου τῆς ψυχῆς οὐδ’ ἀναίρεσις ἀλλὰ τάξις καὶ διακόσμησις, ἀκρότης μὲν ἐστὶ τῆς δυνάμει καὶ τῆς ποιότητι, τῷ ποσῷ δὲ μεσότης γίνεται τὸ ὑπερβάλλον ἐξαιρουῦσα καὶ τὸ ἐλλεῖπον*, 444d). Cf. 445c, which qualifies the details of the *Phaedrus* myth as a simile (*ἐξεικονίζει*)—there is no such qualification of the kinetic language earlier, which seems to be meant literally. The myth in *De gen.* vividly describes the ordered motion of some *daemones*—“and the voice said, those bearing straight and arranged motion use souls obedient to the rein” (*λέγειν δὲ τὴν φωνὴν τοὺς μὲν εὐθεῖαν καὶ τεταγμένην κίνησιν ἔχοντας εὐηνίους ψυχαῖς χρῆσθαι*, 592a; cf. *Phaedrus* myth)—and the opposite (592a-c). See also Alcinous XIII.3, XIV.4, and especially XIV.50; cf. Anon. *In Tht.* X.22-XI.2. Plutarch attributes “some causal motion in the ruling part” (*ἐπελευστικὴν τινα κίνησιν ἐν τῷ ἡγεμονικῷ*) to “some philosophers” (*ἔνιοι τῶν φιλοσόφων*) in one of his polemical tracts against the Stoics (*De Stoic. repug.*, 1045b) as a mechanism for how someone can choose between different indistinguishable alternatives; Caballero (2012) identifies the referent as Arcesilaus and his disciples.

mind, is identified as the true person.<sup>177</sup> In *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, Plutarch calls for us to hymn the demiurge of the *Timaeus* by contemplating him.<sup>178</sup> His descriptions of the contemplative aspect of the divine in *De Iside* further suggest that philosophical inquiry itself is a sort of imitation of the divine. After approvingly quoting a line of Homer, he argues:<sup>179</sup>

He shows that the reign of Zeus is more blessed because it is older in knowledge and wisdom; I think this is the happiness of this eternal life, which the god obtained by lot, that what happens does not escape his knowledge. If knowing and contemplating realities were taken away from him, his immortality would not be life but merely time.<sup>180</sup>

Although our contemplation would differ in form from that of a god, one would suspect, our philosophy is an imitation of its characteristic mode of existence. Plutarch concludes, “for this reason, the search for truth, and especially about the gods, is a longing for the divine.”<sup>181</sup>

Although the imitation of god has theological and metaphysical ramifications, as the *De sera* passage emphasizes, Plutarch is nevertheless deeply concerned with the ethical ramifications of philosophy. To study physics is to study the divine ordering of the world; to practice ethics is to imitate that order in your own soul. While the passage preserved by Stobaeus divides up

<sup>177</sup> On the depiction of mind in Plutarch’s myths, see *infra* pg. 253.

<sup>178</sup> “It is better to trust Plato and to say that the world came into being at the hands of god, as well as to say and sing that it is the most beautiful of things that has come to be and he is the best of causes... and he brought it into arrangement and order to provide likening to it as much as possible” (βέλτιον οὖν Πλάτωνι πειθομένους τὸν μὲν κόσμον ὑπὸ θεοῦ γεγονέναι λέγειν καὶ ἄδειν “ὁ μὲν γὰρ κάλλιστος τῶν γεγονότων ὁ δ’ ἄριστος τῶν αἰτίων” [*Ti* 29a]... εἰς διάθεσιν καὶ τάξιν αὐτὴν καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐξομοίωσιν ὡς δυνατὸν ἦν ἐμπαρασχεῖν; 1014a-b). Plutarch tends to use this strengthened term ἐξομοίωσις, although in a fragment of *De nobilitate*, he defines the quality of good breeding at the “assimilation of justice” (καὶ τοῦτ’ ἔστιν ἡ ὄντως εὐγένεια, ὁμοίωσις δικαιοσύνης; frg. 139 Sandbach = Stob. IV.29.21).

<sup>179</sup> “And of all the things which Homer said about the gods, this was the most beautiful that he proclaimed: ‘truly they share the same race and fatherland, but Zeus is older and knows more.’ He makes it clear that the reign of Zeus is more august in knowledge and wisdom because it is older” (καὶ τοῦτο κάλλιστα πάντων Ὅμηρος ὧν εἶρηκε περὶ θεῶν ἀναφθεγξάμενος [*Il.* XIII.354-5] “ἢ μὰν ἀμφοτέροισιν ὁμὸν γένος ἦδ’ ἴα πάτρη, / ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς πρότερος γέγονει καὶ πλείονα ἦδει.” σεμνοτέραν ἀπέφηνε τὴν τοῦ Διὸς ἡγεμονίαν ἐπιστήμη καὶ σοφία πρεσβυτέραν οὔσαν; 351d-e). The same couplet of Homer appears in *Quomodo adul.* 32a.

<sup>180</sup> σεμνοτέραν ἀπέφηνε τὴν τοῦ Διὸς ἡγεμονίαν ἐπιστήμη καὶ σοφία πρεσβυτέραν οὔσαν. οἶμαι δὲ καὶ τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς, ἦν ὁ θεὸς εἴληγεν, εὐδαιμον εἶναι τὸ τῆ γνώσει μὴ προαπολείπειν τὰ γινόμενα (351e). See also Ammonius’ etymologies in *De E* 385b-c.

<sup>181</sup> διὸ θεϊότητος ὄρεξις ἔστιν ἡ τῆς ἀληθείας μάλιστα δὲ τῆς περὶ θεῶν ἔφεσις (351e). On the introduction to *De Is.*, see especially Roskam (2015b).

philosophy into parts, for the Chaeronean they are all related. Even when adapting a characteristic idea of Middle Platonism, such as the ethical *telos* as likeness to god, Plutarch intimately integrates it with the other aspects of his Platonizing philosophy.

### *Middle Platonism and the Hellenistic schools*

Plutarch continuously interprets and evokes Plato for the proper orientation of ethical life, the method to find truth hidden in traditional myths and practices, and fundamental assumptions about the divine. Much of the scholarship of this period of philosophy, however, is mired in the historiographical question of development, which often seems to entail the quest for “sources.” The period of philosophy between Cicero’s youth in the early first century B.C.E. and the flourishing of Plotinus’ school in the mid-third century C.E. is usually referred to as “Middle Platonism.” Plutarch, writing between the late first and early second centuries C.E., evidently falls in the middle of this period, such that scholarly debates on the development and nature of Middle Platonism can often shape the conception of Plutarch. The only earlier figures are rather shadowy, although Cicero presents some of the epistemological debate between the Academics he studied with in Athens. While Philo of Larissa seems to have adopted a modified skepticism, his student Antiochus seems to have adopted much of the positivistic Stoic epistemology, founded on “comprehension” or “cognitive impression” (κατάληψις).<sup>182</sup> As a result of this

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<sup>182</sup> Cf. Cic. *Acad.* II.16-39 and Long (1974: 224). There is disagreement on the reliability of hostile sources such as Cicero and Plutarch, but Brittain (2001) argues that Antiochus adopted all of Stoic epistemology. Cf. Bonazzi (2012a): “... such a recasting of Platonist doctrine in Stoic terms has to be properly regarded not so much as a historically detached reconstruction, but as an attempt at appropriating Stoic terms and doctrines in order to subordinate Stoicism to Platonism. It is within this context that the issue of Antiochus’ possible influence on later Platonism becomes important” (331); “In the battlefield of Platonism, Antiochus advanced so far beyond the Stoic lines that he was viewed as a defector, an ally of the school he had tried to resourcefully to conquer” (333).



dispute, Antiochus claimed to be the true heir of the Academy, arguing for a unified system of thought drawn from Plato and his followers, broadly defined to include Aristotle and Zeno.<sup>183</sup>

Evidently Cicero followed Philo in developing a skeptical, but thoroughly practical, philosophical stance based on Plato.<sup>184</sup> Yet Antiochus looms large in the scholarship as the “founder” of dogmatic Platonism: older scholarship even held that Antiochus’ diplomatic travels to Alexandria led to the establishment of a “school,” which eventually included Eudorus of Alexandria. Although John Glucker sensibly notes that the diplomatic trip was far too brief to meaningfully establish anything, the idea of Antiochean Platonism spreading to Alexandria proves an appealing narrative.<sup>185</sup> Heinrich Dörrie, however, emphasized another thread of Eudorus’ thought, namely the emergence of Neopythagoreanism.<sup>186</sup> The trend of attributing Plato’s thought back to Pythagoras is attested by the first century B.C.E. and seems to have grown in the Imperial period<sup>187</sup>—it continues now, in a sense, in the scholarly debate over the relationship between Plato, the Academy, and early Pythagoreanism.<sup>188</sup> A Pythagorean in

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<sup>183</sup> Cf. Cic. *Acad.* I.35.133; see also I.46.143-47.144.

<sup>184</sup> E.g. M. in *Tusc.* I.9.17: “I will press on for you and explain what you want, as I will be able, not like Pythian Apollo, as if what I will say should be certain or fixed, but as one small man out of many, pursuing probable inferences” (*geram tibi morem et ea, quae uis, ut potero, explicabo, nec tamen quasi Pythius Apollo, certa ut sint fixa quae dixero, sed ut homunculus unus e multis, probabilis coniectura sequens*). He professes no ability to seek beyond what “is similar to the truth” (*ueri similia*). After surveying various opinions on the nature of the soul, he reiterates his skeptical distance from certainty: “a god could somehow see which of this opinions is true; what is similar to the truth is a hard question” (*harum sententiarum quae uera sit deus aliqui uiderit: quae ueri simillima magna quaestio est*; I.11.23). Cf. Long (1974: 229-31).

<sup>185</sup> 1978: 90-7.

<sup>186</sup> 1944. Eudorus’ date is based upon Strabo’s description of him as καθ’ ἡμᾶς (XVII.1.5). The fragments and testimonies are collected by Mazzarelli (1985), but the “sicuri” (197-209) are far outweighed by the “non sicuri” (535-55). Griffin (2009) also provides some of these in a useful appendix (410-5).

<sup>187</sup> This is part of a broader phenomenon in the intellectual culture of the Roman Empire. Singer (2014), for example, lists instances where Galen projected certain parts of Plato’s thought back onto Hippocrates (9n7).

<sup>188</sup> The question, however, depends on the nature of Pythagoras and Pythagoreans in the Archaic and Classical periods, which is notoriously difficult to reconstruct. Pythagoras has been viewed as either a heroic founder of mathematics—e.g. by Sambursky (1956: 25-7)—or as an irrational “shaman”—e.g. by Dodds (1951: 143-6)—or simply disregarded—e.g. Shorey (1927): “As for Pythagoras, of whom we know nothing, the wise reader turns the page when he sees that name” (176). Much of the difficulty, as with the comparably difficult issue of sorting out metaphysical distinctions between the early members of the Academy, depends on the interpretation of Aristotle’s description of “the Pythagoreans,” whom he argues Plato largely drew upon. but Burkert (1972) influentially reframed the question by separating Pythagoras’ religious thought and actions from later Pythagorean science and

Porphry's *Vita*—plausibly Moderatus of Gades, a contemporary of Plutarch—evidently marks an extreme in charging Plato, Aristotle, Speusippus, Aristoxenus, and Xenocrates with “usurping the fruits” of Pythagoreanism with only slight modifications.<sup>189</sup> The scholarship is divided, however, on the nature of Neopythagoreanism. Is it essentially a form of Platonism that might well have even begun with Xenocrates, as John Dillon argues?<sup>190</sup> Or is it a separate movement with its own mixture of Plato, Aristotle, and earlier Pythagorean sources, as Troels Engberg-Pederson contends?<sup>191</sup> In one fragment, Eudorus attributes a prior cause to both the monad and the dyad—a thoroughly Platonic idea that scholars find in both the *Philebus* and *Parmenides*<sup>192</sup>—

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mathematics. In particular, he assembles a strong argument that Plato alludes to Philolaus in *Phlb.* (218-238). Burkert constructs his case by comparing possible fragments of Philolaus with Aristotle's testimony, which he argues proves their authenticity. Yet the debate continues. For the most recent, see Zhmud (2012). See also Riedweg (2013), and the historiographical survey in Cornelli (2013: 1-51). On the further question of the relationship of Plato and Pythagoreanism, Horky (2013) argues that Plato draws on Philolaus in the *Crat.* (125-66) and *Phd.* (167-99), as well as a broader tradition of “mathematical Pythagoreans” in the *Ti.* especially (200-59). Cf. Cornelli (2013: 100-21). The case of Plato's heirs is similarly contentious. Philip (1966) presents a “reinterpretation” of Pythagoreanism, particularly on the part of Speusippus, which eventually became authoritative (10-2). Dillon (1977) argues, “Again and again in the doxographic tradition we have a Xenocratean doctrine or formulation attributed also to Pythagoras,” which might mean that “he, along with Speusippus, becomes in effect the father of Neopythagoreanism” (38).

<sup>189</sup> “As the Pythagoreans say, Plato, Aristotle, Speusippus, Aristoxenus, and Xenocrates usurped the fruits through small changes...” (... τὸν Πλάτωνα καὶ Ἀριστοτέλη Σπεύσιππὸν τε καὶ Ἀριστόξενον καὶ Ξενοκράτη, ὡς φασὶν οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι, τὰ μὲν κάρπια σφετερίσασθαι διὰ βραχείας ἐπισκευῆς ...; Porph. *VP* §53). The attribution to Moderatus is usually inferred from Porphyry's mention of him in §48, e.g. by Dillon (1977) and Zhmud (2012: 75). Horky (2013) is more skeptical but suggests Moderatus and Nicomachus are “most likely” (261n1). Gorman (1979) passionately adopts this sentiment (187), which, by invoking Numenius, he uses to classify all Neoplatonists instead as Neopythagoreans: “Judged from their own lives and their writings they must be classed as Pythagoreans for their whole purpose was to revive an interest in Orphico-Pythagorean mystical ideas to counter the rising sects of Christians, Gnostics, Manichees and the host of other oriental cults now mushrooming everywhere in the Roman empire” (189). See also 194-8.

<sup>190</sup> Dillon (2014) defines it as “a branch of Platonism that emphasizes the role of number in the cosmos and which regards Pythagoreanism as the origin of this emphasis” (250). He concludes, “Plutarch would never be regarded as being on the ‘Neopythagorean’ wing of Platonism in the Imperial Age, represented by the figures of Moderatus of Gades, Nicomachus of Gerasa, and Numenius of Apamea, but there is no question that he knew a good deal about Pythagoreanism, and in various important respects exhibits influence from this quarter” (266). See also Dillon (1988, 2010); Zhmud (2012): “With few exceptions, all known neo-Pythagoreans of whom written works or fragments are preserved were Platonists” (6).

<sup>191</sup> 2017: 10-3. He draws on Donini (1988b), among others. Cf. Opsomer (2017) in the same volume as Engberg-Pederson.

<sup>192</sup> Dillon (1977): “Now Eudorus here is merely combining elements which were readily available to him from Plato, if not from Old Pythagoreanism... from the *Philebus* (26e-30e) he could have gleaned the elements of this theory, since the monad and the dyad are inevitably also Limit and Limitlessness, and the Cause above them, though not called there the One, has a unifying purpose...” (127); Burkert (1972): “The distinction of a highest One above the pair of opposites come from Pl. *Parm.* 137c-41d” (60). Aulus Gellius ascribes praise of Pythagoras to Plutarch and Calvenus Taurus, but the former is for his estimation of the height of Hercules (I.1.1), and the latter the general zeal

back to the collective “Pythagoreans” of old.<sup>193</sup> It therefore seems that the Alexandrian better fits the former conception. Additionally, many scholars argue that this branch of Neopythagoreanism is particularly interested in synthesizing Aristotle as well as Plato into their account of Pythagorean history.<sup>194</sup> Roughly contemporaneously, Cicero’s *Respublica* depicts Scipio explaining explains Plato’s un-Socratic pursuits and interests by appeal to the tradition of the latter’s travels to Egypt and Magna Graeca, where he encountered “Archytas of Tarentum and Timaeus Locrius and the commentaries of Philolaus.”<sup>195</sup> In the fragmentary dialogue also entitled *Timaeus*, Cicero seems to position Nigidius Figulus, whom he describes as a restorer of Pythagoreanism, as an authority to give a Pythagorean account of the Platonic dialogue.<sup>196</sup>

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of Pythagorean education compared to contemporary students who want to study merely Plato for the beauty or titillation of his writing (I.9.8-11)—not exactly indications that they traced their metaphysics back to Pythagoras, in the same way Eudorus may have. Cf. Numenius’ famous *dictum*, “for what is Plato other than Moses speaking in Attic?” (τί γάρ ἐστι Πλάτων ἢ Μωσῆς ἀπτικίζων; Euseb., *Praep. evang.* XI.10.14). On the veracity of the attribution, however, cf. Whittaker (1967), and, more skeptically, Edwards (1990).

<sup>193</sup> καὶ οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι δὲ οὐ τῶν φυσικῶν μόνων ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντων ἀπλῶς μετὰ τὸ ἔν, ὃ πάντων ἀρχὴν ἔλεγον, ἀρχὰς δευτέρας καὶ στοιχειώδεις τὰ ἐναντία ἐτίθεσαν, αἷς καὶ τὰς δύο συστοιχίας ὑπέταττον οὐκέτι κυρίως ἀρχαῖς οὐσίας. γράφει δὲ περὶ τούτων ὁ Εὐδωρος τάδε· κατὰ τὸν ἀνωτάτω λόγον φατέον τοὺς Πυθαγορικοὺς τὸ ἐν ἀρχὴν τῶν πάντων λέγειν, κατὰ δὲ τὸν δεύτερον λόγον δύο ἀρχὰς τῶν ἀποτελουμένων εἶναι, τὸ τε ἐν καὶ τὴν ἐναντίαν τούτω φύσιν (Eudorus frg. 3 Mazzarelli = Simplicius, *in Phys.* 181.7-30). Bonazzi (2007) adduces parallels from Pythagorean *pseudepigrapha* and argues that Plutarch, “a philosopher supposed to have been influenced by Eurodus,” takes over this idea in the third of the *Quaest. Plat.* (369-71). Opsomer (2005), however, argues that this is only one possibility to resolve a problem, unlikely to “represent [Plutarch’s] considered views” (196-7).

<sup>194</sup> Bonazzi (2007) emphasizes Neopythagorean interest in Aristotle generally; this is also a prevalent theme in the essays collected in Donini (2010). Similarly, see Turner (2001: 346-52). Cf. Dillon (1977: 133-5) and Dörrie (1981: 38-43).

<sup>195</sup> Scipio explains Plato’s philosophy thus as an interweaving of two strands: “and so, because he loved Socrates above all and wanted to attribute everything to him, he combined Socrates’ charm and subtlety of speech with Pythagoras’ obscurity and dignified learning on many arts” (*itaque cum Socratem unice dilexisset, eique omnia tribuere uoluisset, leporem Socraticum subtilitatemque sermonis cum obscuritate Pythagorae et cum illa plurimarum artium grauitate contexit*; *Resp.* I.10.16). The context indicatively pertains to natural science: Scipio is arguing to Tubero, who is enthusiastic about investigating an eclipse, that Socrates himself was not interested in physical inquiries (§15), although Tubero characterizes the Pythagorean way (*Pythagorae more*) as the study of “numbers, geometry, and harmony” (*numeros tamen geometriam et harmoniam*; §16). See also *Tusc.* I.17.39 and Piso in *Fin.* V.29.87. Apuleius continues the biographical tradition and adds Parmenides and Zeno, such that Plato’s philosophy is divided into parts: “physics from the Pythagoreans, logic from the Eleatics, and ethics from the very source, Socrates” (*naturalis a Pythagoreis, de Eleaticis rationalis atque moralis ex ipso Socratis fonte*; *De dog. Plat.* I.3); see also *Flor.* XV.26. Aulus Gellius mentions that Plato bought three books of Philolaus for an outrageous sum (III.17.1), which apparently occasioned a vitriolic claim from Timon of Philus that such a purchase was the source for the *Timaeus* (§6). Philip (1966) speculates that Aristoxenus was Timon’s source (13-4).

<sup>196</sup> Cicero declares that Nigidius Figulus was be a figurehead in the restoration (*renouaret*) of the “all but extinct teaching of those noble Pythagoreans” (... *illos nobiles Pythagoreos, quorum disciplina extincta est quodam modo*;

Plutarch does appeal at one point to “Zaratas, the teacher of Pythagoras,” to characterize the monad and the dyad in his description of Xenocrates’ interpretation of the composition of the world soul.<sup>197</sup> This is no indication, however, that Plutarch has a broader agenda of explaining Platonic metaphysics through Pythagorean sources. Given the context, it could well be that he is simply summarizing Xenocrates’ own appeal to a Pythagorean authority.

Through these two strands especially, posing philosophical genealogies that hinge upon Antiochean and Eudorean, scholars argue that Platonists such as Plutarch are adopting Stoic, Aristotelian, or Neopythagorean ideas, if not some combination of various Hellenistic schools.<sup>198</sup>

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*Ti.* §1), apparently reflecting the Roman phenomenon of Neopythagoreanism. Rawson (1980), however, argues that Varro, based on explicitly Pythagorean passages such as *Ling.* V.11, has a better claim on Neopythagoreanism; cf. Flinterman (2014: 345). Cicero describes Nigidius as a fitting interlocutor on the Platonic dialogue because he was “a sharp and diligent researcher of the things that nature seems to have hidden” (... *tum acer inuestigator et diligens earum rerum, quae a natura inuolutae uidentur*; *Ti.* §1), presumably, as Sedley (2013) argues, Cicero positioned Nigidius as a Pythagorean expert because he expected for a Pythagorean exegesis to be fitting for Plato’s *Ti.* Hoenig (2018) suggests that he is positioned as “a Neopythagorean, likely to be aligned with Plato,” in contrast to Cicero’s explicitly Carneadian stance (48), but argues that the extant translation is Cicero’s “probabilistic” account (49). These Roman philosophers are perhaps motivated by the particularly Italian claim on Pythagorean antiquity, on which see further Flinterman (2014: 341-53), Volk (2016). Numa looms large in this tradition. According to Livy, in two caskets (*lapideae arcae*) were found on the foot of the Janiculum in 181 B.C.E., which each bore inscriptions in Latin and Greek, one purporting to be his tomb and the other to contain his books (XL.29.3-5). One evidently contained seven books in Latin and seven in Greek, which the annalist Valerius Antias deemed to be “Pythagorean, to bring probability and belief to the commonly held lie that Numa was a student of Pythagoras” (*adicit Antias Valerius Pythagoricos fuisse, uulgatae opinioni, qua creditur Pythagorae auditorem fuisse Numam, mendacio probabili accommodata fide*; §7-8). Plutarch’s *Vita* of the king notes that the historicity of his supposed association is much disputed (1.2-3, 8.4-10), such that it would be “youthful and quarrelsome” (μειρακιώδους ἐστὶ φιλονεικίας) to press it too far, although he notes further similarities in many of his “precepts” (παραγγελάτων αὐτοῦ πολλὰ τοῖς Πυθαγορικοῖς ἐοικότα; 14.3.1, cf. 22.4). See also *Vit. Aem.* 2.1-3. Plutarch more skeptically records the other main tradition about Numa (e.g. *Ov. Fast.* III.151-4), his consultation with or marriage to the goddess Egeria (*Vit. Numa* 4.2; cf. 13.1 and 15.5). The Greek tradition of reading the *Timaeus* as a Pythagorean dialogue is especially represented by the pseudepigrapha, first attested by Nicomachus (§11). On the titles attributed to *Timaeus* in ancient and Byzantine catalogues, see Timpanaro Cardini (2010: 615-9).

<sup>197</sup> “And Zaratas the teacher of Pythagoras calls [the indefinite dyad] the mother and the one the father” (καὶ Ζαράτας ὁ Πυθαγόρου διδάσκαλος ταύτην μὲν ἐκάλει τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ μητέρα τὸ δ’ ἐν πατέρα; 1012e). Plutarch’s citation of Pythagoras between Plato and Xenocrates in a list in *De Is.* might similarly reflect the latter’s own Pythagoreanizing interests (360d = frg. 24 Heinze), although the fourth and final inclusion is Chrysippus.

<sup>198</sup> A thread of older scholarship depicts Middle Platonism as “eclectic” by nature, drawing from every possible source. E.g. Clark (1940): “All schools, perhaps with the exception of Epicureanism, contributed to form his views. From Stoicism, which he attacked in general, he accepted some points in particular; even skepticism had its influence, in that mysticism and dependence on revelation are often the counterparts of distrust in reason. Plato, however, is the chief source of his thought, and so he may be properly described as an eclectic Platonist” (115); he also describes “the resuscitation of Pythagoreanism” as “the next development leading on to Plutarch” (108). Donini (1988b) traces the negative valuation behind the term ‘eclectic’ to Kant through Zeller and later (22-31). See further Hatzimichali (2011) and, on Plutarch, Dillon (1988: 107-13).

From Zeno onwards, Stoics also drew on Plato, and particularly the *Timaeus*;<sup>199</sup> although Middle Platonists, definitionally, present themselves as the true heirs of Plato, his authority was claimed by Stoics and Peripatetics as well, meaning that Stoic positions may influence how Platonists read Plato themselves, perhaps even leading some to “appropriate” Stoic positions.<sup>200</sup> The most plausible example in Plutarch’s case is perhaps the conception of god as immanent in the world as well as transcendent.<sup>201</sup> Other claims strain credulity, such as Gretchen Reydam-Schil’s argument that Plutarch could only access the idea of the imitation of god through the Stoics because he could not return directly to the Old Academy. His engagement with Xenocrates, both in his explicit adoption of some of his ideas and his targeted critique, is far too extensive for him to be relying solely on some shadowy intermediary source.<sup>202</sup> Arguments that Plutarch adopts Peripatetic positions regarding natural science and especially ethics are more common.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> See Reydam-Schils (1999). Moreau (1939) already identified the Platonic world soul as a major influence on Zeno and subsequent Stoics. Cf. Rist (1969) on Chrysippus and Posidonius: “... work of the highest caliber, representing a view of the world and of man sharply opposed to the theories of Plato and Aristotle...” (vii-viii); “As for the general psychological doctrines, so here too can there be little doubt in the mind of the unbiased reader of the evidence that it was his interest in Plato’s *Timaeus* which led to Posidonius’ heresies” (265).

<sup>200</sup> Engberg-Pedersen (2017), for instance, describes “the rise of dogmatic Platonism, Aristotelianism and Pythagoreanism in the first century BCE” and the “inevitable” conflict with Stoicism, which led to some “subordinating appropriation” by these new groups, taking individual phrases or ideas and integrating them into their systems, rather than letting contradictory ideas uneasily sit side by side.

<sup>201</sup> Whittaker (1981) argues that *Quaest. Plat.* II is aimed at finding “support in the *Timaeus* for a basic theme of Stoic pantheism, and to reconcile this theme with the conception of the transcendent God,” insofar as “maker” represents what Whittaker takes to be Plutarch’s “transcendent” god, and “father” the “immanent”—“in that rational soul within the universe is not merely his off-spring but literally a part of himself” (51-2). He goes on to argue that this was a second century commonplace. Cf. Brenk (2017: 78-80). O’Brien (2015) argues further for “Stoic influence” on the idea of the demiurge, both on Plutarch (87-111) and Platonism more broadly (4-11).

<sup>202</sup> Nikolaidis (1999), for instance, emphasizes “Plutarch’s allegiance to the Academy, more precisely to the philosophy of Plato as expounded in the Academy, is more or less commonly agreed. Although there are cases where Plutarch appears to take distances from a particular Platonic doctrine or to disagree with certain Academic interpretations of Plato, he nevertheless regarded himself as a Platonic philosopher conscientiously adhering to the teachings of Plato and the Academy” (397). He plausibly argues that Plutarch defended the continuity of the Academy (especially 399-400). Cf. Opsomer (2005), especially on Antiochus (169n18).

<sup>203</sup> Jones (1916) lists potential ethical parallels in Plato and Aristotle (13n39), but cf. Babut (1996). Meeusen (2016) summarizes some of the broader debate over Plutarch’s explicit citations of Aristotle (68-72). Karamanolis (2006) offers a balanced account. Plutarch is certainly not as hostile to Aristotle as Atticus, who characteristically conducts a wholesale attack on Aristotelian ethics (frg. 2 = Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XV.4). See further *infra* pg. 153. Teodorsson (1999) claims that Plutarch’s understanding of natural science is essentially Aristotelian. Plutarch certainly draws widely on him for facts about the natural world, e.g. in the dialogue *De sollertia animalium*, in which where two

Scholars particularly emphasize the role of *metriopatheia*, the idea that the passions should be moderated rather than eliminated entirely, especially in the essay *De virtute morali*;<sup>204</sup> Plato had already, although often overlooked, formulated the idea in the *Politicus* and suggests it in the *Respublica*.<sup>205</sup> Plutarch, moreover, does not normally use Aristotelian metaphysical language, as Apuleius and Alcinous do with “activity” and “potentiality.”<sup>206</sup> Other Middle Platonic works, such as the anonymous papyrus commentary on Plato’s *Theaetetus*, might betray more of an

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young men contend over whether land or sea animals are more intelligent through catalogues of examples (cf. 965d-e). Museen (2014), however, argues that Plutarch distinctively does not follow adopt Aristotle’s idea of scientific method (20n54).

<sup>204</sup> The treatise presents Aristotle, moreover, as a philosopher who rightly followed Plato’s psychology for the most part in the beginning, but later strayed wrongly in the development of his own philosophy (ταύταις ἐχρήσατο ταῖς ἀρχαῖς ἐπὶ πλέον Ἀριστοτέλης, ὡς δῆλόν ἐστιν ἐξ ὧν ἔγραψεν ὕστερον δέ...; 442b). Cf. 447f-8a. On the ethical and polemical content of this treatise, see Opsomer (2005: 180-3). It begins by criticizing various Stoics for their failure to make distinctions about what the soul is (a prefatory question for what makes a soul virtuous) and offers what he presents as Plato’s view as a correction. The aim of the tract is prudence or practical wisdom, but it opens with the prefatory necessity of an inquiry into the soul: “about the virtue which is called by and known as ‘ethical,’ which differs most of all from theoretical virtue in that it has emotion as its material and reason as its form, it is the first task to say what essence it has and what its nature is” (περὶ τῆς ἠθικῆς λεγομένης ἀρετῆς καὶ δοκούσης, ἧ δὴ μάλιστα τῆς θεωρητικῆς διαφέρει, τῷ τὸ μὲν πάθος ὕλην ἔχειν τὸν δὲ λόγον εἶδον, εἰπεῖν πρόκειται τίνα τ’ οὐσίαν ἔχει καὶ πῶς ὑφίστασθαι πέφυκε; 440d). Plutarch explicates that the point of the doxography is not exhaustiveness, but rather that his own arguments become clearer and tighter (βέλτιον δὲ βραχέως ἐπιδραμεῖν καὶ τὰ τῶν ἐτέρων, οὐχ ἱστορίας ἔνεκα μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ σαφέστερα γενέσθαι τὰ οἰκεία καὶ βεβαιότερα προεκτεθέντων ἐκείνων, 440e). It discusses the positions of four Stoics on the nature of virtue, including Chrysippus (440e-1b), and culminates in a summary of the common ground of their position, that there is only a rational soul (καὶ νομίζουσιν οὐκ εἶναι τὸ παθητικὸν καὶ ἄλογον διαφορᾶ τινι καὶ φύσει [ψυχῆς] τοῦ λογικοῦ διακεκριμένον, ὁδὴ καλοῦσι διάνοιαν καὶ ἡγεμονικόν, ...) and that virtue is a disposition or power of this (441c). Stoics are a recurrent target in the treatise: e.g., καίτοι πάλιν αὐτοὶ (449b); ἧ καὶ φασιν αὐτοί... αὐτός τε Χρύσιππος (449c); καὶ αὐτοὶ (450b); αὐτοὶ τέ φασι (451b). On Plutarch’s handling of the Stoic arguments, see further Ingenkamp (1999). The authenticity of the dialogue had been questioned in the past, most recently by Hartman (1916: 203-209), but it is now usually upheld, but this treatise is one of Dillon’s (1977) principle sources for Plutarch’s ethics (193-196). Dillon, moreover, characterizes it as markedly “Aristotelian” and from its tone “early, even perhaps an essay written while Plutarch was still attending Ammonius’ Academy” (193). Teodorsson (1999) took there to be a consensus that Plutarch’s ethics are “basically Aristotelian,” such that other aspects of his thought might turn out to be basically Aristotelian as well (674); he later (2010) argues, however, that not only argued are Plutarch’s ethics are built on his interpretation of Plato, but further that “Plutarch’s cosmology should certainly be regarded as a plausible exegesis rather than a misrepresentation of Plato’s account of the construction of the World-Soul” (434); “although this suggests Aristotelian inspiration, it is Plutarch’s own interpretation of Plato’s cosmology that forms the theoretic basis for” *De vir. Mor.* (430). Cf. Simonetti (2017): “... he combines Peripatetic and mostly Pythagorean elements, and develops a doctrine that is ultimately consonant with his spirit of a committed Platonist” (180).

<sup>205</sup> *Plt.* 283d-4d. Cf. Annas (1999: 130-1). See also *Pl. Resp.* X.603e and *Leg.* X.959a-d. Plutarch praises his wife, on the other hand, for maintaining calmness after their first child died (*Con. ad uxor.* 608d-e).

<sup>206</sup> See further *infra* pg. 128.

Antiochean mindset.<sup>207</sup> There is some dispute, moreover, on how much of the Aristotelian corpus was actually known to Plutarch.<sup>208</sup> There are further historiographical reasons to doubt the older scholarly reconstruction of a chain from Antiochus to Apuleius through Albinus and the shadowy “school of Gaius,” which is supposed to explain the link between Plutarch and Apuleius by way of Arius Didymus. It has been shown to be entirely circular and baseless by Tryggve Göransson, although it still lingers on.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> The commentary was first published by Diels & Schubart (1905), who suggest an affinity with Albinus and the *Didask.* Cf. Dillon (1977: 270-1). Tarrant (1983), however, argues that it was written rather by Eudorus (179), if not another first century B.C.E. author (cf. 162-3). He also suggests that Plutarch drew upon the interpretation of midwifery in *In Tht.* in *Quaest. Plat.* I (166-7, with fns 55-7). The *Didask.* is often dated to be later than Plutarch, e.g. by Dillon (1977: 206). The authorship of the treatise is still disputed, particularly between those who assign it to the manuscript’s otherwise unknown Alcinous, such as Dillon (1993: ix-xiii), and to the attested 2<sup>nd</sup> century Platonist Albinus, such as Hershbell (1991). Whittaker (1987) is particularly vehement against the latter position. A further issue is the extent to which the treatise is dependent on “sources” other than Plato, Aristotle (whose terminology he uses often), and various Stoics. Perhaps he was influenced by Plutarch himself, as Loenen (1957: 46-8, 46fn2) suggests. The older scholarship has a tendency to favor Posidonius—as Shorey (1938) calls him, “lost Posidonius, whom German ingenuity reconstructs” (36)—but cf. already Jones (1926: 105-8). More recently, Dillon (1993) has taken a reminiscence of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Stoic Arius Didymus in XII.1 to mean that he must have been the “major source in all of this [physical] section” (114); others take Arius and the Alcinous to share a common source, such as Annas (1999), who in turn uses Arius as a source for Middle Platonism (1n1). The interpretive assumption that Alcinous was not reading the relevant classical philosophers himself, however, seems unwarranted, as Runia (1986) argues against Dillon (1977: 285).

<sup>208</sup> Sandbach (1982): “My conclusion is that Plutarch or his sources knew of *Topica*, *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, *Historia Animalium*, *Rhetoric* III, and probably of *De Caelo* and *De Anima*. Direct acquaintance with the contents is certain only for *Historia Animalium* and *Rhetoric* III...” (229). He notes greater awareness of lost exoteric texts, such as the *Eudemus* (cf. 210). There have been increasing attempts, on the other hand, to find lost dialogues of Aristotle lurking behind the text of Plutarch, especially in *De fac.*, above all at the hands of Bos (1989). He is followed, for instance, by Lanzillotta (2012: 5-8).

<sup>209</sup> Evidently Albinus, of whom there is still an extant *Prolegomena* to Plato—including a section on the divisions of the dialogues (§3) similar to DL III.49—was a student of Gaius apparently around the 140’s C.E., since Galen studied with another student of Gaius when he was in Pergamum (*Aff. dig.* VIII.41). Cf. Singer (2014: 21). Doxographies in Stobaeus attributed to “Arius” or have been connected with the Stoic Arius Didymus to explain the connection between Antiochus (or Posidonius) and Albinus, such as by Witt (1937: 95-8). Cf. Dillon (1977: 337-8). Whittaker (1987) more thoroughly attacks the connection between Albinus and the *Didask.*, the latter of which he successfully argues should be attributed to an Alcinous, but the narrative persists, such as in Harrison’s (2000) modification (196-7). Göransson (1995), however, attacks every element of the general account of the similarities, dates, and influences of these philosophical sources: the *Didask.* and Apuleius’ *De dog. Plat.* are more dissimilar than they appear, there is no evidence that the Arius text should be attributed to the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E. Didymus beyond the shared given name, there is no evidence that the *Didask.* was from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. other than the previous identification with the “school of Gaius.” Arius’ text is only held to be 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E. because of the unfounded identification of him with Augustus’ Didymus, and Alcinous’ is only held to be 2<sup>nd</sup> century C.E. because of the now usually rejected assumption of Albinus’ authorship (133-6). He argues, moreover, that it is equally possible if not more likely, that in the one substantial parallel Arius’ argument was in fact following that of Alcinous (202). Between Alcinous and Apuleius, he concedes narrow band of similarities, but qualifies: “The result of our comparison between Apuleius’ second book and chapters 27-34 of the *Didaskalikos* is that there exist very close

Eudorus' influence is usually held to reach Plutarch through his fellow-Alexandrian teacher, Ammonius.<sup>210</sup> Perluigi Donini adduces two passages in *De virtute* and *De Iside* where he detects a Hellenistic pseudo-Pythagorean source lying behind Plutarch's presentation of Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle in a single doxography.<sup>211</sup> The relevant question, however, is if Plutarch usually attributes the ideas in Plato back to unnamed Pythagoreans, as Eudorus and Moderatus do, or Pythagoras himself, as Numenius does.<sup>212</sup> Plutarch does not. Rather, Plato is presented in both as the primary authority. When he does discuss Pythagoras—including in a symposiastic vignette with Moderatus' student Lucius—it is most often in the context of purity and abstention from certain foods, particularly meat.<sup>213</sup> He does engage with unnamed

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parallels between certain sections of the two works, but that the great bulk of Apuleius' text does not exhibit any similarity to the corresponding parts of Alcinous' work. The only possible explanation for this fact is that, as we have assumed from the beginning of our investigation, both texts are compilations from a multiplicity of sources, and the two authors, in those sections in which the parallels are found, have used the same source or two closely related sources, but that in the other sections they build on different sources," listing "classification of the good," "virtue and vice," and "friendship and love" as the only topics of parallel sections (181). Moreschini (2015), stressing the similarity in ethics at least, argues for Antiochus as the common source for Apuleius and Alcinous (and Arius Didymus) (24). Hatzimichali (2017) re-examines the evidence and suggests a date "between 100 BCE and 100 CE," although cautioning against the identification with Augustus' court philosopher (86). See also Long (1996).<sup>210</sup> E.g. Tarrant (2000): Ammonius' "Egyptian name may or may not indicate that he had received his training in Egypt, but must indicate some kind of Egyptian connection that might explain how Plutarch had come to know the detailed work of Eudorus" (82). Very little was known about Ammonius except from Plutarch, even in Late Antiquity. Comparing Philostratus' *V S*, Eunapius laments: "but of the philosophers, no one has accurately taken record: among them, there is Ammonius the Egyptian, the teacher of Plutarch the most divine, and Plutarch himself, the charm and the lyre of all philosophy" (φιλοσόφων δὲ οὐδεὶς ἀκριβῶς ἀνέγραψεν· ἐν οἷς Ἀμμωνίος τε ἦν ὁ ἐξ Αἰγύπτου, Πλουτάρχου τοῦ θειοτάτου γεγονώς διδάσκαλος, Πλούταρχός τε αὐτός, ἡ φιλοσοφίας ἀπάσης ἀφροδίτη καὶ λύρα; §454). When he claims slightly later that Plutarch "scattered his own and his teacher's lives throughout each of his books," (ἀλλὰ τὸν ἴδιον καὶ τὸν τοῦ διδασκάλου καθ' ἕκαστον τῶν βιβλίων ἐγκατέσπειρεν), such that someone can find them if they zealously search (ὥστε, εἴ τις ὀξύδορκίῃ περὶ ταῦτα, ...), it seems clear that this Eunapius himself learned about Ammonius through such a search of Plutarch's works.

<sup>211</sup> Donini (1992a). Cf. [Plut.] *De lib. educ.* 2c.

<sup>212</sup> E.g. as Calcidius describes: "Numenius, from the school of Pythagoras, refutes this Stoic idea of principles through the doctrine of Pythagoras, to which, he says, the Platonic doctrine coheres. He says that Pythagoras calls god by the name of singularity, but material by that of duality..." (*Numenius ex Pythagorae magisterio Stoicorum hoc de initiis dogma refellens Pythagorae dogmate, cui concinere dicit dogma Platonicum, ait Pythagoram deum quidem singularitatis nomine nominasse, siluam uero duitatis*; §295 = frg. 52 des Places). Numenius evidently holds that some Pythagoreans misunderstood the master but claims both Socrates and Plato were true Pythagoreans (frg. 24). He, like Cicero, however, nevertheless presents Plato as a perfect intermediate (ἀνὴρ μεσεύων) of Pythagoras and Socrates, "mixing them into one" (αὐτὸ τοῦτο κέρασας): "he appeared more of the people than the former, and more reverent than the latter" (τοῦ μὲν δημοτικώτερος, τοῦ δὲ σεμνότερος ὄφθη; Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XIV.5.9).

<sup>213</sup> Lucius, "a certain student of the Pythagorean Moderatus," sees Philinus abstaining from partaking in meat and, as one would expect (οἷον εἰκόδες), was impelled into discussing the thought of Pythagoras (ταῦτ' ἐπαινέσας ὁ Σύλλας



Pythagoreans in the numerological portion of the *De animae procreatione*, which is also the most explicitly Eudorian in the corpus, in that the Alexandrian appears twice. Yet even on the significance of numbers, Plutarch is rather ambivalent about both. Sometimes they are helpful for understanding Plato’s difficult ideas—such as his use of the ratio of the ratio of 256:243, known as the *λεῖμμα*, in his detailed description of the Demiurge’s harmonization of the world soul<sup>214</sup>—but at other times they depart from Plato, to their detriment.<sup>215</sup> Rather than tracing

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προσεῖπε περὶ τῶν Πυθαγορικῶν, ὡς μάλιστα μὲν ἐγεύοντο τῶν ἱεροθύτων ἀπαρξάμενοι τοῖς θεοῖς, ἰχθύων δὲ θύσιμος οὐδεὶς οὐδ’ ἱερεύσιμος ἔστιν; *Quaest. conv.* VIII.8.727c). They turn to interpreting a Pythagorean *symbola* (συμβόλοις; 727c and 728b; see further *infra* pg. 178), but in the next vignette the same characters discuss abstention from fish, referring to tropes such as Pythagorean secrecy and silence (especially 728c-f; see also *De Is.* 363f-4a). They introduce, however, variations in the dietary restrictions: “Sulla agreed and added about the Pythagoreans that they tasted mostly of sacrifices they offered to the gods, and there is no sacrifice or dedication of fish” (μάλιστα μὲν ἐγεύοντο τῶν ἱεροθύτων ἀπαρξάμενοι τοῖς θεοῖς, ἰχθύων δὲ θύσιμος οὐδεὶς οὐδ’ ἱερεύσιμος ἔστιν; VIII.9.729c). Cf. *Numa* VIII.8, *De Iside* 353c-e. Plutarch begins the first tract of *De esu carniū* with the feint, “while you ask for what reason Pythagoras abstained from eating meat, I marvel at what passion—what kind of soul—possessed the first man to touch slaughter to his mouth...” (ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν ἐρωτᾷς τίμη λόγῳ Πυθαγόρας ἀπέχετο σαρκοφαγίας, ἐγὼ δὲ θαυμάζω καὶ τίμη πάθει καὶ ποιᾷ ψυχῇ [ἢ λόγῳ] ὁ πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἤφατο φόνου στόματι; 993a). See also *De cap. ex amic. util.* 86d and *Autobulus* in *De soll. an.* 959d-6a. In the second *De esu* Plutarch refers to the argument that metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls into different sorts of creatures, implies the necessity of vegetarianism—cf. e.g. Emped. frgs. B136-7 Diels, *Ov. Met.* XV.143-75, Riedweg (2013: 49)—but he notes a hesitance to rely on it (998d). Cf. frg. 122 Sandbach, *Porph. VP* §15; Tsekourakis (1986: 128, 135-8). Although Plutarch himself is evidently at times ambivalent about eating meat (e.g. *Quaest. conviv.* VIII.9.729f-30a)—perhaps, because as Brenk argues, these are youthful works, while maturity softened his vegetarian zeal—he consistently associates the question with Pythagoras and his followers. See also Newmyer (2006: 18-23, 90-2). See also *Sen. Ep.* CVIII.17-21, *Solon* in *Plut. Conv. sept. sap.* 159b-e. The origins and distinctiveness of a “Pythagorean” abstention from animal products in earlier antiquity are difficult to elucidate. It might be inherent in the “Pythagorean way of life” (Πυθαγόρειον τρόπον... τοῦ βίου) mentioned by Socrates in *Resp.* X.600b, although abstention from meat is not mentioned in some earlier sources, such as *Hdt.* IV.95 and *Isoc. Bus.* 28-9; cf. Zhmud (2012) on the evidence from comedy (179-83). Plato describes “so-called Orphic lives” (Ὀρφικοὶ τινες λεγόμενοι βίοι) in the *Leg.*, however, as explicitly abstaining from animal products (VI.782c-d). There may be overlapping elements between the two: see Bernabé (2013: 144-6), Edmonds (2013: 217-25), and Betegh (2014: 155-6). The practice of abstinence from flesh attracted some fierce adherents among the Neoplatonists, such as Porphyry (*Abst.*) and Proclus (*Mar. Vit. Proc.* §12, cf. §19).

<sup>214</sup> *Ti.* 36b, quoted in *Plut. De an. proc.* 1027c and 1020b). Plutarch also notes that “Pythagoreans” (here apparently agreeing with Plato) call the difference between the two terms, thirteen, by the term *λεῖμμα* (1017e-f). See further *De an. proc.* 1018e, 1027c, and 1020b. Plutarch also notes that “Pythagoreans” (here apparently agreeing with Plato) call the difference between the two terms, thirteen, by the term *λεῖμμα* (1017e-f). See further 1018e.

<sup>215</sup> The Pythagorean *τετρακτύς* (1027f) is distinct from the Platonic (1017d, 1022a), and the Platonic is “by far more elegant in its arrangement and more complete than the Pythagorean” (ὥστε πολὺ τῆς Πυθαγορικῆς τὴν Πλατωνικὴν τετρακτῶν ποικιλωτέραν εἶναι τῆ διαθέσει καὶ τελειοτέραν; 1019b). It is easier, however, to discern Plato’s opinion of what the *λεῖμμα* is, however, if you “briefly call to mind the customary things in Pythagorean discourses” (πρότερον δὲ τί τὸ *λεῖμμα* ἔστι καὶ τίς ἢ διάνοια τοῦ Πλάτωνος μᾶλλον κατόψεσθε τῶν εἰωθότων ἐν ταῖς Πυθαγορικαῖς σχολαῖς λέγεσθαι βραχέως ὑπομνησθέντες; 1020e). Eudorus is similarly appealed to in 1019e, but dismissed in favor of Plutarch’s interpretation, because the latter is “more harmonious with Plato” (τοῖς δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος λεγομένοις συμφωνότερόν ἐστιν; 1020c). Eudorus cited as “following Crantor” (ἐπακολουθήσας Κράντορι), but see also the

Platonic mathematics back to Pythagorean roots, he is distinguishing two separate systems to show where the latter can be helpful or misleading. He does, however, refer to Pythagorean identifications of divine names with numbers, which characters in *De E* seem to adopt in their speeches, although Plutarch allows them only with heavy qualification in *De Iside et Osiride*.<sup>216</sup> Indicatively, since he traces the origins of Pythagorean symbolism to Egyptian symbolism, he attributes this numerological practice back to the Egyptians as well.<sup>217</sup>

The dialogue *De genio Socratis* presents the most difficult evidence to analyze: it includes an explicitly Pythagorean character Theanor, who has come from Croton to assure that his dead companion had received a fitting (Pythagorean?) burial.<sup>218</sup> More complicated is that the central exposition, in the form of a myth, is given by Simmias, familiar from Plato's *Phaedo*, whom some scholars see as himself a Pythagorean.<sup>219</sup> Theanor praises the speech then gives his own, which includes a memorable depiction of the *daemones* of the dead cheering on the virtuous as they contend with the contest of life.<sup>220</sup> Yet Simmias' speech shares striking similarities with Plutarch's other myths, which have no Pythagorean dressing whatsoever, and

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other mathematicians from Soli in 1022c-e. Whether Eudorus is responsible for Plutarch's citations of unspecified "Pythagoreans" is possible but not certain.

<sup>216</sup> "We should not honor these, but we should honor the divine that works through them, as the clearest mirrors and instantiations through their nature, because we must recognize the implement or mechanism of the god ordering the world" (οὐ ταῦτα τιμῶντας, ἀλλὰ διὰ τούτων τὸ θεῖον, ὡς ἐναργεστέρων ἐσόπτρων καὶ φύσει γεγονότων, ὥστ' ὄργανον ἢ τέχνην δεῖ τοῦ πάντα κοσμοῦντος θεοῦ νομίζειν; 382a). For more evidence on the Pythagorean practice, see Zhmud (2012: 195n102). In *De E*, the young Plutarch identifies the pentad with "marriage," while Ammonius describes god as τὸ ἕν: "thus then one must act piously and greet him with the salutation, 'you are,' or even, by Zeus, as some of the ancients did, 'you are one'" (οὕτως οὖν αὐτὸν δεῖ σεβομένους ἀσπάζεσθαι καὶ προσαγορεύειν, "εἶ," καὶ νῆ Δία, ὡς ἔνιοι τῶν παλαιῶν, "εἶ ἕν;" 393b). On the referent, cf. Thum (2013: 255-62).

<sup>217</sup> "The Pythagoreans arranged numbers and figures with the appellations of the gods" (οἱ δὲ Πυθαγόρειοι καὶ ἀριθμοὺς καὶ σχήματα θεῶν ἐκόσμησαν προσηγορίας; *De Is.* 381f); cf. 354f-5a and *De E* 388c. Plutarch uses the story of Pythagoras' journey to Egypt to explain aspects of his thought. See further *infra* pg. 178.

<sup>218</sup> 579f. Varro evidently also received a distinctively Pythagorean burial (*Pythagorio modo*), according to Pliny, which entailed a casket made of ephemeral and light materials (XXXV.46.160).

<sup>219</sup> E.g. Brenk (1977): "Since the members of the discussion are of the Pythagorean brotherhood, Plutarch has filled the dialogue with Pythagorean overtones..." (139). He argues that "the Pythagorean interpretation of the *daimones*," however, is "principally" contained within Theanor's speech.

<sup>220</sup> 593d-4b. Detienne (1963) has argued extensively that this conception of the *daemon* is distinctively Pythagorean, projecting the Plutarchean myth back to even the shadowy early Pythagoreans. Cf. Koning (2010: 166n24).

there is not anything in Theanor’s speech that stands out as un-Platonic.<sup>221</sup> What we are left to conclude, it seems, is that Plutarch is not as outwardly hostile to the Neopythagoreans, as he is to the Stoics and especially Epicureans, but he does not share in the characteristic Neopythagorean agenda of proving Plato’s Pythagoreanism.<sup>222</sup> When he does construct doxographies to explain Plato’s place in philosophy, it is rather as the metaphysician who corrected the flaws in Anaxagoras’ teleology and so, for the first time, explained causation—a lineage he adapts from Plato’s *Phaedo* and repeats in several places.<sup>223</sup>

This tendency in the scholarship to explain Middle Platonism through Eudorus, like the earlier trend of Antiochus, is now attracting criticism.<sup>224</sup> Both are perhaps motivated by conceptions of Plotinus’ Platonism, which even among his students and colleagues could be understood either as an extension of Pythagoreanism or a blending of Stoicism and Aristotle into Plato.<sup>225</sup> Plutarch, however, usually depicts his characters as appealing to the Academy, and a

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<sup>221</sup> Lamberton (2001), however, argues that Theanor is pointedly ignored: “Undaunted, Theanor picks up the theological rhetoric of the myth and delivers a stream of inflated, groundless, soteriological bombast that exemplifies Galaxidoros said earlier about the damage that Pythagoras had done to philosophy. This is met by a wonderfully bathetic silence and a return to the world of action” (187). See also Dillon (2010: 143-4).

<sup>222</sup> In one of the *Quaest. conv.*, Florus does claim that Plato “mixed Lycurgus in with Socrates no less than Pythagoras, as Dicaearchus thought” (τῷ Σωκράτει τὸν Λυκοῦργον ἀναμιγνύς οὐχ ἥττον ἢ τὸν Πυθαγόραν <ὡς> ᾤετο Δικαίαρχος; VIII.2.719). Dillon (2010) misleadingly cites as evidence that for Plutarch “Plato combines the spirit of Socrates with that of Pythagoras, and it is that combination which in his view makes Plato the supreme philosopher” (143). Cf. Jaeger (1948). The context of the full vignette weighs against this being Plutarch’s meaning, however. The character of Plutarch gives an exegesis of the *Ti.* as the last speech, and the rest of Florus’ speech—fittingly for a Roman politician, consul in 75 C.E. under Vespasian, cf. Stadter (2015: 34-6, 40-2)—focuses on Lycurgus, not Pythagoras. This gives the citation of Dicaearchus a certain edge: the pure materialist advocate of the active life attacks both Plato and Pythagoras for their beliefs about the soul, and the latter for his political failures. See Huffman (2014).

<sup>223</sup> See *infra* pg. 285.

<sup>224</sup> Moreschini (2015) compares old claims of Poseidonius’ and Antiochus’ influence over Middle Platonism: “Eudorus of Alexandria has recently been considered instead of Antiochus. This philosopher was in some way ‘rediscovered’ by Dörrie in now distant 1944” (21). Hatzimichali (2017) is more dismissive, casting him along with Philo of Larissa as “two figures who were never particularly prominent in the history of philosophy and whose works do not seem to have achieved much circulation, judging from the small number of surviving direct quotations” (85). See also Zeller (1955: 306).

<sup>225</sup> Porphyry attests that his former teacher Longinus held the former—describing Plotinus in a letter as “he who, as it seems, brought Pythagorean and Platonic principles into a clearer interpretation than those who came before” (ὅς μὲν τὰς Πυθαγορείους ἀρχὰς καὶ Πλατωνικάς, ὡς ἐδόκει, πρὸς σαφεστέραν τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ καταστησάμενος ἐξήγησιν; §20)—while Porphyry himself explained Plotinus’ achievement as “mixing in hidden dogmas of the

line of recent scholarship has increasingly questioned whether he might be better understood in light of the skeptical Academy—although what that might represent by the second century C.E. is rather daunting to attempt to explain. Much of the debate centers around to what degree there is a break between different phases of the Academy as Antiochus contended, which manifests especially in the question of skepticism versus dogmatism—a subject that Diogenes Laertius treats as well-trodden question by his day.<sup>226</sup> This has been an especially contentious topic in the case of Plutarch, who, according to the Lamprias catalogue, wrote a treatise on the unity of the Academy.<sup>227</sup> John Glucker, for instance, argues that the Academy as an institution had long ceased to function by the time of Plutarch, but nevertheless identifies some strands of Academic skepticism in Plutarch’s explicit citations of Carneades and similar philosophers.<sup>228</sup> These citations are restricted to the polemical anti-Epicurean and anti-Stoic works, however, which prompts him to propose a developmental scheme of a dogmatic youth and a skeptical maturity, which is meant to explain Plutarch’s influence on his student Favorinus, who in turn distinguished his own form of “skepticism” from the extreme Pyrrhonians.<sup>229</sup> On the other hand,

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Stoics and the Peripatetics, even condensing the core of Aristotle’s treatise *Metaphysica*” (ἐμμέμικται δ’ ἐν τοῖς συγγράμμασι καὶ τὰ Στωικὰ λανθάνοντα δόγματα καὶ τὰ Περιπατητικὰ καταπεπύκνωται δὲ καὶ ἡ “Μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ” τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους πραγματεία; §14). Cf. Long (1974) on Antiochus (229). Evidently there were claims that Plotinus essentially took over the philosophy of Numenius, which both Porphyry and Longinus denied at length. See also Hani (1976), citing *De Is.* 382d-e: “Ces idées de vision, de contact direct et supra-rationnel, de bond, de grâce, et de don et d’accueil, préfigurant déjà les traits spécifiques de l’extase plotinienne” (476-7).

<sup>226</sup> “Since there is much disagreement between those that say he holds dogmatic opinions and those that say he does not, let us discuss this issue further” (ἐπεὶ δὲ πολλὴ στάσις ἐστὶ καὶ οἱ μὲν φασιν αὐτὸν δογματίζειν, οἱ δ’ οὐ, φέρε καὶ περὶ τούτου διαλάβωμεν; III.51).

<sup>227</sup> No. 63.

<sup>228</sup> 1978. Cf. Obsieger (2013: 383-6). Donini (1986), however, argues that, even if “Ammonio non fu certamente uno scolacra dell’Academia,” nevertheless “che professò una cauta filosofia platonica (medioplatonica) difficilmente distinguibile da quella di Plutarco, una filosofia che esibiva le stesse venature di scetticismo academico” (110). Cf. Whittaker (1969).

<sup>229</sup> The Lamprias catalogue apparently attributes a similar sort of work to Plutarch (περὶ τῆς διαφορᾶς τῶν Πυρρωνείων καὶ Ἀκαδημαϊκῶν; no. 64). Further, Glucker (1978): “... there were, at the time [of Favorinus] some philosophers who professed Academic skepticism and taught it to others, claiming that theirs was the best sort of philosophical instruction... One of them was Plutarch in his later years. Another was Favorinus. It is, indeed, not unlikely that in his Plutarch, where the description of this ‘best method of instruction’ appears, Favorinus was paying homage to the teaching activities of his old friend and master, and at the same time advertising his own method of teaching philosophy as the best available” (292). Cf. Ioppolo (1993).

there has been pushback against the idea of Plutarch as a “dogmatist” by Harold Tarrant and especially Jan Opsomer, who take the *Quaestiones Platonicae* to indicate Plutarch’s willingness to consider every side of a question, and so to engage in a sort of “semi-skepticism.”<sup>230</sup> He is overtly skeptical, however, about certainty in physical inquiry, although he still engages in speculation. In a symposiastic vignette where the character of Plutarch defends the medical portion of the *Timaeus* against a critical doctor, for instance, he concludes two hypothetical arguments by cautioning, “the intricacy of nature’s functioning is not accessible to an account (*logos*), nor is it possible to credibly explain with any precision what mechanisms it uses.”<sup>231</sup> Plutarch argues in this vein more strongly in regard at the end of the physical treatise *De primo frigido*, exhorting Favorinus to the consideration of multiple positions but withholding of

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<sup>230</sup> Tarrant (1983) defines “semi-skeptic factions” as “The Fourth Academy, or such of its members as accepted the meaningfulness of *ἐνάργεια* as well as the impossibility of certainty, along with Cicero, Plutarch” (169n68), and Eudorus, whom he argues to be the author of the Anon. *In Tht.* He argues further: “there is no doubt that [Eudorus] held many doctrines, as did Philo of Alexandria and Plutarch, upon whom we suspect [Eudorus’] influence: doctrine rather than dogma (in our sense). Philo and Plutarch have a very fluid doctrine, built in various ways around a few key principles. In Eudorus’ terms, they (like Plato) are *πολύφωνος* without being *πολύδοξος*” (184). Tarrant (1985) further elaborates his conception of a “Fourth Academy.” Opsomer’s (1998) dissertation book has an extensive treatment of Plutarch in this respect. Among other issues, he draws attention to Plutarch’s deeply held assumptions, such as that Socrates and Plato would never be impious, especially in the first *Quaestio*. He is largely followed by Simonetti (2017), who describes Plutarch’s attitude as “anti-dogmatic” and “aporetic-zetetic” (195), which she connects particularly with the *Timaeus* and the dialogue form (196-7), as does Opsomer (2005: 199-2000). Gerson (2013) argues that Platonism is defined in part by “antisepticism,” deeming Plutarch as a Platonist generally, but not in this respect (188n28). Cf. Philo’s claim in *De aet. mund.* that human stupidity and vice (*τοὺς ἀφροσύνης καὶ ἀδικίας καὶ τῶν ἄλλων κακιῶν... τύπους δυσσεκπλύτους*) necessitates that it be difficult even to “discover by ourselves some likeness of the truth” (*δι’ αὐτῶν μίμημά τι τῆς ἀληθείας ἀνευρίσκωμεν*; §2) about the destructibility or indestructibility—consequently also the temporality or eternity—of the world.

<sup>231</sup> ἢ γὰρ φύσις οὐκ ἐφικτὸν ἔχει τῷ λόγῳ τὸ περὶ τὰς ἐνεργείας εὐμήχανον, οὐδ’ ἔστι τῶν ὀργάνων αὐτῆς τὴν ἀκρίβειαν οἷς χρῆται... ἀξίως διελθεῖν (*Quaest. conv.* VII.1.699b). He concludes the speech on a similar note: “This is more likely by far than the others, but the truth is nevertheless beyond our reach in these matters; but one should not, in such an unclear matter with so many arguments on each side, speak so arrogantly against a philosopher preeminent in esteem and authority” (*εἰκότα γὰρ μακρῶ ταῦτα μᾶλλον ἐκείνων. τὸ δ’ ἀληθὲς ἴσως ἄληπτον ἔν γε τούτοις, καὶ οὐκ ἔδει πρὸ φιλόσοφον δόξῃ τε καὶ δυνάμει πρῶτον οὕτως ἀπαυθαδίασσθαι περὶ πράγματος ἀδήλου καὶ τοσαύτην ἀντιλογίαν ἔχοντος*; 700b).

judgement.<sup>232</sup> Certain knowledge is not even theoretically obtainable, if the object is the world of becoming—both because of the unstable nature of the object and the fallability of sensation.<sup>233</sup>

Pierluigi Donini, while emphasizing on the one hand Neopythagorean influence on Plutarch, also detects a substantial Academic component in both Plutarch and Ammonius, such as in the final speech of *De E*.<sup>234</sup> Jan Opsomer considers a similar position, but with a heavy qualification: “Pythagorean ideas often figure in Plutarch’s dialogues, but they do not always carry great weight and rarely constitute Plutarch’s last word on a given issue. Plutarch is a Platonist, in some respects a pythagoreanising Platonist, but not a Pythagorean.”<sup>235</sup> George Boys-Stones, however, provides another model of the impetus for Middle Platonism—or as he prefers “post-Hellenistic philosophy”—which seems to better explain Plutarch’s position in what Boys-Stones argues to be the first generation of true “Platonists.” He considers the movement “rather as a methodology than as a collection of doctrines.”<sup>236</sup> By viewing Plato as an authority,

Platonist philosophy involved *imprimis* puzzling out what Plato meant as a means of advancing towards knowledge: and the real uncertainties that might be thrown up by this exegetic process (as, for example, in Plutarch’s *Platonic Questions*) show that the process was quite honest in its conception, not a disingenuous appropriation of Plato for doctrines worked out in spite of him.<sup>237</sup>

<sup>232</sup> “Compare these things, Favorinus, to those said by others. If they neither fall short of persuasiveness nor exceed it by much, bid opinions farewell, thinking that it is more philosophical to hold back in unclear things than to assent” (ταῦτ’, ὃ Φαβωρίνε, τοῖς εἰρημένοις ὑφ’ ἑτέρων παράβαλλε· κἂν μήτε λείπηται τῇ πιθανότητι μήτε ὑπερέχη πολύ, χαίρειν ἕα τὰς δόξας, τὸ ἐπέχειν ἐν τοῖς ἀδήλοις τοῦ συγκατατίθεσθαι φιλοσοφώτερον ἡγούμενος; 955c). Cf. Boys-Stones (1997: 44).

<sup>233</sup> Ammonius in *De E* is particularly skeptical about this human faculty: “sense-perception is beguiled by ignorance of existence to think that what is coming to be actually exists” (ψεύδεται δ’ ἡ αἴσθησις ἀγνοία τοῦ ὄντος εἶναι τὸ φαινόμενον; 392e). Reason (ὁ λόγος), on the other hand, has objects beyond time (392f). See also *De Is*. 373a-c.

<sup>234</sup> 2005: 199.

<sup>235</sup> Modifying Donini, he distinguishes three sources: “(1) Plato himself, (2) the (New) Academic tradition, and (3) Neopythagoreanism (which it is perhaps better to call ‘pythagoreanising Platonism’)” (176).

<sup>236</sup> 2001: 126. He considers Thrasyllus and Ammonius, as well as Eudorus and Philo before them, as “important for fostering an interest in Plato,” but not in fact Platonists (100-1). Cf. Boys-Stones (2017): “if it is right to think that Eudorus is the first ‘Platonist’ of the post-Hellenistic age...” (67). On the Imperial period, see Whitmarsh (2005): “At once conservative and radical, traditional and innovative, centripetal and centrifugal, the ‘Second Sophistic’ ... offers a new and exciting perspective on ancient literature, one that will be unfamiliar to many readers” (3).

<sup>237</sup> 103. He connects this change in orientation to the “basis for the extensive commentary tradition that grows up with the movement as well,” and argues, against David Sedley, that the early works were mainly philosophical and not linguistic, on the evidence of “Plutarch’s *Platonic Questions*, or his exegetical discussion *On the Procreation of the Soul in the Timaeus*, neither of which presupposes difficulties in understanding Plato’s Greek” (103n11).

Boys-Stones still sees Plutarch and other Middle Platonists as “dogmatic,” in that they “were able to commit themselves to the truth of a proposition *on the grounds that* Plato had said it, and, it might be, even before they themselves understood *why* it was true,” thus orienting their principal assumptions to the text of Plato.<sup>238</sup> The detailed exegesis of Plato by Plutarch and other members of his circle, it seems, reflects a trend of returning to the texts of traditional philosophical authorities. In light of Roman domination of the political world, the jewels of the old cultural and intellectual world of Athens, and especially Plato, provided relevancy for the Greek aristocrats of the provinces, such as Plutarch.<sup>239</sup>

### *Conclusion*

While figures such as Alcinous and Apuleius appeal to Aristotelian and Stoic concepts to enhance their presentations of Plato, and while others such as Eudorus explain his thought by attributing central ideas to Pythagorean influence, Plutarch develops a system of interpreting myths, rituals, and images from Greek and Egyptian traditions to fit his rationalistic system of Platonic religion, which assumes the goodness of the divine and provides a model for virtue in its portrayal of the imitation of god. All of these positions, it seems, harken back to Platonic models, whether the theodicy of *Leges X*, the interpretive examples of the *Cratylus*, or the various formulations of the assimilation to god insofar as possible for a human. Just as many scholars argue that Plutarch subordinates philosophy to religious commitments, however, a substantial

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<sup>238</sup> 102. Cf. Brittain (2001): “Plutarch accepts, in some manner, that Plato is an *authority*, while the Academics held it to be an important principle that there is no authority beyond the reason of the individual” (231).

<sup>239</sup> The broader trend is also reflected, for example, in what is still called the “Second Sophistic.” Cf. Whitmarsh's (2005) characterization of the period as “at once conservative and radical, traditional and innovative, centripetal and centrifugal” (3).

strand in the scholarship on Plutarch's myths argue that they transcend the bounds of dialectic.<sup>240</sup> The two extended studies, Wolfgang Beck's 1953 dissertation and Yvonne Vernière's 1977 monograph, both distinguish elements of the myths as irrational—although for Beck that is beneath reason and for Vernière that is above reason.<sup>241</sup> I argue, to the contrary, that Plutarch's myths are bounded by the same rationalism as his interpretation of Plato. Vernière often compares the *hieros logos* of the mysteries, as if Plutarch pre-empted the eventual position of the Middle Platonist Numenius, who does develop a sort of obscurantistic attitude towards Plato.<sup>242</sup> Plutarch, however, does not. The dialogue *De defectu oraculorum* makes it especially clear that Plutarch treats both mythmaking and interpretation of Plato as distinctive styles of argument through the juxtaposition of two characters each deploy one sort of discourse but not the other in the course of an argument over the number of worlds. Cleombrotus conveys a myth concerning an exotic stranger, while Lamprias offers purely dialectical exegesis of the *Timaeus*.<sup>243</sup> The debate goes undecided, such that the two sorts of discourse both seem to have a potential to reach

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<sup>240</sup> See also Gallo (1998): "il mito serve da un lato a chiarire il pensiero filosofico, aiuta a capirlo; in altri casi può integrarlo superando con procedimento intuitivo gli ostacoli e i limiti della ragione" (208); Santamaría Álvarez (2007): "La principal finalidad de estos mitos es la misma que la de los platónicos: ilustrar la creencia en la inmortalidad del alma y convencer de ella a sus lectores, no apelando a la razón sino a la intuición religiosa" (878). Plutarch's myth as a whole occasionally receive attention by comparison with Plato's. Stewart (1905) justifies printing a translation of the entire myth from *De Sera* (369-76) in the course of a discussion of the *Phaedrus*: "Plutarch's Aridaeus-Thespis Myth seems to me to be so important for the understanding of what I have called the celestial and astronomical *mis en scène* given to eschatology by Plato..." (368-9). He also describes the *De fac.* myth (440-1) and quotes again the *De gen.* myth in full (441-5). Cf. Frutiger (1930: 279).

<sup>241</sup> Beck's dissertation, entitled *Plutarchs Mythopoiie*, is unpublished, but I was able to examine it. In her tripartite division of myth, "proprement religieux" or initiatory myth transcends reason: "La fable ... prolonge parfois sur des points où la raison achoppe" (1977: 314). Cf. *De Is.* 378a. She casts Plutarchean exegesis of Platonic myth as the forebearer to that of Neoplatonism (e.g. 37-8). Roskam (2007), building on Hardie (1992), is wariest of myth (although he still interprets the content as straightforward doctrine): "Plutarch here obviously enters the domain of myth, the argumentative value of which is certainly not up to the level of rational argumentation" (165).

<sup>242</sup> On Numenius, see *infra* pg. 206.

<sup>243</sup> Attitudes differ on Cleombrotus. Goldschmidt (1948) distinguishes the "[p]latonisme populaire" of Cleombrotus from the "platonisme savant" of Lamprias (301). Brenk (1977), pointing to the "satirical introduction" (89) in 410a-11e is dismissive (91). (Babut 1992). Babut (1992) stresses his lack of dogmatism and Platonism to argue against the position that he is "une sorte d'amateur peu versé dans les problèmes philosophiques et inapte à en comprendre les subtilités" (218). Dušanić (1996) analyzes the character as a conscious Platonizing fiction in light of the name appearing in *Phd.* 59c (293-4). Schröder (2010) argues that "Cleombrotus himself appears in a somewhat doubtful light" (158), but notes Babut's argument (n19). On the dialogue generally, see Flacelière (1947), Brenk (1977: 85-112), and Lambertson (2001: 165-72).



the truth.<sup>244</sup> They are epistemically parallel—the reason is that this issue is difficult, but no indication that Plutarch thinks that Plato intentionally hid the truth from all but the initiated.<sup>245</sup>

The dialogue is centered around a discussion between Lamprias, Ammonius, and others such as Cleombrotus, discussing the puzzling question of why previously great oracles have evidently declined by their day.<sup>246</sup> There are a few mythic narratives in the dialogue—such as the relatively famous story of Thamus and the death of the “Great god Pan”<sup>247</sup>—and Cleombrotus, when the conversation returns to the nature of *daemonēs*, continues the trend by introducing a fantastical man:

But I would marvel if it does not seem much stranger to you than the things already said. And yet, it seems to concern natural philosophy and Plato provides a keynote, although he does not speak simply but through a murky opinion, inserting an enigmatic underlying meaning with caution. But other philosophers reproach him greatly for this. Since there is a bowl of myths and accounts mixed together in the midst of us, however—where could someone come across a more charitable audience so he could test these accounts as if foreign coins?—I will not shrink from indulging a narrative of a foreign man.<sup>248</sup>

<sup>244</sup> Cf. Simonetti (2017): “The hypothesis of a plutarly of worlds raised in the centre of the dialogue represents a typical philosophical question (ζήτημα) of the kind of those discussed in Platonist circles of the Imperial age” (79-80).

<sup>245</sup> Simonetti (2017): “The hypothesis of a plutarly of worlds raised in the centre of the dialogue represents a typical philosophical question (ζήτημα) of the kind of those discussed in Platonist circles of the Imperial age” (79-80).

<sup>246</sup> Lamprias, the narrator, asks Cleombrotus to “tell us more about the oracle; for the ancient reputation of the divinity there was great, but now it seems to have diminished” (μᾶλλον... περὶ τοῦ μαντείου διέλθ’ ἡμῖν, ὃ Κλεόμβροτε· μεγάλη γὰρ ἡ παλαιὰ δόξα τῆς ἐκεῖ θεϊότητος, τὰ δὲ νῦν ἔοικεν ὑπομαραίνεσθαι; 411d-e). Various solutions are raised, but Ammonius offers a simple, but dreary, political explanation: all of Greece is diminishing over time (413e-4c). It is no longer the center of even the Greek world.

<sup>247</sup> Philip, described as a historian (συγγραφεύς; 418a), relates a story told by Epitheres, a grammarian who evidently taught some of the interlocutors. The myth, set in the time of Tiberius (419d), recounts a memorable sea voyage. The sailors here “someone shouting for Thamus, such that we were struck with wonder” (Θαμοῦν τινος βοῆ καλοῦντος, ὅστε θαυμάζειν)—a clear pun, but cf. Dušančić (1996) on *Phdr.* 274c-e (278-80)—which turned out to be the name of the Egyptian helmsman. The voice instructs him to shout, “the great Pan is dead” (ὁ μέγας Πᾶν τέθνηκεν) at a certain point in the journey (419c). When he does, “a great groaning mixed with marveling came about, not from one voice, but many” (γενέσθαι μέγαν οὐχ ἑνὸς ἀλλὰ πολλῶν στεναγμὸν ἅμα θαυμασμῶ μεμιγμένον; 419d). Eusebius summarizes the myth at length (*Praep. evang.* V.17.2-9). The myth has inspired some English literature, such as Browning’s 1844 poem entitled “The Dead Pan” (1862: 256-66). *De def. or.* also includes a myth about a distant island, under which Cronus slumbers (419e-20a), which is also a part of the more elaborate myth of *De fac.* See *infra* pg. 271.

<sup>248</sup> ἀλλὰ θαυμάσαιμ’ ἄν... εἰ μὴ πολὺ φαίνεται τῶν εἰρημένων ὑμῖν ἀτοπώτερος, καίτοι δοκεῖ φυσιολογίας ἔχεσθαι, καὶ Πλάτων αὐτῷ παρέσχε τὸ ἐνδόσιμον οὐχ ἀπλῶς ἀποφηνάμενος ἐκ δόξης <δ’> ἀμαυρᾶς [καὶ] ὑπόνοιαν ἐμβάλων αἰνιγματώδη μετ’ εὐλαβείας· ἀλλ’ ὅμως πολλὴ γέγονε κάκεινον καταβόησις ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων φιλοσόφων. ἐπεὶ δὲ

Cleombrotus is evidently sympathetic to Plato, but he prefers an exotic myth. This move befits the context of the dialogue. Cleombrotus had responded to the dialogue’s earlier myths with the sarcastic quip “I too have things of this sort to relate” and rejects Epicurean “infinity” as another myth.<sup>249</sup> When he presents his own myth, he emphasizes the exoticism of the unnamed stranger:

I managed to find him only through many wanderings and much bribery for information near the Red sea, where one time each year he encounters others, since he lives in glades with nymphs and *daemones*, as he said. I found kind conversation with him. He is the most beautiful man in form to be gazed and he lived without suffering sickness since once per month he eats a medicinal, bitter fruit. He was learned in many tongues, but to me he mostly spoke a Doric that was not far off from music. When he spoke, his breath was very sweet and the fragrance gripped the place.<sup>250</sup>

The man even has the power of prophecy on this one occasion per year and is visited by political potentates. He is thoroughly exotic, but he evidently gives an account of figures from myth, whom he claims are not gods but rather punished *daemones*.<sup>251</sup> When another interlocutor, Heracleon, asks Cleombrotus “how this pertains to Plato and provides the keynote for the

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μύθων καὶ λόγων ἀναμειγμένων κρατήρ ἐν μέσῳ πρόκειται (καὶ ποῦ τις ἂν εὐμενεστέροις ἀκροαταῖς ἐπιτυχῶν ὥσπερ νομίσματα ξενικὰ τούτους δοκιμάσειε τοὺς λόγους;), οὐκ ὀκνῶ χαρίζεσθαι βαρβάρου διήγησιν ἀνδρός (420f-1a). Cf. Brenk (1977): “It is hard to believe that Plutarch is doing anything but spoofing here... Cleombrotos attempts to bamboozle his friends with tales of the mystic’s accomplishments” (67).

<sup>249</sup> ἔχω μὲν... καὶ ἐγὼ τοιαῦτα διελθεῖν... (420a); ἡμεῖς δὲ τὴν ἀπειριαν μῦθον εἶναί φαμεν... (420b). The latter is a reversal, since he objects that the Epicureans scoffing dismiss providence as a myth (κατὰ τῆς προνοίας μῦθον αὐτὴν ἀποκαλοῦντες). Cf. Lamprias’ epistolary introduction to the dialogue (409e-10b).

<sup>250</sup> ὃν πλάναις πολλαῖς καὶ μήνυτρα τελέσας μεγάλα περὶ τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν ἀνθρώποις ἀνὰ πᾶν ἔτος ἅπαξ ἐντυγχάνοντα τᾶλλα δὲ συνόντα νύμφαις νομάσι καὶ δαίμοσιν, ὡς ἔφασκε, μόλις ἐξανευρῶν ἔτυχον λόγου καὶ φιλοφροσύνης. κάλλιστος μὲν ἦν ὃν εἶδον ἀνθρώπων ὀφθῆναι νόσου τε πάσης ἀπαθῆς διετέλει, καρπὸν τινα πῶας φαρμακῶδη καὶ πικρὸν ἐκάστου μηνὸς ἅπαξ προσφερόμενος· γλώσσαις δὲ πολλαῖς ἤσκητο χρῆσθαι, πρὸς δ’ ἐμὲ τὸ πλεῖστον ἐδώριζεν οὐ πόρρω μελῶν. φθεγγομένου δὲ τὸν τόπον εὐωδία κατεῖχε τοῦ στόματος ἥδιστον ἀποπνέοντος (421a-b). The mystic’s foreignness is emphasized further by Lamprias’ comparison of Petron of Himera, “not a barbarian, but a Greek” (οὐ βάρβαρος ἀλλ’ Ἕλληνα)—“neither an Egyptian nor an Indian but a Dorian from Sicily” (ὢν Αἰγύπτιος οὐδ’ Ἰνδὸς ἀλλὰ Δωριεὺς ἀπὸ Συκελίας; 422d).

<sup>251</sup> “Thus he said are the things of Typhons and Titans: battles arise of *daemones* against *daemones* and then there are exiles or punishments for those that are overpowered and did wrong, for example the things that Typhon is said to have done to wrong Osiris or Cronus Uranus” (οὕτως δ’ ἔχειν καὶ τὰ Τυφωνικά καὶ τὰ Τιτανικά· δαιμόνων μάχας γεγονέναι πρὸς δαίμονας εἶτα φυγὰς τῶν κρατηθέντων ἢ δίκας ὑπὸ θεοῦ τῶν ἐξαμαρτόντων, οἷα Τυφὼν λέγεται περὶ Ὀσίριον ἐξαμαρτεῖν καὶ Κρόνος περὶ Οὐρανόν; 421c-d). The speech is described as causing wonder (θαυμαστός; 421e). See also Heracleon’s invocation of Empedocles, as well as Plato and Xenocrates, for evil *daemones* (418e-9a).

account,” the topic turns to the number of worlds.<sup>252</sup> In the *Timaeus*, Plato had supposed that it is possible there are five worlds, although he ultimately holds that there is just one.<sup>253</sup> The mystic, by Cleombrotus’ account, corrects Plato by postulating one hundred and eighty-three worlds arranged in a triangle.<sup>254</sup> The argument has no traditional names of gods nor narrative nor anything else that would mark it off as distinctively mythic, yet Cleombrotus concludes, “this is what I heard him mythologize about these things, simply, as if in a rite of the mysteries, offering no demonstration for his account or proof.”<sup>255</sup>

The question recurs, however, of why Plato specified five: Heracleon references explanations of the grammarians by reference to Homer, which prompts Demetrius to bid “enough with myths!”<sup>256</sup> Lamprias eventually takes up the challenge of explaining Plato’s hypothetical number of worlds by comparing different ways in which five is a significant number, and hence Plato’s postulation is not at all “mythic or irrational,” unless someone is misled by Aristotle.<sup>257</sup> He distinctively attempts to explain the reasoning in the *Timaeus* through Platonic physics—the Epicurean concept of void, for instance, is ruled out of hand, because “according to him it does not exist.”<sup>258</sup> Rather than importing the Aristotelian formulation of a fifth element or appealing to another mythic source, he compares concepts such as the five

<sup>252</sup> τοῦ δ’ Ἡρακλέωνος πυθομένου πῆ ταῦτα προσήκει Πλάτωνι καὶ πῶς ἐκεῖνος τὸ ἐνδόσιμον τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ παρέσχεν (421e-f).

<sup>253</sup> *Timaeus* contrasts someone postulating boundless (ἀπείρους) worlds, which would be the doctrine of a foolish person (ἀπείρου), with the question of “one or five” (ἓνα ἢ πέντε), as bringing greater doubt (εἰκότως διαπορήσαι), although “according to the likely account” (κατὰ τὸν εἰκότα λόγον) it is one (55c-d).

<sup>254</sup> ... τρεῖς καὶ ὀγδοήκοντα καὶ ἑκατὸν... (422b).

<sup>255</sup> ταῦτ’... περὶ τούτων μυθολογοῦντος ἤκουον ἀτεχνῶς καθάπερ ἐν τελετῇ καὶ μῆσει, μηδεμίαν ἀπόδειξιν τοῦ λόγου μηδὲ πίστιν ἐπιφέροντος (422c).

<sup>256</sup> μύθων γὰρ ἅλις (423a). Evidently the grammarians (γραμματικῶν) think that Homer conceives of five worlds, “the heavens, water, air, earth, and Olympus above all” (τὸ πᾶν εἰς πέντε κόσμους διανεμόντος, οὐρανὸν ὕδωρ ἀέρα γῆν ὄλυμπον; 422e-f).

<sup>257</sup> ... τούτων οὔτε μυθῶδες οὔτε παράλογον (424b). His rejections of “the suspicions of Aristotle” (Ἀριστοτέλους ὑπόγονται τινες) is perhaps a reference to *De caelo* I.276b.

<sup>258</sup> οὐ δῆπου πρὸς τὸ κενόν· οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν κατ’ αὐτόν (424d). He does, nevertheless, hedge his argument with an attack directed at those that think it does exist. Plutarch dedicates *Quaest. Plat.* VI to the physical issues that arise from the denial of the existence of void in the *Ti*.

shapes in the *Timaeus* and the five kinds from the *Sophista*, not unlike the argumentation of the character of young Plutarch in *De E*.<sup>259</sup> Lamprias engages in Platonic interpretation as another sort of discourse, which is contrasted from Cleombrotus' myth.<sup>260</sup> He is careful to disavow certainty: "but if we call the Academy to mind in these matters, here as elsewhere as well, let us remove excessive belief."<sup>261</sup> The issue of the number of worlds is never resolved in *De defectu*, but Cleombrotus' and Lamprias' competing arguments constitute two possibilities, each built up from a different sort of discourse.

This sort of parallel structure reveals, I argue, how Plutarch's longer and more elaborate myths in *De sera numinis vindicta* and *De facie in orbe lunae* should be understood. Like Platonic interpretation, mythmaking provides "likely accounts," hypothetical accounts of the structure of the world and its relationship to the divine. Here, as elsewhere in the corpus, Plutarch constructs a consciously Platonic system through the use of these parallel discourses. The next chapter argues that the discourse of Platonic interpretation, and of the likely myth of the *Timaeus* in particular, is based on consistent hermeneutic principles such as the internal consistency and coherence of the dialogues, through both exegesis *in prima persona* and through characters in the dialogues. These two chapters form the initial part of this study. The following two chapters, the second part of this study, argue that the discourse of mythmaking in imitation of Plato, namely in *De sera numinis* and *De facie in orbe lunae*, respectively, forms another sort of discourse that strengthens the argumentation in the rest of the dialogue, whether that is in the form of an additional exhortation that emphasizes a major ethical idea or a teleological account

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<sup>259</sup> Kinds: 428c-d; shapes: 428d-e, 430b.

<sup>260</sup> Cf. the citation of the Egyptian myth (Αιγύπτιοι μυθολογοῦσι) of Rhea bearing five children (429f).

<sup>261</sup> εἰ δ' ἀλλαχόθι που κἀνταῦθα τῆς Ἀκαδημείας ὑπομιμνήσκοντες ἑαυτοὺς τὸ ἄγαν τῆς πίστεως ἀφαιρῶμεν... (431a).

of the physical world that illustrates how providence could be unfolding. In this way, Plutarch imitates the function of both the myths of the *Respublica* and the *Timaeus*.

## Chapter two. *Myth as a metaphysical puzzle: Plutarch's De animae procreatione*

While Plutarch interprets the Platonic corpus broadly, his exegesis of “likely myth” in Plato’s *Timaeus* is especially extensive. It is often implicit, for example, when Plato is cited in polemical treatises, but he also depicts characters engaged in Platonic inquiry, such as Lamprias’ speech in the plurality of worlds debate in *De defectu oraculorum*.<sup>1</sup> In the eighth book of the *Quaestiones convivales*, the topic of “why Plato says god is always doing geometry” arises, and a series of speeches appeal to Plato’s *Timaeus* and other dialogues for evidence.<sup>2</sup> The historical Plutarch was evidently well-known for his exegesis of this dialogue in particular. In the immediate generations after Plutarch’s life, Aulus Gellius—who in scattered parts of the *Atticae noctes* describes studying with both Calvenus Taurus and Favorinus, themselves friends and students of Plutarch<sup>3</sup>—begins a discussion of the medical portion of the *Timaeus* by citing

<sup>1</sup> Even in political contexts, Plutarch tends to invoke the demiurge of the *Ti.*, such as in *De fort. Rom.* 316e-7c, on which see further Dillon (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Διογενιανός [εἶπεν] “ἐν τοῖς Πλάτωνος γενεθλίοις αὐτὸν Πλάτωνα κοινωνὸν παραλάβωμεν, ἐπισκεψάμενοι τίνα λαβὼν γνώμην ἀπεφήνατ’ αἰεὶ γεωμετρεῖν τὸν θεόν; εἴ γε δὴ θετέον εἶναι τὴν ἀπόφασιν ταύτην Πλάτωνος” (VIII.2.718b-c). The preface of the eighth book, which contains more overtly philosophical content as befits Plato’s birthday, argues that, if empty, drunken babbling should take hold, the conversation might give way to violence and result in a most uncultured and unpleasant affair (ἀμουσώτατον καὶ ἀχαριστότατον, 716e). Harrison (2000) notes that “eight of the ten ζητήματα in the *Quaestiones Platonicae* have parallels with *Quaestiones convivales* Book 8.2 and Book 9.2 and 14; there are almost no correspondences to any other part of the *Quaestiones convivales*” (198). But in *Quaest. conv.* I.2, Plutarch has his father appeal to his and his brothers’ belief that “the great god” changed an *akosmia* into the *kosmos*, “neither taking nor adding anything, but by placing each thing to the fitting place he perfected the most beautiful figure from the most shapeless” (τὸν μέγαν θεὸν ὑμεῖς πού φατε τὴν ἀκοσμίαν εὐταξία μεταβαλεῖν εἰς κόσμον, οὐτ’ ἀφελόντα τῶν ὄντων οὐδὲν οὔτε προσθέντα, τῷ δ’ ἕκαστον ἐπὶ τὴν προσήκουσαν χώραν καταστήσαι τὸ κάλλιστον ἐξ ἀμορφωτάτου σχῆμα περὶ τὴν φύσιν ἀπεργασάμενον; 615f-6a). He continues, “we learn these revered and greater things from you” (ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν τὰ σεμνότερα καὶ μείζονα παρ’ ὑμῶν μαθάνομεν, 616a), before moving onto the ‘cosmification’ of the banquet. Valuations of the philosophical aspects of the rest of the *Quaest. conv.* are usually negative, because these sorts of obviously and explicitly philosophical episodes are relatively few, but Kechagia (2011) makes the case that the method of inquiry throughout is essentially protreptic, especially in conjunction with these few episodes.

<sup>3</sup> Plutarch dedicates *De pr. frig.* to Favorinus and includes him regularly as a character in the *Quaest. conv.*, such as in VIII.10. Glucker (1978) argues that the former treatise was aimed at a younger Favorinus who was δαιμονιώτατος Ἀριστοτέλους ἐραστής (287), while both he and Plutarch later professed Academic skepticism and taught it to others (292). Bowie (2002) evaluates Favorinus’ “decision to attach himself to Plutarch’s circle” as demonstrating “the prestige of the now aging sage” (51). According to Galen, Favorinus wrote a work “*On the Academic disposition, subtitled Plutarch*” (“Περὶ τῆς Ἀκαδημαϊκῆς διαθέσεως,” ὃ “Πλούταρχος” ἐπιγράφεται; *De*

Plutarch as a learned authority.<sup>4</sup> Within Plutarch’s lifetime, even apparent non-philosophers would request his solutions to the difficulties of the *Timaeus*, as we learn from *De tranquillitate animi*: the ethical treatise begins with an epistolary greeting to the orator Paccius and an acknowledgement of his request for a work on the calmness of the soul, as well as “something also on the parts of the *Timaeus* needing the most careful exegesis.”<sup>5</sup> Plutarch often refers to these sorts of passages which require explanation, such as in the speech given by Plutarch’s own character in the vignette of the discussion on why Plato says god always does geometry. It culminates in a description of the demiurge, “the best of causes,” ordering (κοσμησαῖ) nature by “proportion and measure and number,” to make a unity out of the pre-existing material.<sup>6</sup>

Plutarch evidently draws this explanation from the description of the demiurge’s composition of the world soul in the *Timaeus*. This part of the dialogue is notoriously difficult, as

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*opt. doct.* I.41.5-6), as well as a polemical work against Epictetus, “in which Onesimus, the slave of Plutarch, speaks with Epictetus” (ἐν ᾧ δῆθέν ἐστιν Ὀνήσιμος ὁ Πλουτάρχου δοῦλος Ἐπικτήτῳ διαλεγόμενος; I.41.7-8), evidently a jeer at the Stoic’s social status. Cf. Ioppolo (1993: 199). Calvenus Taurus was the teacher of Aulus Gellius—who depicts them discussing something in *Problematibus Aristotelis*, for instance (XIX.6)—also describes a lengthy, explicitly exemplary anecdote the teacher gave about *Plutarchus noster, uir doctissimus ac prudentissimus* (I.26.4), indicating his own friendship or tutelage with the Chaeronean.

<sup>4</sup> *et Plutarchus et alii quidam docti uiri...* (XVII.11.1). Gellius cites him again in the final section of the chapter (*sed Plutarchus in libro symposiacorum...*; §6), grounding the entire discourse in Plutarch’s opinion on the relevant part of the *Ti*. There is some disagreement on Gellius’ degree of philosophical interest. Tarrant (1996) is generally optimistic, but Holford-Strevens (2003), while allowing that Gellius “appreciated Plutarch as a source of interesting information and found his philosophy quite deep enough” (285), argues that Gellius’ interests were narrowly ethical (260-2). He suggests that, although Gellius praises *Timaeum nobilem illum dialogum* (III.17.5), he did not read it, perhaps because “Taurus reserved *Timaeus* (and his commentary) for the more advanced students.” See also Trapp (1997) on Maximus of Tyre, another second century C.E. orator with ethical interests and Platonic leanings.

<sup>5</sup> ... παρεκάλεις περὶ εὐθυμίας σοί τι γραφῆναι καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν Τιμαίῳ δεομένων ἐπιμελεστέρας ἐξηγήσεως (464e). The work begins with the formula, Πλούταρχος Πακκίῳ εὖ πράττειν. Plutarch describes Paccius his reputation as “less than none of those that speak in the market” (δόξαν οὐδενὸς ἐλάττωνα τῶν ἐν ἀγορᾷ λεγόντων; 465a). Cf. Glucker (1978: 259 with fn4).

<sup>6</sup> ἐβούλετ οὖν μηθέν, ὡς ἀνυστὸν ἦν, ὑπολιπεῖν ἄχρηστον καὶ ἀόριστον, ἀλλὰ κοσμησαί λόγῳ καὶ μέτρῳ καὶ ἀριθμῷ τὴν φύσιν, ἐν τι ποιῶν ἐκ πάντων ὁμοῦ τῶν ὑποκειμένων, οἷον ἢ ἰδεὰ καὶ ὅσον ἢ ὕλη γινόμενον (720b). Plutarch apparently expects his audience to know the *Ti*.—“you all will be able to easily recall the division in the *Timaeus*” (εἴσεσθε ῥαδίως... ἀναμνήσαντες αὐτοὺς τῆς ἐν Τιμαίῳ διαρέσεως...; 720a)—since he explicitly cites one division, which Sandbach in Minar et al. (1961: 129fnb) suggests derives from 48e, while still expecting them apparently to think back on the geometrical language of the composition of the world toward the beginning of the dialogue. In the first speech, Tyndares the Lacedaemonian takes heart “hearing Plato himself naming the unbegotten and eternal god as the father and maker of the world and of all things begotten” (ἀναθαρρῶ δὲ πάλιν αὐτοῦ Πλάτωνος ἀκούων πατέρα καὶ ποιητὴν τοῦ τε κόσμου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων γεννητῶν τὸν ἀγέννητον καὶ ἀίδιον θεὸν ὀνομάζοντος, 718a). Cf. Pl. *Ti*. 28c.

Plato himself anticipated and signaled by having Timaeus interrupt the narration, which had been focused on the composition of the world's body, with the claim that the world's soul is in fact older, despite the order of the presentation.<sup>7</sup> He continues:

“The things of which he composed soul and the manner of its composition were as follows: (1) Between the indivisible Existence that is ever in the same and the divisible Existence that becomes in bodies, he compounded a third form of Existence composed of both. (2) Again, in the case of Sameness and in that of Difference, he also on the same principle made a compound intermediate between that kind of them which is indivisible and the kind that is divisible in bodies. (3) Then, taking the three, he blended them all into a unity, forcing the nature of Difference, hard as it was to mingle, into union with Sameness, and mixing them together with existence.”<sup>8</sup>

This passage, and the subsequent description of the proportions by which the demiurge harmonizes this world soul, are the subject of much of Plutarch's extant work dedicated to *in prima persona* Platonic exegesis: namely, the *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, which quotes the passage in full and extensively argues about its interpretation, and second and fourth of the *Quaestiones Platonicae*, which directly relate to this passage and interpretation, in addition to the other three on passages in the *Timaeus*.<sup>9</sup> These generically related exegetical works are

<sup>7</sup> “We do not attempt to say now that the soul is indeed *not* older, that the god thus even designed it to be younger—for the one uniting them would not allow for the older to be ruled by the younger—but we men speak, perhaps both partaking in much chance and with some likelihood perhaps; but he composed, from these things and in a way like this, the soul as prior and older than the body in birth and excellence, as its ruler and commander and leading the led (body)” (τὴν δὲ δὴ ψυχὴν οὐχ ὡς νῦν ὑστέραν ἐπιχειροῦμεν λέγειν, οὕτως ἐμηχανήσατο καὶ ὁ θεὸς νεωτέραν—οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἄρχεσθαι πρεσβύτερον ὑπὸ νεωτέρου συνέρξας εἴασεν—ἀλλὰ πως ἡμεῖς πολὺ μετέχοντες τοῦ προστυχόντος τε καὶ εἰκῆ ταύτη πη καὶ λέγομεν, ὁ δὲ καὶ γενέσει καὶ ἀρετῇ προτέραν καὶ πρεσβυτέραν ψυχὴν σώματος ὡς δεσπότην καὶ ἄρξουσιν ἀρξομένου συνεστήσατο ἐκ τῶνδὲ τε καὶ τοιῶδε τρόπων; 34b-5a). Cf. Sambursky & Pines (1971: 10): “In many ways, various doctrines concerning Time propounded by various Platonic schools are for all intents and purposes commentaries on this text.” See also *Leg.* X.892a and 896b-c.

<sup>8</sup> τῆς ἀμερίστου καὶ αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτὰ ἐχούσης οὐσίας καὶ τῆς αὐτῆς περὶ τὰ σώματα γιγνομένης μεριστῆς τρίτον ἐξ ἀμφοῖν ἐν μέσῳ συνεκεράσατο οὐσίας εἶδος, τῆς τε ταυτοῦ φύσεως αὐτῆς περὶ καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἑτέρου, καὶ κατὰ ταῦτὰ συνέστησεν ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ τε ἀμεροῦς αὐτῶν καὶ τοῦ κατὰ τὰ σώματα μεριστοῦ· καὶ τρία λαβὼν αὐτὰ ὄντα συνεκεράσατο εἰς μίαν πάντα ἰδέαν, τὴν θατέρου φύσιν δύσμεικτον οὖσαν εἰς ταυτὸν συναρμότητων βία. μειγνὺς δὲ μετὰ τῆς οὐσίας καὶ ἐκ τριῶν ποιησάμενος ἐν, πάλιν ὅλον τοῦτο μοίρας ὅσας προσῆκεν διένειμεν, ἐκάστην δὲ ἐκ τε ταυτοῦ καὶ θατέρου καὶ τῆς οὐσίας μεμειγμένην. ἤρχετο δὲ διαίρειν ὧδε (*Tim.* 35a-b); translation from Cornford (1937: 59-60). Grube (1932), and many after him, reconstruct and understand the text following Proclus *In Tim.* II.156, which Grube includes with a translation (81-2). The text was considered very difficult even in antiquity: Macrobius offers a commentary on the Platonic text as a preliminary to a Ciceronian text that draws on it, and, he thinks, would be incomprehensible without it freshly in mind (*Comm.* II.2).

<sup>9</sup> *De an. proc.* 1012b-c, *Quaest. Plat.* V, VII, and VIII. On the genres of Platonic exegesis in Plutarch's corpus, see also *infra* the appendix to this chapter.



presumably the sorts of response Paccius expected he might receive: expositions of Plutarch's interpretations of particularly intricate and curious passages, such as this.<sup>10</sup>

In this chapter, I argue that Plutarch's exegesis of Plato, especially in these two works but also throughout the corpus, is meaningfully interpretive, rather than arbitrary or manipulative. Plutarch, as a Platonist, accordingly applies consistent principles to the text: Plato would never contradict himself, it is better to interpret Plato through Plato, and Plato's narratives entail temporal differences in the things they describe.<sup>11</sup> The first two are often related, but they are distinct. Alcinous presumably also considered Plato to be consistent, but he found it useful to draw on Aristotle, for instance, for formulations of categories in logic and argument, which he seemed to think of explications of what was implicit in Plato before, with numerous examples from various dialogues.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Apuleius and Alcinous both seem to explain matter in a way

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<sup>10</sup> These discussions were evidently frequent: Plutarch introduces one possibility in the fourth of the *Quaest. Plat.* with the transition, "or is what we frequently say true?" (ἢ τὸ πολλάκις ὕφ' ἡμῶν λεγόμενον ἀληθές ἐστιν; 1003a). See also *De an. proc.* 1027a.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Teodorsson (2010): "He himself considered that he used the only correct method, namely to explicate *Platonem ex Platone*, i.e. to set out from the assumption that Plato actually had a consistent doctrine and that internal contradictions are mere appearances and can be neutralized through a proper exegesis" (419). Opsomer (2004) formulates two similar but distinct principles, drawing on Helmer (1937): "it is assumed that Plato's works express (different parts of) the same doctrinal system; Plutarch displays an extraordinary literal-mindedness when interpreting specific phrases, passages, and dialogues" (138, cf. fn8 on Helmer). It is certainly possible to identify other principles, such as Tarrant's (1996) attribution of a "principle of clarity" to Calvenus Taurus based on Aulus Gellius, XII.5.6; Plutarch displays an intention to clarify points of obscurity in Plato, such as which part of the divided line is larger in *Quaest. Plat.* III. This point is uncontroversial, however, and only explains that Plutarch undertook exegesis, rather than what *sort* of interpretation he thought best explained Plato. Cf. the principles of interpretation that Hershbell (1987) cites from Helmer (1937): "Plutarch's interpretation of the 'Timaeus' arises from three factors: Plutarch's ingenuity ('*Scharfsinn*'), his conception of Plato's thought as a unity, and his literal interpretation of the text" (237). Gerson (2013) finds rather different principles in Plutarch's thought: "(a) the amalgamation of Platonic and Pre-Socratic (especially Pythagorean) doctrines; (b) the use of Aristotle for the elucidation of Platonic doctrines; and (c) the effort to show that a consistent Platonic account of issues arising in contemporary debates could be given" (187-8).

<sup>12</sup> V-VI. Dillon (1993) explains Alcinous' terminology as often distinctively Aristotelian (72-80). Eudorus seems to have discussed (or perhaps commented upon) the *Cat.*, and hence appears in Simplicius' list of τῶν παλαιῶν τῶν κατηγοριῶν ἐξηγητῶν, along with Boethius, Ariston, Andronicus, and Athenodorus (frg. 14 Mazzearelli = Simplicius, *In Cat.* 159.30-3). He apparently adopted the Aristotelian formulation of an actuality/potentiality distinction: "Eudorus the Academic objects that the wing does not cohere with the winged, because wing is said in actuality, while winged in potentiality, as in able to become winged" (Εὐδώρος δὲ ὁ Ἀκαδημαῖκος ἐγκαλεῖ ὡς οὐ συνάττεται τὸ πτερόν τῷ πτερωτῷ· τὸ μὲν γὰρ πτερόν ἐνεργείᾳ λέγεται, τὸ δὲ πτερωτὸν δυνάμει, ὡς δυνάμενον πτεροθῆναι; frg. 16 Mazzearelli = Simplicius, *In Cat.* 187.10-1). There has been much recent attention on Eudorus

that requires the specifically Aristotelian idea of potentiality.<sup>13</sup> Plutarch, on the other hand, explains Plato’s consistency through Plato alone. These assumptions allow Plutarch to use certain interpretive techniques, such as making distinctions between ostensibly contradictory terms to show an underlying coherency or explaining difficult ideas in the *Timaeus*’ “likely myth” by comparing different terms and passages across the dialogues—approaching the text as a sort of puzzle, whose pieces are to be found in the rest of the Platonic corpus.<sup>14</sup> The third

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and the *Cat.*: e.g. Tarrant (2008), Bonazzi (2013), Griffin (2015: 82); cf. Boys-Stones (2017). Tuominen (2009) outlines the metaphysical significance of the *Cat.* in later Neoplatonism (201-217).

<sup>13</sup> Apuleius’ account of matter (*materia*) relies on distinctly Aristotelian conception of δύναμις as potential (as opposed to ἐνεργός, actual), literally translated by *uis*: *sed neque corpoream nec sane incorpoream concedit esse. ... sine corpore uero esse non potest dicere quod nihil incorporale exhibeat, sed ui et ratione sibi eam uideri corpoream...* (*De dog. Plat.* I.5.192). Alcinous’ account is very similar on this point, including the importation of the Aristotelian concept in exactly this way: τοιαύτη δ’ οὖσα οὔτε σῶμα ἂν εἴη οὔτε ἀσώματον, δυνάμει δὲ σῶμα, ὡς καὶ τὸν χαλκὸν ὑπακούομεν δυνάμει ἀνδριάντα, διότι τὸ εἶδος δεξάμενος ἀνδριᾶς ἔσται (VIII.3). Göransson (1995) lists these as one of three instances of “verbal similarities” on the topic of matter, on which they have more similarities than any other non-ethical topic (145, with *comparanda* in fn3). In *De deo* VIII.1-8, Apuleius more explicitly but qualifiedly discusses Aristotle’s idea of tiny animals made of flame. Apuleius’ works, like the *Didaskalikos*, are largely doxographical, but he does include one example of explicit exegesis. He distinguishes Socrates from soothsayers (*harioli*) who have no doubt what they hear is divine by stressing the qualification in Plato’s phrase τινα φωνήν (*Phd.* 242c), the context of which was just described in *De deo* (XIX.163-4): “but Socrates indeed does not say that ‘a voice’ appeared to him, but ‘some voice,’ so that you might surely understand by that addition that neither a common nor human voice is signified. If this was what he meant, the ‘some’ was useless, but rather he would have said either ‘voice’ or certainly ‘the voice of someone,’ as the courtesan in Terence says: ‘I seem just now to hear a voice of a soldier.’ But as to why he says he heard ‘some voice’: either he does not know from whence it arose, or he has some doubt about it, or he demonstrates that it was something unaccustomed or secret, as Socrates thus says the voice came to him divinely at opportune moments” (*at enim Socrates non uocem sibi sed ‘uocem quampiam’ dixit oblatam, quo additamento profecto intellegas non uistatam uocem nec humanam significari. quae si foret, frustra ‘quaepiam,’ quin potius aut ‘uox’ aut certe ‘cuiuspian uox’ diceretur, ut ait illa Terentiana meretrix [Eun. 454]: audire uocem uisa sum modo militis. quid uero uocem puampiam dicat audisse, aut nescit unde ea exorta sit, aut in ipsa aliquid addubitavit, aut eam quiddam insolitum et arcanum demonstrat habuisse, ita ut Socrates eam, quam sibi (ac) diuinitus editam tempestiue accidere dicebat (XX.165-6).* The *De deo* is sometimes considered apart from *De Platone* and *De mundo*—it is published together just with the *Apologia* and *Florida*, for instance, in Harrison et al. (2001) and Jones (2017)—perhaps because an imagined interlocutor describes the narrator as *orator* (V.129). The idea of Apuleius drawing on Plutarch, literarily or philosophically, is appealing, because in the *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius twice characterizes Lucius as a descendant of Plutarch: *nam et illic originis maternae nostrae fundamenta a Plutarcho illo incluto* (I.2); *nam et familia Plutarchi ambae prognatae sumus* (II.3). See Fletcher (2014: 62n108), cf. Walsh (1981:22-9). Heller (1983) assumes “Apuleius synthesized his Platonism with Isis religion in a manner similar to Plutarch’s,” based again on the basis of the claim of “kinship with Plutarch” in the *Metamorphoses*—“this claim, taken in a literal sense, is absurd. It must, therefore, signal a philosophical kinship with Plutarch, and thus it furnishes an important clue to Apuleius’ philosophical orientation in the *Metamorphoses*” (325). Moreschini (2015) is more skeptical, but posits the belief that daemonology had its origin in “Zoroastrian magi or... Orpheus from Thrace, or perhaps from Egypt and Phrygia” as a possible “doctrine of Middle Platonism” (144). Drews (2015) argues for Platonism generally in Apul. *Met.* XI.

<sup>14</sup> For example, besides his various identifications of indivisible essence in the *Ti.* (discussed below), he also makes arguments such as that mother and nurse are both used in the *Timaeus* to refer to matter (ὁ γὰρ Πλάτων μητέρα μὲν

principle is distinctive to Plutarch, but it stems from the commonly held assumption that Plato's choices, such as the specific ordering of narratives, must be deliberate and significant. Because Plutarch maintains some skeptical distance, these interpretations are not authoritative statements of Platonic dogma, but likely accounts, aimed at clarifying what Plato "might have had in mind." Toward the end of the second of the *Quaestiones Platonicae*, for example, he exhorts the readers to consider whether the argument was plausible to themselves as well, which is evidently a separate question from what Plato himself found plausible: evidently, the former is the primary topic of Plutarchean exegesis.<sup>15</sup>

Plutarch's exegesis therefore aims at explaining aspects of Plato's thought by consistently applying certain principles—namely, the consistency of Plato, the preference for reading Plato through Plato, and the "literal" significance of narrative distinctions.<sup>16</sup> His corpus reflects, and depicts, a cultured and erudite practice of Platonic interpretation, in which Plutarch, his teacher, brother, sons, and students or friends such as Paccius detected and interpreted problems from the text of Plato, and resolved them by applying a set of procedures bounded by certain hermeneutical assumptions;<sup>17</sup> it seems to reflect what Medieval scholars have termed a "textual community," centered especially around the *Timaeus*.<sup>18</sup> By applying these principles to the

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καὶ τιθήνην καλεῖ τὴν ὕλην...; 1015d), responding to the Peripatetic Eudemus of Rhodes, whom Plutarch alleges was mistaken (ἀγνοήσας) in thinking Plato called difference (ἀνομοιότης) by these names.

<sup>15</sup> "Given that these things very much grasp the opinion of Plato, consider if it was said plausibly also" (τούτων δὲ μάλιστα τῆς Πλάτωνος ἀπομένων δόξης, ἐπίστησον εἰ κάκεῖνο λεχθήσεται πιθανῶς; 1001b).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Opsomer's work *contra* Cheniss, e.g. 2005: "Given his hermeneutic principles and presuppositions, Plutarch does all he can to reconcile apparently conflicting texts so as to arrive at a consistent interpretation. The consistency of the interpretation with Platonic texts and the consistency that is established between Plato's texts as a result of the interpretation, are the criteria for correctness" (178).

<sup>17</sup> The social circle in which Plutarch interpreted Plato was, at least as reflected in his own writings, extremely broad. In the beginning of *Quaest. conv.* VII.2, he refers to "sessions of reading Plato together" (ἐν ταῖς Πλατωνικαῖς συναναγνώσεσιν), in which *hapax legomena* from *Leg.* IX.853d "always provide a topic" (ζήτησιν ἀεὶ παρῆχεν; 700c), although the subsequent discussion is biological (*via* etymology) rather than philological. In the previous vignette, a physician's assault on the medical portion of the *Ti.* leads Florus to ask, "are we to leave Plato's case undefended?" (οὕτως ὑφησόμεθα τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐρήμην ὀλισκάνοντος; 698e), prompting Plutarch to take up the defense at length.

<sup>18</sup> See further the appendix to this chapter *infra*.

Platonic dialogues, Plutarch creates an account of each of the elements described in the demiurge's composition of the world soul, deriving sameness and difference from the monad and the dyad. He strenuously contends that the elements existed separately before the composition, such that there was a pre-cosmic soul, whose disorderly influence can still nevertheless be felt periodically even in the ordered universe in the form of cosmic upheavals. Plutarch takes this to be a resolution of the tension, identified and attacked as early as Aristotle, between Plato's claim of an ungenerated soul in the *Phaedrus* and a generated one in the *Timaeus*. These interpretations, like Plutarch's mythic expositions, comprise "likely accounts." First, however, I survey the assessment of Plutarch's interpretations of Plato in the scholarship.

While Matthias Baltes depicted Plutarch as a philologically careful interpreter of the *Timaeus*, John Dillon treated him as even a cogent exegete in some respects, and Jan Opsomer has especially increased the prominence of this sort of position, two competing trends in the scholarship preclude the possibility of claiming that Plutarch is meaningfully interpreting Plato:<sup>19</sup> either he was entirely unoriginal and relatively faithfully transmitting earlier opinions, which

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<sup>19</sup> 1976: "Nur ist er ein viel sorgältigerer Philologe, beachtet alle möglichen Implikationen einer Annahme, zieht in größtem Ausmaß die übrigen platonischen Dialoge heran und errichtet ein Lehrgebäude von staunenswerter innerer Kohärenz und Geschlossenheit" (45); Dillon 1977: "Plutarch adduces *Philebus*, 24Aff. and *Politicus* 273B to fortify his position and, all in all, puts forward a well-argued and coherent case, though it depends, of course, on the premise of the unity of Plato's thought" (208); Opsomer's dissertation book on Middle Platonism (1998) dedicated a long chapter to Plutarch (127-212), important parts of which he has reconsidered and restated (2005). Helmer (1937) and Phillips (2002) also treat Plutarch as an interpreter, and similarly, Runia (1986b) argues that Middle Platonists "were loyal to the texts and considered it their task to explain Plato's writings. But their Plato is a Plato dimidiatus, drawn almost exclusively from the 'classical' dialogues (*Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Symposium*, *Timaeus*) with a few snippets from elsewhere (e.g. *Thet.* 176a-c)" (52). Donini tends to straddle a sort of intermediate position, e.g.: "Non è certamente questo il luogo per pronunciare un giudizio che pretenda di essere definitivo a proposito della coerenza complessiva dell'interpretazione platonica di Plutarco; e forse non è neanche il tempo: forse si deve ancora lavorare non poco nell'approfondimento degli scritti dei *Moralia*. Ci si può limitare a dire, per il momento, che l'incongruenza tra le due genealogie in cui Platone è incluso potrebbe essere una spia, un segnale manifestamente visibile di una tensione latente in tutta la produzione filosofica di Plutarco, quella tra la tendenza dogmatica e sistematica dell'interpretazione platonica e la ripugnanza a chiudere il pensiero del maestro in una rigida collezione di dottrine fissate una volta per tutte. Questa tensione deve essere stata presente abbastanza a lungo nel platonismo della prima età imperiale, per quanto a noi è possibile ricostruire dalle scarse testimonianze che ne sono state conservate" (1992, reprinted in 2010: 372).

John Whittaker for instance takes to be a sort of “scholastic” inheritance;<sup>20</sup> or his commitment to certain ideas, particularly of a “religious” rather than philosophical sort, was so strong that he manipulated the text of Plato to fit these preconceptions, as Harold Cherniss influentially argued in his Loeb edition of the *Quaestiones Platonicae* and *De animae procreatione*. These arguments are grounded in the sorts of assumptions about the nature of Middle Platonism, namely its relationship to the Hellenistic schools and religious traditions, which the last chapter surveyed. I argue, however, that Plutarch—like later figures such as Calvenus Taurus and Atticus—is engaged directly in consistent interpretation of Plato through Plato.

Cherniss’ Loeb is the *locus classicus* for the reading of interpretation of Plutarch as a manipulator of Plato, alleges that the *De animae procreatione* is something of a cautionary tale, in that it shows how “Plutarch could manipulate for his own purpose philosophical texts still available for comparison,” in the service of his “dogma of ‘creation’ as an historical beginning.”<sup>21</sup> A few pages into his introduction, he launches into an extended critique. These

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<sup>20</sup> 1974. Dillon (1977) similarly uses the term “scholastic” to describe Platonists contemporaneous and posterior to Eudorus (135), both drawing on Dörrie (1971). The latter coined the term “Schulplatonismus” (36), which he links particularly to Eudorus, but argues that Plutarch uniquely exists outside of this, because his aim is broad but thoroughly ethical: “dabei ist er keineswegs einem Maximus von Tyros zu vergleichen, dem es allzu sehr auf Breitenwirkung ankam; sondern Plutarch hat offenkundig die Mission gespürt, sein Wissen auszubreiten und weithin zugänglich zu machen, weil allem Wissen eine ethische Wirkung zukommt; παιδεία im besten Sinne war der eigentliche Antrieb für Plutarch, sein vielschichtiges Werk zu verfassen. Was dagegen aus dem Platonismus seines und des folgenden Jahrhunderts erhalten ist, ist durchweg schul-intern” (38). He takes this to mean that Plutarch was more influenced by non-Platonic sources than later Middle Platonists: “Auf jedem Fall hat er ausser-platonischen Elementen in viel stärkerem Masse Rechnung getragen als die ihm zeitgenössischen Platoniker, von denen zumindest das Lehrgebäude des Kalvisios Tauros zu Athen und das des Albinos zu Smyrna gut bekannt sind” (40). Cf. Dillon (2014: 223n2); Turner (2001): “clearly, Plutarch’s metaphysics is highly original and occasionally contradictory; perhaps his overwhelming desire to insist that Plato believed that the world had a beginning in time was responsible for its somewhat fluid character” (376).

<sup>21</sup> 1976: 149. See further 146: “This theory of his, despite all narrow literalism and despite his protest against interpreting Plato for the promotion of one’s own doctrines (1013b), was not the consequence of his literal interpretation of the *Timaeus* but was the formulation of his own theology and theodicy, which, to be plausibly represented as in his words “something that agrees with Plato,” required the “creation” in the *Timaeus* to be taken literally. This is indicated... even more clearly by his way of manipulating texts to support it” (137-8); “similar treatment of Plato’s text and similar internal contradictions characterize Plutarch’s literal interpretation of the generation of the physical universe”; “so Plutarch’s interpretation upon closer inspection proves to be far from ‘literal.’ His motive was not strict fidelity to Plato’s words but concern to enlist Plato’s authority for the proposition that the universe was brought into being by god” (147). Cf. Dillon (1988: 108-9, 112-3).

“manipulations” range from the identifications of concepts together, such as receptacle (χώρα) with matter (ύλη), to the deliberate omission or alteration of the text so as to sway opinions.<sup>22</sup> Cherniss is followed in his valuation of Plutarch’s fidelity by Jackson Hershbell, Radek Chlup, and Carl Séan O’Brien, among others.<sup>23</sup> On the charge of textual manipulation, however, Jan Opsomer compares Plutarch’s citation with Burnet’s Oxford Classical Text, and shows persuasively that there is only one substantial difference, which is nevertheless more likely to be a textual variant than a conscious manipulation.<sup>24</sup> Cherniss alleges, however, that Plutarch’s ulterior motivations were “theological” and “religious reasons.” Whittaker similarly argues that “Plutarch and Atticus denied the eternity of the universe and hence (in opposition to other equally religiously motivated Platonists) insisted upon the literal interpretation of the *Timaeus*.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> 185nc, 189ne. Cf. Plut. *De Is.* 374e; *Timaeus Locrius* XX. Gerson (2013) takes this identification to be a sign of Plutarch’s reading Plato through Aristotle (189) and argues similarly about the demiurge and the Aristotelian unmoved mover (194).

<sup>23</sup> Hershbell (1987) takes the assumption “that Plato’s thought forms a unity” to uphold “Cherniss’s belief that Plutarch’s interpretation uses Plato’s authority for his own theology” (240 with n34). See further 238-9; cf. 246-7. Chlup (2000): “we need not go into the details of Plutarch’s exegesis of *Timaeus* 35a-36b. As Harold Cherniss demonstrated in his LCL introduction and notes to the treatise, the whole interpretation is irreconcilable with many Platonic passages, and to pursue it, Plutarch has to commit himself to many misrepresentations of Plato’s meaning. What is more, Plutarch is not even entirely consistent with himself and it seems that he is really expounding the *Timaeus* passage at two different levels” (140); O’Brien (2015): “as Cherniss comments on Plutarch’s supposedly literal interpretation of the *Timaeus*,... as Cherniss also points out, there is little in the treatise that is original and it is interesting mainly due to information which it provides on earlier treatments of the *Timaeus*...” (113). See also Dörrie & Baltes (1993: 212).

<sup>24</sup> Opsomer (2004: 140-2). The difference is between reading αὐτῆν and αὐτῶν in *Ti.* 35a, which is substantially different, but does not show that Plutarch consciously emended the text, as Cherniss implies and Ferrari & Baldi (2002) argue. Opsomer plausibly argues that Xenocrates also took the reading to be αὐτῆν (160-1). Opsomer moreover acutely points out that Cherniss does not take issue with Plutarch’s practice of making identifications across dialogues, because he does it himself: his objection is that, in his view, Plutarch makes the wrong sorts of identifications, while Cherniss himself made the right ones (155). Cherniss’ methodology was criticized much earlier on these grounds by De Lacy (1946): “he assumes that the dialogues express Plato’s beliefs, and that a comparison of the dialogues makes possible a more or less systematic reconstruction of these beliefs. When confronted with the obvious fact that the dialogues are not in all respects entirely consistent, he resorts to the distinction between literal and figurative statements. Statements that violate the basic principles of Plato’s thought are to be taken figuratively, whereas those that express integral parts of his thought must be accepted literally” (76).

<sup>25</sup> 1987: 82, 109, and 122. Hankinson (1995) comparably concludes “Plutarch was a dogmatist in religion, and held strong views on moral virtue, its nature and acquisition,” confining “his Middle and New Academic tendencies... to his love of refutational argument” (140). Cf. Moreschini (2015): “in one of my earlier studies, I proposed distinguishing Apuleius and Alcinous from other Middle Platonist currents through the distinction between a ‘religious current’ and a ‘rationalist current’, because no Platonic philosopher ever wanted to be anything other than Platonic. ... it too was eventually abandoned, because, as was said, it substituted one division for another: it thus

As the previous chapter demonstrates, however, Plutarch shapes his theology to his philosophy; he constrains traditional ideas to fit Plato, rather than bending the dialogues.

Although some, such as David Runia, see Plutarch as aloof from general trends, other scholars attribute Plutarch's interpretations to either the Hellenistic schools<sup>26</sup>—particularly the Stoic Posidonius in older scholarship<sup>27</sup>—or some Middle Platonist tradition. John Whittaker, for example, argues that specific un-Platonic combinations of Platonic phrases and passages indicate scholastic heritage from earlier Middle Platonists.<sup>28</sup> The idea of Plutarch and later figures as inheritors of earlier Hellenistic thought seems to render their method of interpreting Plato is, to at least some extent, simply compiling earlier writers from any number of schools and choosing between options. The sort of view of Middle Platonism as a development through polemic with

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seems more useful to consider Middle Platonism as a 'battleground' of the various schools, according to the description suggested by H. Dörrie" (19). Against assigning influence based on shared terminology alone, cf. Barnes (1999: 5).

<sup>26</sup> 1986: "Plutarch... remains a rather independent figure, difficult to pin down precisely but revealing much indubitable Middle Platonist material in his copious works" (77). There is, for instance, disagreement on whether Plutarch's interest in metaphysics was ancillary—e.g. Chlup (2000): "his primary philosophical interests were ethical, not metaphysical" (138)—or substantial—e.g. Karamanolis (2006): "unlike Antiochus, who was driven primarily by epistemological and ethical concerns, Plutarch shows a strong interest in metaphysics" (87). Cf. Nikolaidis (1999): "sceptic influences and, occasionally, sceptic propensities are undoubtedly present in Plutarch's work; but so are also Pythagorean, Peripatetic and Stoic ones, without anyone so far having felt the need to depict Plutarch, for this reason, as Pythagorean or Peripatetic or Stoic. Plutarch is first and foremost a Platonist, while all other philosophical doctrines that can be identified in his work are not actually incompatible with his own interpretation of Plato" (413).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Jones (1916: 80) and (1926: 105-108); Dörrie & Baltes (1993: 297). Attempts to find echoes of Posidonius in Plutarch tend to be older—as surveyed, for instance, in Brenk (1977: 3-4)—but often finding their impulse in Plutarch's explicit discussion of Posidonius in *De Proc.* 1023b-c. Cf. Hershbell (1987: 239). Posidonius is particularly prominent in the older scholarship on *De fac.*, as the last chapter discusses, *infra* pg. 316.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. 1987b: "the triad is already explicit in Plutarch's exposition of Plato's myth of Πενία and Πόρος in the *Symposium* 203Bff. Identifying Πενία with basic matter and Πόρος with the self-sufficient first principle, Plutarch says of the latter (*De Iside* 374D) ὁ Πόρος οὐχ ἕτερός ἐστι τοῦ πρώτου ἐραστοῦ καὶ ἐφετοῦ καὶ τελείου καὶ ἀντάρκου. We note first of all that Plutarch has substituted the adjective ἀντάρκης in place of Plato's ἰκανός. Such substitutions are an important part of the technique practiced by Middle Platonists of introducing their own stylistic variations into Plato's formulations. ... This, of course, is all part of the Middle Platonic technique of combining and conflating Platonic formulae drawn from various dialogues. We notice further that Plutarch's formulation is repeated in the theological chapter X of the *Didaskalikos* of Alcinous at the close of the statement of the *uia eminentiae* based on *Symp.* 210A-D... We should conclude not that Alcinous has borrow from Plutarch but that both are exploiting independently of each other a lost Middle Platonic source which combined the *Philebus* triad with the designation τὸ ἐραστόν..." (288-9). More generally, see Whittaker (1987a): "Middle Platonic scholastic technique [was based on] the supposition that the writings of Plato contain along with much else a certain number of Platonic δόγματα which can be removed from their contexts and forged into a systematic whole" (81).

other Hellenistic schools similarly precludes the idea of interpretation of Plato through Plato.

Mauro Bonazzi, for instance, recently addresses the ancient claims “that the main task for

Platonists is exegesis” because of the lack of clarity in the dialogues with some doubt:

This is what ancient Platonists repeated over and over again. In spite of many divergences, today several scholars agree with the view that Platonism consists in the systematization of the doctrines latently present in the dialogues. Personally I find things much more complex. It is certainly true that Platonism results from the interpretation of Plato’s dialogues. But such a description is not exhaustive. The confrontation with the other schools is equally important for the development of Platonism.<sup>29</sup>

Plutarch certainly engaged in extended polemic especially against Epicureans and Stoics,

perhaps more than some Platonists in this period such as Alcinous or Apuleius. Plutarch

distinguishes himself, however, in his own self-presentation. In his treatise on the composition of

the world soul, *De animae procreatione in Timaeo*, Plutarch addresses his sons Autobulus and

Plutarch, describes their request as the spur for composing the work and explains his intentions

as a conscientious but controversial interpreter of Plato:<sup>30</sup>

Since you think it is necessary to compile the things that have been said many times and written sporadically in various works into a single work for those interpreting the opinion of Plato about the soul, as we supposed it was at least, and for this account to obtain its own definitive statement, because it is not especially easy to understand, and because it requires exhortation to refute most of those expert in Plato.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> 2017: 120.

<sup>30</sup> Like *De tranq. anim.*, *De an. proc.* begins with an epistolary heading—ὁ πατήρ Αὐτοβούλω καὶ Πλουτάρχῳ εὖ πράττειν. At 1022c he claims he should have left the math for their training (ὅμῃς ἂν αὐτοῖς ἔνεκα γυμνασίας παρήκα). Perhaps relatedly, Autobulus was a character in *Quaest. conv.* VIII.2, although not a speaking one: the first speaker playfully calls on him to put a hand to the second speaker and chastise the speech (παρεκάλει... ἄψασθαι... καὶ κολάσαι τὸν λόγον; 719c). He is also the narrator of the *Amat.*

<sup>31</sup> ἐπεὶ τὰ πολλάκις εἰρημένα καὶ γεγραμμένα σποράδιον ἐν ἑτέροις ἕτερα τὴν Πλάτωνος ἐξηγουμένοις δόξαν ἦν εἶχεν ὑπὲρ ψυχῆς, ὡς ὑπενοοῦμεν ἡμεῖς, οἴεσθε δεῖν εἰς ἓν συναχθῆναι καὶ τυχεῖν ἰδίας ἀναγραφῆς τὸν λόγον τοῦτον, οὔτ’ ἄλλως εὐμεταχείριστον ὄντα καὶ διὰ τὸ τοῖς πλείστοις τῶν ἀπὸ Πλάτωνος ὑπεναντιοῦσθαι δεόμενον παραμυθίας... (1012b). Hershbell (1987) notes that ἀναγραφῆς has “connotations of ‘placing on record’ or ‘setting out in public,’ and no doubt Plutarch intended to provide not only his sons, but his circle of friends and readers with a unified collection of his frequent statements and sporadic writings on Plato’s opinion about the soul” (238).



When Plutarch specifies his grounds for opposing earlier authorities—particularly aiming at Xenocrates and Crantor, two of the earliest Academics<sup>32</sup>—his primary criticism is their lack of attention to Plato’s intentions: “both men seem to me to err from the opinion of Plato, if we must use the plausible as a benchmark—not to work out one’s own doctrines, but to desire saying something in concord with Plato.”<sup>33</sup> Plutarch’s stated intention, in contrast, was to consider what Plato most plausibly intended to say. While it is possible that he was either hypocritically forcing his own interpretations or trying to hide his faithful transmission of prior dogma, he is better understood, I argue, as he presents himself throughout the exegetical works, as a sincere albeit consciously controversial interpreter of Plato.<sup>34</sup> His interpretations are not derived from a static body of transmitted “scholastic” opinions on Plato, but rather the result of living arguments about the meaning of the text of dialogues such as the *Timaeus*. This chapter is divided into three sections, each of which examines one of Plutarch’s interpretive principles: that Plato is self-consistent across dialogues, that Plato ought to be read through Plato, and that temporal aspects of Platonic narratives must be significant. Even throughout his most controversial interpretations, namely that the world soul “came to be” at a distinct time from pre-existing, constituent parts,

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<sup>32</sup> Plutarch explains his intention to be exemplary, rather than exhaustive, following the quotation of *Ti.* 35a: “to start, it is a boundless task at present to go through so many differences these words have given interpreters, and at the same time a superfluous one, given that you have read most of them... I think that the clarification when they [Xenocrates and Crantor] are revealed will provide something like a keynote” (ταῦτα πρῶτον ὅσας παρέσχηκε τοῖς ἐξηγουμένοις διαφοράς, ἅπλετον ἔργον ἐστὶ διελεῖν ἐν τῷ παρόντι, πρὸς δ’ ὑμᾶς ἐντετυχηκότας ὁμοῦ ταῖς πλείσταις καὶ περιττόν... οἶμαι τι τὴν τούτων ἀνακαλυφθέντων σαφήνειαν ὥσπερ ἐνδόσιμον ἡμῖν παρέξειν; 1012c-d). Apparently there are others he could have included, as Jones (1916) adduces a scholion on Aristotle’s *Cael.* (ad 279b32) that attributes a similar reading to Xenocrates, as well as to Speusippus, who is even more shadowy in this connection. Dillon (2003: 80) surveys other evidence for Speusippus’ positions on the dialogue (81-5; see also Cherniss [1976: 219n3, 221n4]), but there is even less for Xenocrates (86-7) and Crantor (87-9).

<sup>33</sup> ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκοῦσι τῆς Πλάτωνος ἀμφοτέρω διαμαρτάνειν δόξης, εἰ κανόνι τῷ πιθανῷ χρηστέον, οὐκ ἴδια δόγματα περαίνοντας ἀλλ’ ἐκείνῳ τι βουλομένους λέγειν ὁμολογούμενον (1013b). Cf. 1014a: “I will apply and bring together both the interpretation and the proof with the texts themselves: for the matter is thus, in my opinion” (ἔπειτα ταῖς λέξεσιν ἐπάξω συνοικειῶν ἅμα τὴν ἐξήγησιν καὶ τὴν ἀπόδειξιν. ἔχει γὰρ οὕτως κατὰ γε τὴν ἐμὴν τὰ πράγματα δόξαν). He seems to prioritize consonance with the Platonic texts. Cf. Cherniss (1976): “The object of συνοικειῶν is the texts, τὰς λέξεις ‘understood’ ... and not, as Thévenaz has it, the interpretation and the demonstration” (179ng).

<sup>34</sup> Roskam (2010) argues that Plutarch’s polemical works formulate “intellectual rules for a good debate” (134), which are not only explicitly formulated, but also illustrated in “the actual *πραξις* in Plutarch’s circle” as presented by the *Quaest. conv.* (136).

Plutarch is applying the same sorts of assumptions that are evident also from the simpler and clearer *Quaestiones Platonicae*, which have generally received less attention.<sup>35</sup> Finally, I contrast this distinct form of discourse, Platonic interpretation, with Plutarch's presentation of another, the ethical interpretation of Pythagorean *symbola*.

### *The consistency of Plato*

Contradiction is a central concern for Plutarch's polemics. Some of his most sustained and effective arguments against the Stoics and Epicureans, for instance, contend that they inherently contradict their own positions and assumptions, such that their philosophies cannot possibly provide a correct or complete answer.<sup>36</sup> Conversely, he also defends Plato against such opposing claims by showing that any potential contradiction is only ostensible. This tactic is increasingly common in philosophical polemic in the early Empire, at least as is evidenced by the earliest extant commentary on Aristotle, an early second century C.E. lemmatic exegesis of the *Ethica Nicomachea* attributed to Aspasius.<sup>37</sup> He worries, for instance, over a potential tension between virtue being both an extreme and a mean: "But what he introduces next bears some puzzlement (τινὰ ἀπορίαν): for he says 'according to the essence and the definition that says

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<sup>35</sup> Jones' (1916) dismissal of the *Quaest. Plat.*—"a work of much less importance" (68)—and short treatment, mostly dealing with the parts overlapping with *De an. proc.*, are representative (104-6). However, Oikonomopoulou (2013: 143-4) surveys *Quaest. Plat.* VI (the shortest and simplest), and Wouters (1996) is dedicated to X (on the parts of speech). There has been recent interest in the *Quaest. Rom.*, such the treatment of them as cultural polemic in Preston (2001), but the *Quaest. conv.* tend to attract the most attention of Plutarch's collections of *Quaestiones*.

<sup>36</sup> This is especially apparent from the title *De stoicis repugnantiis*, still extant, and the attestation of a Περὶ τῶν Ἐπικουρέων ἐναντιωμάτων in the Lamprias catalogue (no. 129). More generally, see also *De soll. an.* 964c-d, Hershbell (1987: 246-7), Hilton (2019: 152-7). Inconsistency is also Taurus' main critique of the Stoics, according to Gellius: "You know well that I do not get along well with Stoics, or perhaps more properly with the Stoa; for it seem especially contradictory to both itself and to us, as I argue in the book which I dedicated to the subject" (*me autem scis cum Stoicis non bene conuenire uel cum Stoica potius; est enim pleraque et sibi et nobis incongruens, sicut libro, quem super ea re composuimus, declaratur; XII.5.5*).

<sup>37</sup> The text is translated with short notes by Konstan (2006); the main treatments are Becchi (1994) and the essays in Alberti & Sharples (1999).

what it is, virtue is an intermediate, but according to the best and the good, an extreme.”<sup>38</sup>

Aspasius resolves the potential contradiction by appealing to the different sorts of definitions in the *Analytica posteriora*, deeming the former an “essential” definition and the latter a “conclusory” one, meaning that Aristotle could hold both virtue as a mean and as an extreme in different senses.<sup>39</sup>

Whereas the Aristotelian commentator tackles here an ostensible contradiction in a single sentence, Plutarch evidently expects Plato to remain consistent across all the dialogues and rejects interpretations on the grounds that they would introduce a contradiction.<sup>40</sup> He chides those who follow Xenocrates’ interpretation of the critical passage of the *Timaeus* for connecting sameness and difference to resting and motion:

They are clearly ignorant also about sameness and difference, because they say that the one provides resting and the other motive capability into the generation of the soul, while Plato himself in the *Sophista* disposes and divides being and the same and the other, as well as resting and motion, as each is different from each and the five exist apart from one another.<sup>41</sup>

Plutarch frames the debate as if his opponents share this fundamental assumption that Plato never contradicted himself, even across dialogues, and so explains their interpretations as arising from

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<sup>38</sup> ὁ δὲ ἐξῆς ἐπιφέρει τινα ἀπορίαν· φησὶ γὰρ “κατὰ μὲν τὴν οὐσίαν καὶ τὸν λόγον τὸν τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι λέγοντα μεσότης ἐστὶν ἡ ἀρετὴ, κατὰ δὲ τὸ ἄριστον καὶ τὸ εὖ ἀκρότης” (48.7-9, citing 1107a).

<sup>39</sup> He references the “middle” term—εἴρηται δὲ περὶ τούτων ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς Ὑστέροις ἀναλυτικοῖς (48.33-9.1)—then contrasts the “definitions called conclusory by him” (τοῖς ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ λεγομένοις συμπερασματικοῖς ὄροις; 49.3-4). He gives an illustration from geometry (49.4-9), concluding: “and such a thing holds also for ethical definitions: for the man that says it is an intermediacy both in passions and activities described the essence of it (virtue) and what makes it a virtue, while he who says it is an extreme speaks according to the the good as a conclusion. For since it is an intermediacy in passions and activities, it would be an extreme in regard to the good” (τοιοῦτον δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς ὀρισμῶν ἐστὶν· ὁ μὲν γὰρ εἰπὼν μεσότητα εἶναι καὶ ἐν πάθεσι καὶ πράξεσι τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτῆς εἴρηκε καὶ δι’ ὃ ἐστὶν ἀρετὴ, ὁ δὲ εἰπὼν ἀκρότητα κατὰ τὸ εὖ ὡςπερ συμπέρασμα λέγει. ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἐστὶ μεσότης ἐν πάθεσι καὶ πράξεσιν, εἴη ἂν ἀκρότης κατὰ τὸ εὖ; 49.10-3). Humans are best when they have as much virtue as possible, rather than a moderate amount.

<sup>40</sup> In the eighth of the *Quaest. Plat.*, for example, he anticipates that the reader might be troubled by the idea in the *Ti.* that the sun is an “instrument” of time, because it is described so highly in the *Resp.* (1006f). The fourth chapter discusses the sun further, *infra* pgs. 302 and 316.

<sup>41</sup> ἐκφανῶς δὲ τούτοις ἠγνόηται τὸ περὶ τοῦ ταυτοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἐτέρου· λέγουσι γὰρ ὡς τὸ μὲν στάσεως τὸ δὲ κινήσεως συμβάλλεται δύναμιν εἰς τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς γένεσιν, αὐτοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐν τῷ Σοφιστῇ τὸ ὄν καὶ τὸ ταυτὸν καὶ τὸ ἕτερον, πρὸς δὲ τούτοις στάσιν καὶ κίνησιν, ὡς ἕκαστον ἐκάστου διαφέρον καὶ πέντε ὄντα χωρὶς ἀλλήλων τιθεμένου καὶ διορίζοντος (1013d).

either perverse incentives or ignorance: perhaps they have more interest in their own theories than Plato's, or perhaps they do not know what he meant. This criticism reveals Plutarch's central concern of resolving ostensible contradictions in Plato to show the underlying coherency.<sup>42</sup>

This concern, of course, is more broadly prevalent among commentators on Plato, such as the Neoplatonists and many modern commentators.<sup>43</sup> Plato's description of the world soul being generated in the *Timaeus*, however, presents a problem, because in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates argued that all soul is ungenerated.<sup>44</sup> Plutarch firmly rejects the possibility that Plato had held each in such a contradictory way:

The first proof is the dissolution of his supposed, ostensible discrepancy and disharmony towards himself: no one would impute such confusion and lack of care to even a drunken sophist—so how possibly to Plato!—such that the nature of the soul appears at once both ungenerated and generated—ungenerated in the *Phaedrus* but generated in the *Timaeus*.<sup>45</sup>

Before engaging with the details of the world soul's elements and composition, Plutarch undertakes to show that Plato does not actually contradict himself on the grounds that he used the words in different senses. This was a pressing burden for Plutarch, presumably in no small part because the tension between an ungenerated soul in one dialogue and a generated one in another

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<sup>42</sup> See also Opsomer (2004): “here we see at work one of the guiding principles of Plutarch's hermeneutics: the search for consistency. I believe that this, in general, was also one of his reasons for writing the treatise: Plutarch wanted to make sense of the text, to resolve difficulties and remove contradictions” (147).

<sup>43</sup> Shorey (1903) is an early but indicative example: “the attempt to base such a chronology on the variations and developments of Plato's doctrine has led to an exaggeration of Plato's inconstancy that violates all sound principles of literary interpretation and is fatal to all genuine intelligence of his meaning. The implicit canon of this method is that variation in literary machinery and expression must be assumed to imply divergence or contradiction in thought. To this I wish to oppose an interpretation based on the opposite canon: that we are to assume contradiction or serious alternation in Plato's thought only in default of a rational literary or psychological explanation of the variation in the form of its expression” (5).

<sup>44</sup> *Ti.* 34b and *Phdr.* 245c-6a. Plutarch quotes this passage again in 1013c. Cf. Porph. *Sent.* XXI.

<sup>45</sup> ἀπόδειξις δὲ πρώτη μὲν ἢ τῆς λεγομένης καὶ δοκούσης αὐτοῦ πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἀσυμφωνίας καὶ διαφορᾶς λύσις. οὐδὲ γὰρ σοφιστῆ κραιπαλῶντι, πόθεν γε δὴ Πλάτωνι, τοιαύτην ἂν τις ἀναθείη... ταραχὴν καὶ ἀνωμαλίαν, ὥστε τὴν αὐτὴν φύσιν ὁμοῦ καὶ ἀγένητον ἀποφαίνειν καὶ γενομένην, ἀγένητον μὲν ἐν Φαίδρῳ, τὴν ψυχὴν ἐν δὲ Τιμαίῳ γενομένην (1015f-6a). Calcidius responds to a similar argument concerning the *Ti.* and *Phdr.* (§228-9). Ferrari & Baldi (2002) compare another “accusa di incoerenza e autocontraddizione” concerning the *Ti.* and *Leg.* (259), leveled by the Epicurean character Velleius in Cicero's *Nat. D.* (I.30).

drew almost immediate attack onto Plato. Aristotle already exploited it in the *Metaphysica* by hinting at Plato's difficulty in making soul both that which moves itself and that which comes into being with the heavens in the *Timaeus*.<sup>46</sup> He continues the attack in *De caelo*, but there focuses on the tension between Plato's claim that the world was generated, and therefore destructible<sup>47</sup>—although *Timaeus* insists that it never will be because of the goodness of the creator and the beauty of creation.<sup>48</sup>

Although Plutarch does not mention Aristotle in *De animae procreatione*, it is clear from his anti-Epicurean dialogue *Adversus Colotem* that he took these Peripatetic criticisms of Plato as an obvious sign of Aristotle's strong divergence from Plato: if Colotes had read *De caelo*, Plutarch jeers, he certainly would not have claimed Aristotle and the Lyceum generally followed Plato.<sup>49</sup> For some of the later Middle Platonic commentators, the Aristotelian critique is the explicit spur for explaining this aspect of the *Timaeus*. Calvenus Taurus apparently began his

<sup>46</sup> ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐδὲ Πλάτωνί γε οἶόν τε λέγειν ἦν οἷεται ἐνίοτε ἀρχὴν εἶναι, τὸ αὐτὸ ἑαυτὸ κινεῖν· ὕστερον γὰρ καὶ ἅμα τῷ οὐρανῷ ἢ ψυχῇ, ὡς φησὶν (XII.1072a).

<sup>47</sup> εἰσι γὰρ τινες οἷς ἐνδέχεσθαι δοκεῖ καὶ ἀγέννητόν τι ὄν φθαρῆναι καὶ γενόμενον ἄφθαρτον διατελεῖν, ὥσπερ ἐν τῷ Τιμαίῳ (280a). The related problem of “whether motion came to be, not existing before” (πότερον δὲ γέγονε ποτε κίνησις οὐκ οὔσαν πρότερον) is the opening topic *Arist. of Ph.* VIII (250b). See further Jones (1916: 72) and Baltes (1976: 5-18).

<sup>48</sup> *Timaeus* describes the demiurge professing that only an evil character would dissolve something beautifully harmonized and functioning well (τὸ μὲν οὖν δὴ δεθὲν πᾶν λυτόν, τό γε μὴν καλῶς ἄρμοσθὲν καὶ ἔχον εὖ λύειν ἐθέλειν κακοῦ, 41a-b), so it will never be destroyed; time, moreover, simultaneously came to exist with the would soul in, such that one could not be destroyed without the other (38b, cf. 37e). Plutarch seems to invoke this detail in *Quaest. Plat.* III when he argues that “each of us is destructible, but the world will not be destroyed” (καὶ φθαρτὸς ἡμῶν εἷς ἕκαστός ἐστιν, ὁ δὲ κόσμος οὐ φθαρησόμενος; 1002c). Cf. *Amat.* 770a-b. Philo also approvingly quotes the passage (*De aet. mund.* §13). Diogenes Laertius similarly seems to see the demiurge's will, rather than the world's eternity, as the cause of its persistence: ἀλλὰ μὴν καὶ ἄφθαρτον διαμένειν τὸν κόσμον διὰ τὸ μὴ διαλύεσθαι εἰς τὸν θεόν (III.72). Apuleius—in what Göransson (1995) calls “a confused treatment of the well-known problem” (147)—seems to both interpret the generation of the world as metaphorical and to insist that it is indestructible on these same grounds (*De dog. Plat.* I.8.198). Cf. Justin *Dial.* V.

<sup>49</sup> “But first, let's examine the attentiveness and great learning of this philosopher, who says that Aristotle and Xenocrates and Theophrastus and all the Peripatetics followed the dogmas of Plato, For where beyond the inhabited world did you write the book, such that you composed these accusations and did not happen upon their writings, or get your hands on Aristotle's works *De caelo* and *De anima*...” (καὶ πρῶτόν γε τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ πολυμάθειαν τοῦ φιλοσόφου σκεπνόμεθα, λέγοντος ὅτι τούτοις τοῖς δόγμασι τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐπηκολουθήκασιν Ἀριστοτέλης καὶ Ξενοκράτης καὶ Θεόφραστος καὶ πάντες οἱ Περιπατητικοί. πῶ γὰρ ὦν τῆς ἀοικίτου τὸ βιβλίον ἔγραψες, ἵνα ταῦτα συντιθεῖς τὰ ἐγκλήματα μὴ τοῖς ἐκείνων συντάγμασιν ἐντύχης μηδ' ἀναλάβης εἰς χεῖρας Ἀριστοτέλους τὰ περὶ Οὐρανοῦ καὶ τὰ περὶ Ψυχῆς, ...; 1114f-5a). He goes on to cite works of Theophrastus, Heracleides, and Dicaearchus, as well as Strato (1115b). Cf. Sandbach (1982: 215-6).

brief doxography of opinions on whether the world is generated with Aristotle, who, he notes, thought Plato meant that it was generated but indestructible.<sup>50</sup> Proclus claims that Atticus and Harpocration—rare Platonists that followed Plutarch in arguing that Plato held that the generation of the world soul entailed a change of state from chaos to order<sup>51</sup>—were trying to combat Aristotle, but inadvertently allowed that the world was destructible:

Since Aristotle in *De caelo* charged the divine Plato with saying that the world is begotten in time, as Aristotle thought at least, and therefore saying that it is destructible, Harpocration and Atticus and those taking Plato to have said in the *Timaeus* that the world is begotten in time think they have found a defense against Aristotle by saying that the world is destructible through its own nature but remains indestructible through the will of the god.<sup>52</sup>

The destructibility of the world was as unthinkable for Proclus, as it was for Aristotle.<sup>53</sup> The latter's criticism seems to constitute the context for the roughly contemporaneous responses of Xenocrates and Crantor, as with the later arguments of Atticus and Harpocration.

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<sup>50</sup> Ἀριστοτέλης μὲν οὖν φησιν λέγειν τὸν Τιμαίον γενητὸν εἶναι τὸν κόσμον, τοῦ Τιμαίου λέγοντος γεγονέναι· καὶ γὰρ φέρεται αὐτοῦ σύγγραμμα περὶ τοῦ παντὸς ὡς γενητοῦ (frg. 22b.12-5 Lakmann). See also Philo *De aet. mund.* §7.

<sup>51</sup> Baltes (1976) argues that Atticus followed Plutarch rather closely: “dabei hat Attikos sich in der Entwicklung seiner Lehre so eng an Plutarch angelehnt, daß die beiden fast immer wie ein Zwillingenpaar zusammen genannt werden, wenn die zeitliche Entstehung der Welt zur Diskussion steht” (38); “Die Neuzeit hat ihm die Bewunderung dafür nicht versagt, in der Antike hingegen ist er mit seiner Lehre anscheinend bald in den Schatten des Attikos getreten, der Plutarchs Lehren adaptiert und, wie es scheint, weiter ausgebaut hat. Kein Wunder, wenn die spätere Kritik sich vor allem auf den kongenialen Nachfolger konzentrierte, dem wir uns nun zuwenden wollen” (45). Cf. Dillon (1988: 116-9).

<sup>52</sup> Ὁ Ἀρποκρατίων καὶ ὁ Ἄττικὸς οἱ τὸ γενητὸν λέγεσθαι τὸν κόσμον ἐν Τιμαίῳ ὑπὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος κατὰ χρόνον ἀκούοντες, ἐπειδὴ ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης ἐγκαλεῖ τῶν θείων Πλάτωνι ἐν τῇ Περὶ οὐρανοῦ, διότι λέγων κατὰ χρόνον τὸν κόσμον γενητὸν, ὡς ἐκεῖνος οἶεται, λέγει αὐτὸν ἄφθαρτον εἶναι, ἀπολογίαν οἶονται εὐρίσκειν πρὸς αὐτὸν λέγοντες, ὅτι φθαρτὸς μὲν ἐστὶ διὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ φύσιν, ἄφθαρτος δὲ διαμένει διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ βούλησιν (*In Remp.* II.377.15-23). Harpocration was supposedly Atticus' student, and composed a *ὑπόμνημα εἰς Πλάτωνα* in twenty-four books, the fragments of which are collected in Dillon (1971). Proclus might have included Plutarch in this group because he tends to treat Plutarch and Atticus as a pair in *In Ti.* Harpocration, however, separated himself from Atticus on the issue of the demiurge and apparently followed Numenius' distinction between three first gods, as Dillon notes (frg. 14, 143-5). Lakmann (2017) provides a description, bibliography, text, and translation for Harpocration (122-6, 474-91) and Severus (230-6, 684-97). On the Aristotelian side, Kupreeva's (2016) survey reveals that *Cael.* was apparently one of the most common objects of commentary in the second century C.E., including a work by Apasius (139).

<sup>53</sup> Some scholars, however, go to great lengths to defend Aristotle's basic affinity with “his teacher” Plato, such as Claghorn (1954: 97-8).

Plutarch, on the other hand, echoes without further comment Plato's argument in the *Timaeus* that the world could be destroyed, although it never will be because the demiurge would not want to destroy anything excellent. He does not indicate much concern about this particular aspect of Aristotle's critique. The alleged contradiction between a generated and ungenerated world soul, however, evidently posed a serious problem for Plutarch. In *De animae procreatione*, he invokes a passage in *Leges X* and he states, "if the world is ungenerated, undone is Plato's contention that the soul, older than the body, rules over all change and motion, established as the leader and the primary actor, as he himself said"<sup>54</sup>—a potential contradiction Plutarch does not accept. His solution rather is to distinguish different senses of the term "becoming" (γένεσις, γίνεσθαι): it could either mean "becoming," he claims, or a sense of "being"—an interpretive move familiar from Socrates' exegesis of Simonides in the *Protagoras*, for instance, but used in a surprising and peculiar sense by Plutarch.<sup>55</sup> He introduces the distinction after dismissing a line of Heraclitus—"no one either of gods or men made this world"<sup>56</sup>—and instead appeals to the text of the *Timaeus* to characterize the demiurge's arrangement as a sort of becoming:

It is better to believe Plato, to say that the world, on the one hand, came to be by the agency of god and to sing "for it is the most beautiful of things begotten and he the best of causes;" but the essence and material, from which it came to be, however, is not becoming, but always available for the demiurge and offering itself into arrangement and order and likeness to him, insofar as possible.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> εἰ γὰρ ἀγένητος ὁ κόσμος ἐστίν, οἴχεται τῷ Πλάτωνι τὸ πρεσβυτέραν τοῦ σώματος τὴν ψυχὴν οὐσαν ἐξάρχειν μεταβολῆς καὶ κινήσεως πάσης, ἡγεμόνα καὶ πρωτουργόν, ὡς αὐτὸς εἶρηκεν, ἐγκαθεστῶσαν (1013e-f). Cf. the πρωτουργοὶ κινήσεις in *Leg. X.897a*. Apuleius similarly stresses the relative age of the world soul, "truly the oldest of everything generated" (*animam uero... omniumque gignentium esse seniore*; *De dog. Plat.* I.9.199; cf. I.10.201).

<sup>55</sup> "For Simonides does not seem to say anything self-contradictory. So you, Prodicus, declare your opinion: do 'becoming' and 'being' seem to be the same thing to you, or different?" (οὐ γὰρ, ὦ Πρόδικε, προαπόφηναι τὴν σὴν γνώμην· ταῦτόν σοι δοκεῖ εἶναι τὸ γενέσθαι καὶ τὸ εἶναι, ἢ ἄλλο; 340b).

<sup>56</sup> κόσμον τόνδε οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτ' ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν (B30 Diels).

<sup>57</sup> βέλτιον οὖν Πλάτωνι πειθομένους τὸν μὲν κόσμον ὑπὸ θεοῦ γεγονέναι λέγειν καὶ ἄδειν "ὁ μὲν γὰρ κάλλιστος τῶν γεγονότων, ὁ δ' ἄριστος τῶν αἰτίων" (*Ti.* 29a) τὴν δ' οὐσίαν καὶ ὕλην, ἐξ ἧς γέγονεν, οὐ γενομένην ἀλλὰ ὑποκειμένην ἀεὶ τῷ δημιουργῷ εἰς διάθεσιν καὶ τάξιν αὐτὴν καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐξομοίωσιν ὡς δυνατὸν ἦν ἐμπαρρασχεῖν (1014a-b).

Plutarch is characterizing “becoming” as specifically “becoming ordered,” which he distinguishes from simply “existing:”

Generation did not come from something not being, but from something which was neither beautiful nor sufficient, as in the case of a house or a garment or a statue. For there was disorder before the generation of the world: disorder not lacking body nor motion nor soul, but bearing a shapeless and incohesive corporeal part, as well as a stupid and irrational kinetic part. This was the cacophony of soul without reason.<sup>58</sup>

The technical metaphor is useful for clarifying Plutarch’s point. The wood that will become a house still exists in trees, but the house only comes into being when that wood is shaped by a rational agent.<sup>59</sup> Although γίνεσθαι can have both of these senses, Plutarch distinguishes a qualification of εἶναι to describe the former, while using the latter to explain Plato’s use of ἀγένητος in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>60</sup>

Plutarch makes a similar sort of distinction in *Quaestiones Platonicae* IV, where he sets out to explain how the body is said in the *Timaeus* to both be unbegotten and begotten by the soul: “mindless soul and shapeless body always coexisted (συνυπήρχον) with one another, but they bore no generation or origin,” until the soul partook of reason and then ordered the body.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> οὐ γὰρ ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος ἢ γένεσις ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ μὴ καλῶς μηδ’ ἰκανῶς ἔχοντος, ὡς οἰκίας καὶ ἱματίου καὶ ἀνδριάντος. ἀκοσμία γὰρ ἦν τὰ πρὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου γενέσεως· ἀκοσμία δ’ οὐκ ἀσώματος οὐδ’ ἀκίνητος οὐδ’ ἄψυχος ἀλλ’ ἄμορφον μὲν καὶ ἀσύστατον τὸ σωματικὸν ἐμπληκτον δὲ καὶ ἄλογον τὸ κινήτικὸν ἔχουσα· τοῦτο δ’ ἦν ἀναρμοστία ψυχῆς οὐκ ἐχούσης λόγον (1014b). Alcinoüs uses similar language (XII.2). Plutarch further uses a musical metaphor. See 1014c; in greater detail: 1026a. He further describes harmonizing with ratios and numbers even the “dumbest materials” (τὰ κωφότατα σώματα) such as wood and stone (1029e).

<sup>59</sup> One could explain this sort of distinction as an adoption of the Aristotelian conception of *entelecheia*, but the chaotic pre-cosmic state seems to have a “being” that is not just potential orderliness. And when the ordered world soul comes to be, the chaotic tendency of the primordial soul is not eradicated, which we would expect if it were actualized orderly soul.

<sup>60</sup> This is most clearly and explicitly at 1016c.

<sup>61</sup> ἢ τὸ πολλάκις ὑφ’ ἡμῶν λεγόμενον ἀληθές ἐστιν; ἢ μὲν γὰρ ἄνους ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ ἄμορφον σῶμα συνυπήρχον ἀλλήλοις αἰεὶ καὶ οὐδέτερον αὐτῶν γένεσιν ἔσχεν οὐδ’ ἀρχὴν· ἐπεὶ δ’ ἡ ψυχὴ νοῦ μετέλαβε καὶ ἀρμονίας καὶ γενομένη διὰ συμφωνίας ἔμφρων μεταβολῆς αἰτία γέγονε τῇ ὕλῃ καὶ κρατήσασα ταῖς αὐτῆς κινήσει τὰς ἐκείνης ἐπεσπάσατο καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν, οὕτω τὸ σῶμα τοῦ κόσμου γένεσιν ἔσχεν ὑπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς, καὶ κατασχηματιζόμενον καὶ συνοιοῦμενον (1002f-3a). Both the body and the soul are begotten. *De an. proc.* specifies the relationship further: “it is necessary that the composition, which is coming into being around the body of the earth, be taken as an image of the proportion (εἰκόνα... τῆς ἀναλογίας), by which [the demiurge] harmonized the soul” (δεῖ δὲ τὴν περὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ κόσμου γενομένην σύντηξιν εἰκόνα λαβεῖν τῆς ἀναλογίας ἐν τῇ διηρμόσατο ψυχῇ; 1025a). In this sense, the body and the soul are more similar than either is to the intellect. This point, as well as the intermediacy of soul



In *De animae procreatione*, Plutarch quotes various parts of the *Timaeus* to support this distinction. He remarks that Plato, for instance, described “the soul” as “invisible and partaking in reason and harmony, became the best of begotten things at the hands of the best of intelligible and eternal things.”<sup>62</sup> Plutarch takes this to be the “the clearest difference and distinction, by which the eternal and the ungenerated have been stripped from her,” meaning the ordered world soul.<sup>63</sup> Calvenus Taurus, following soon after Plutarch, also attempts to explain the “generation” in the *Timaeus* and its lack in the *Phaedrus* by elaborating philological distinctions. He distinguishes four separate meanings of γίνεσθαι, each of which is unlike Plutarch’s distinction between γίνεσθαι and εἶναι: “becoming” as belonging to the class of things that become, even if it did not; by being composite, even if it was not combined; by always being in a state of becoming (ἀεὶ ἐν τῷ γίνεσθαι), like Proteus changing into various shapes; and being always dependent on something external to it, namely god.<sup>64</sup> Each of these explanations clearly precludes the possibility of the world soul changing in any meaningful way, and certainly not something like “becoming ordered from pre-existing material.”<sup>65</sup>

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generally, argues against the Stoic influence that Reydams-Schils (1999) postulates in Plutarch’s “view on matter” (167-71).

<sup>62</sup> ... αὐτὴ δὲ ἀόρατος μὲν, λογισμοῦ δὲ μετέχουσα καὶ ἀρμονίας ψυχῆ, τῶν νοητῶν ἀεὶ τε ὄντων ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀρίστου ἀρίστη γενομένη τῶν γεννηθέντων (36e-7a).

<sup>63</sup> ἐνταῦθα γὰρ τὸν μὲν θεὸν ἄριστον εἰπὼν τῶν ἀεὶ ὄντων, τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν ἀρίστην τῶν γεννηθέντων, σαφεστάτη ταύτῃ τῇ διαφορᾷ καὶ ἀντιθέσει τὸ αἰδίου αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ ἀγέννητον ἀφήρηται (1016b-c).

<sup>64</sup> λέγεται τοίνυν τὸ γεννητὸν καὶ τὸ μὴ γενόμενον μὲν, ἐν δὲ τῷ αὐτῷ ὃ γένει τοῖς γενητοῖς. ... λέγεται γενητὸν καὶ τὸ ἐπινοία σύνθετον, καὶ εἰ μὴ συντεθῆ. ... λέγεται γενητὸς ὁ κόσμος, καθὼ ἀεὶ ἐν τῷ γίνεσθαι ἔστιν ὡς ὁ Πρωτεὺς μεταβάλλων εἰς παντοδαπὰς μορφάς. ... λέγοιτο δὲ γενητὸς, ὅτι καὶ τὸ εἶναι αὐτῷ ἀλλαχόθεν ἔστιν καὶ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ, πρὸς ὃν κεκόσμηται (frg. 22b Lakmann = Philoponus, *De aet. mund.* 145.1-7.25). The fragments of Taurus’ notes on the *Ti.* (as well as the *testimonia* of Aulus Gellius and a few others) are collected in Lakmann (1995: 229-58), and this is the most salient fragment of exegesis; see also Taylor (1831: 41-8). Dillon (1977) translates and comments on the entire passage, as “excellent evidence for Middle Platonic scholasticism” (243), noting parallels with other Middle Platonic authors (244). The different senses of γενητὸς remain an important inquiry in later Platonism. Porphyry, for instance, distinguishes generated meaning depending on an anterior cause (τῷ ἀπ’ αἰτίου τινὸς ἀνηρητῆσθαι) from generated meaning being composite (τῷ σύνθετα εἶναι): bodies are generated in both senses, but soul and intellect only the former (*Sent.* XIV).

<sup>65</sup> Although Taurus aligns himself with the Chaeronean generally—according to Gellius, calling him *Plutarchus noster, uir doctissimus ac prudentissimus* (I.26.4)—and, I argue, further develops hermeneutic principles and practices that are in some ways similar, he departs from Plutarch on the contentious issue of the generation of the world soul in the *Ti.*

Plutarch's impetus for this solution, I argue, was an often-overlooked section of *Leges X*. The recent commentators Franco Ferrari and Laura Baldi, however, posit Aristotelian influence, by pointing to the method of resolving contradiction to the twenty-fifth chapter of Aristotle's *Poetica*, subtitled, appropriately enough "about problems and solutions."<sup>66</sup> The procedures described on linguistic issues are not particularly distinctive to Aristotle but are succinctly explicated: one must resolve some problems attending to diction, whether dialect or accent or punctuation accounts for a difference, whether a word is used metaphorically, and, in particular, whether "a word seems to signify a contradiction" but actually has multiple meanings in different contexts.<sup>67</sup> The Italian commentators argue that Plutarch in *De animae procreatione* engaged in the last procedure. This sort of attribution, however, better fits interpreters after Plutarch who distinguish multiple definitions of γίγνεσθαι to resolve ostensible issues arising from the *Timaeus*, such as Taurus. Plato himself, however, formulated a sort of "becoming" that both entails a change of state, and yet precludes the sort of chaotic "existence" that Plutarch seeks to distinguish from "becoming." In *Leges X*, the Athenian Stranger, resting his claim to knowledge of scientific sophistry on his Athenian origin, proposes and explicates a tripartite distinction in the meaning of γίγνεσθαι to explain how they attempt to surpland law with nature: "some perhaps say that everything that is becoming, has become, or will become, is either by nature, by art, or

<sup>66</sup> περὶ δὲ προβλημάτων καὶ λύσεων (1460b); Ferrari & Baldi 2002: "il metodo adottato da Plut. per risolvere l'aporia testuale, vale a dire per liberare Platone dall'accusa di *inconstantia*, è esattamente quello consigliato da Aristotele, il quale suggeriva di valutare se le affermazioni apparentemente contraddittorie in questione si riferiscono davvero alla medesima cosa e se vanno prese nello stesso senso. ... Plut. si muove seguendo le indicazioni metodologiche aristoteliche..." (260). One could also compare the discussion of the πρόβλημα διαλεκτικόν in *Top.* I.11. They describe this in greater depth in the introduction (24-5), but also posit a consistent concern to "Platonem ex Platone σαφηνίζειν" (22-3). Cf. Oikonomopoulou (2013): "The two answers... both attempt to shed light on the problem according to the principle of 'explaining Plato from Plato', that is, by recourse to well-known aspects of Platonic 'doctrine' (thought by imperial Platonists to be a complete and fully elaborated system of philosophical thought)" (143).

<sup>67</sup> τὰ δὲ πρὸς τὴν λέξιν ὀρώντα δεῖ διαλύειν... δεῖ δὲ καὶ ὅταν ὄνομά τι ὑπεναντίωμά τι δοκῆ σημαίνειν, ἐπισκοπεῖν ποσαχῶς ἂν σημῆναιε τοῦτο ἐν τῷ εἰρημένῳ (1461a). This last example is the emphasis of Ferrari and Baldi's argument, but similar the same method is often used by earlier philosophers, such as in the *Derveni Papyrus*.

by chance.”<sup>68</sup> The example of “becoming by nature or chance” is the existence of the four elements, which maps onto Plutarch’s example of the unworked wood or stone: it is the stuff that exists without art or intent.<sup>69</sup> The “becoming” that the demiurge undertakes is clearly of the “by art” sort, in contrast. One might object that the distinction is sophistic, but both Cleinias and the Athenian Stranger find it immediately “likely.”<sup>70</sup> Their objection is to the subordination of “becoming by art” to the other sorts, and not the tripartite distinction itself. Plutarch too would agree that “becoming” according to a rationally intended end is superior to arbitrary sorts of “becoming.” Without the demiurge’s ordering, shapeless matter and chaotically moving soul simply exist in a lesser and qualified sense, beneath this sense of “becoming.”<sup>71</sup>

While Plutarch does not specifically cite this passage, he accuses earlier Platonists of mangling *Leges X* as a whole:<sup>72</sup> “and now this said will suffice, that the contest and discourse about the gods, which Plato agrees was proclaimed against the atheists most ambitiously and beyond his old age, they confound, or rather entirely destroy.”<sup>73</sup> He can leave off here because a separate treatise has been dedicated (ιδία τε λόγου τέτευχε) to the subject. His omission of the sorts of becoming in *Leges X* is perhaps due to the terseness of the account in *De animae procreatione* and its coverage in this separate work. The few scholars that consider Plutarch in light of this book, however, focus on the distinction between twelve different kinds of motion

<sup>68</sup> λέγουσί πού τινες ὡς πάντα ἐστὶ τὰ πράγματα γιγνόμενα καὶ γενόμενα καὶ γενησόμενα τὰ μὲν φύσει, τὰ δὲ τέχνῃ, τὰ δὲ διὰ τύχην (888e).

<sup>69</sup> πῦρ καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ γῆν καὶ ἀέρα φύσει πάντα εἶναι καὶ τύχῃ φασίν, τέχνῃ δὲ οὐδὲν τούτων... (889b).

<sup>70</sup> Κλεινίας· οὐκοῦν καλῶς; Ἀθηναῖος· εἰκός γέ τοί που σοφοῦς ἄνδρας ὀρθῶς λέγειν (888e). It would not necessarily bother Plutarch, however, that antagonists in Plato proposed a useful consideration: he attributes Protagoras’ anthropological myth to Plato himself, for instance (*De fort.* 98d, citing *Protagoras* 321c). Similarly, Tarrant (1996) discusses Gellius’ and Calvenus Taurus’ method of looking “for depth of meaning in the words of a wide variety of Plato’s characters,” including even Callicles (178-84); see also Olymp. *In Alc.* 61.8-11.

<sup>71</sup> On the conception of matter as “inert” cf. Dillon (2014): “Plutarch, we may note, has no hesitation in attributing the Aristotelian conception of Matter to Plato” (234).

<sup>72</sup> On the impact of this book’s arguments against atheism and superstition on Plutarch, see *supra* pg. 76.

<sup>73</sup> ὅτι τὸν περὶ θεῶν ἀγῶνα καὶ λόγον, ᾧ Πλάτων ὁμολογεῖ φιλοτιμότητα καὶ παρ’ ἡλικίαν πρὸς τοὺς ἀθέους κεκρῆσθαι, συγγέουσι, μᾶλλον δ’ ὄλωσ ἀναιροῦσιν (1013e).

and ignore the earlier part about pious and impious beliefs.<sup>74</sup> Plutarch, who thinks of book X as the tirade against the atheists, rather than just the discursus on types of motion, seems to consider them together. So, while what might have been in Plutarch's lost treatise is necessarily speculative, I posit that the tripartite distinction in kinds of becoming at the beginning of book X might well have provided useful distinctions for the “becoming” and pre-“existing” of the world soul in the *Timaeus*.

The next section argues further that Plutarch and his characters practice a principle of interpreting Plato through Plato, rather than appealing to a figure such as Aristotle, to construct a coherent account of his cosmology in the *Timaeus*. Plutarch seems entirely committed to a sort of Platonic unitarianism, although he does not seem to have been bothered that some of the solutions he proposes in each of the *Quaestiones Platonicae* are mutually exclusive—presumably because each is only a likely account with the potential to resolve a puzzle. As the next section argues, Plutarch finds the pieces to complete the puzzles elsewhere in the Platonic corpus, a practice which reflects a central interpretive principle. The third section will then examine the most controversial part of Plutarch's resolution of the contradiction of the ungenerated and generated soul, his insistence that the two states occur somehow at different times, rather than representing different aspects of an eternal state—an issue that so thoroughly

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<sup>74</sup> This might explain why this source has not been detected. Both Cherniss (1976) and Ferrari and Baldi (2002), for example, cite Plutarch's reference as beginning at 891e (117nd, 238), where the Athenian stranger signals that he is proceeding into a more unaccustomed argument (λέγομι' ἄν, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἤδη σχεδὸν οὐκ εἰωθότα λόγον τινὰ τόνδε), that the impious are ignorant about the true nature of souls, which are prior to all bodies (892a). This is not the entire episode, but only the beginning of the more logically intricate argument, which leads to a discussion of the issue of theodicy: “Is it necessary to agree then from this that soul is responsible for both good things and bad, beautiful things and ugly, both just and unjust, and of everything opposite, if we set it as responsible for everything?” (ἄρ' οὐν τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο ὁμολογεῖν ἀναγκαῖον τῶν τε ἀγαθῶν αἰτίαν εἶναι ψυχὴν καὶ τῶν κακῶν καὶ καλῶν καὶ αἰσχυρῶν δικαίων τε καὶ ἀδίκων καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐναντίων, εἴπερ τῶν πάντων γε αὐτὴν θήσομεν αἰτίαν; 896d).

divides subsequent Platonists that the Neoplatonist Iamblichus describes it as a raging civil war (διαστάζουσιν).<sup>75</sup>

### *Reading Plato through Plato*

The previous section examined the principle of non-contradiction that Plutarch applies to his interpretation of Plato, which other interpreters, such as Peripatetics, similarly apply to their philosophical authority. Aspasius' commentary on Aristotle's *Ethica Nicomachea*, continuing from the last section, not only assumes that a tension in Aristotle is merely ostensible, but also presumes that the best solution is applying a distinction from the *Analytica posteriora*, rather than appealing to another philosophical authority—so to speak, interpreting Aristotle from Aristotle. This impulse was evidently shared by many ancient schools of interpretation, but Porphyry formalizes and explicates in his *Homericae quaestiones* of reading Homer through Homer:<sup>76</sup> “but I, thinking it best to clarify Homer from Homer, was showing that he interprets

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<sup>75</sup> Iamblichus includes this in a section entitled “regarding the activities of the soul” (περὶ τῶν ἔργων τῆς ψυχῆς) in his doxography in *De an.* He describes three factions: Plotinus and Porphyry—whom he refers to as the “purest of the Platonists” (οἱ δὲ καθαρώτεροι τῶν Πλατωνικῶν, §32)—bring “many forms and portions of activities of life into one arrangement and one form”; another, represented by Numenius, “strain them into conflict” (ἤδη τοίνυν καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς Πλατωνικοῖς πολλοὶ διαστάζουσιν, οἱ μὲν εἰς μίαν σύνταξιν καὶ μίαν ἰδέαν τὰ εἶδη καὶ τὰ μόρια τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τὰ ἐνεργήματα συνάγοντες, ὥσπερ Πλωτῖνός τε καὶ Πορφύριος· οἱ δὲ εἰς μάχην ταῦτα κατατείνοντες, ὥσπερ Νουμῆνιος; §23); and finally, the one represented by Plutarch and Atticus receives the longest description: “and there are those who harmonize (the soul) from conflicting parts, as those around Atticus and Plutarch do. And they say that the ordering and arranging (motions) come later than the underlying and unarranged and disorderly motions, and they [Atticus and Plutarch] thus weave together a harmony from both” (οἱ δὲ ἐκ μαχομένων αὐτὰ συναρμόζοντες, ὥσπερ οἱ περὶ Ἀττικῶν καὶ Πλούταρχον. καὶ οὗτοι μὲν προὔποκεμένων τῶν ἀτάκτων καὶ πλημμελῶν κινήματων ἐπεισιέναι φασὶν ὕστερα τὰ κατακοσμοῦντα αὐτὰ κατὰ διατάττοντα καὶ τὴν συμφωνίαν ἀπ’ ἀμφοτέρων οὕτως συναφάνουσι; §23). Finamore & Dillon (2002) make sense of ἐπεισιέναι with the idea of “supervenience” (49, 137), but it could just emphasize the temporal aspect. Proclus often names Plutarch and Atticus together (e.g. *In Tim.* I.381.26-2.12), and Iamblichus might also mention them again in §28, depending on the solution to corrupt text, as they discuss (2002: 158). The topic there is that of this chapter’s next section: Iamblichus signals at least Atticus as unusual in arguing that every sort of soul is incorporated by a single method (καθ’ ἓνα δὲ τρόπον), the imposition of a rational soul on pre-existing, irrational soul.

<sup>76</sup> As will Hellenistic Judaism, for instance, according to Runia (1986b): “Indeed the method of interpreting Moses via Moses is an essential aspect of Philo’s interpretation of scripture” (488).

himself, sometimes similiarly, other times in other ways.”<sup>77</sup> Plutarch, although he does not explicitly formulate this sort of position, similarly tends to interpret Plato through Plato. In the symposiastic vignette that depicts the discussion on why Plato says god is always doing geometry, all three of the speakers, including the character of Plutarch, cite parts of various Platonic dialogues. The first speaker, Tyndares, begins by asking whether Plato said something unusual, difficult, and riddling, or “what he himself has said and written many times.”<sup>78</sup> Even when Platonic interpretation is depicted as symposiastic play, it nevertheless follows a serious rule: Plato is best interpreted from Plato.

This principle is evident throughout the *Quaestiones Platonicae* and *De animae procreatione*.<sup>79</sup> The latter explains the elements of the composition of the world soul in the *Timaeus* by comparison with other dialogues, but the *Quaestiones* similarly use other passages of Plato to explain puzzling passages.<sup>80</sup> In the third, Diotima’s ladder from the *Symposium* is

<sup>77</sup> ἀξιῶν δὲ ἐγὼ Ὅμηρον ἐξ Ὀμήρου σαφηνίζειν αὐτὸν ἐξηγούμενον ἑαυτὸν ὑπεδείκνυον, ποτὲ μὲν παρακειμένως, ἄλλοτε δ’ ἐν ἄλλοις (I.56). Porphyry’s Ὀμηρικὰ ζητήματα (cf. Plutarch’s Πλατωνικά ζητήματα) begins with by stating the intention to read Homer through Homer, “because Homer interprets many things himself” (ὡς αὐτὸς μὲν ἑαυτὸν τὰ πολλὰ Ὅμηρος ἐξηγεῖται; I.1). The idea of interpreting *Homerus ex Homero* is often attributed to the Alexandrian school of Aristarchus and his followers, but Pfeiffer (1968) points out that this is based on an *a priori* assumption about Porphyry’s sources. He argues against this: “Scholars are not inclined to pronounce general principles, but philosophers are... the formula Ὅμηρον ἐξ Ὀμήρου σαφηνίζειν was coined by Porphyry and should not be taken as an authentic remark of Aristarchus, though it is not against his spirit” (227). But the general account, which Pfeiffer shares in this respect, is that Porphyry wrote these when he was “a young philosopher, an Athenian pupil of the φιλόλογος and κριτικός Cassius Longinus” (226), because the style of interpretation is very different from the explicitly Numenian style of allegory that dominates Porphyry’s *De antr. nymph.* But Lamberton (1986) argues that both of the works could have been written in either period, or indeed at the same time (108-13).

<sup>78</sup> οἶει γὰρ, εἶπεν, ὦ Διογενιανέ, τῶν περιττῶν τι καὶ δυσθεωρήτων αἰνίττεσθαι τὸν λόγον, οὐχ ὅπερ αὐτὸς εἶρηκε καὶ γέγραφεν πολλάκις, ὑμνῶν γεωμετρίαν ὡς ἀποσπῶσαν ἡμᾶς προσισχομένους τῇ αἰσθήσει καὶ ἀποστρέσουσαν (*Quaest. conv.* VIII.2.718c). See also Lamprias’ speech in IX.5.740b-e.

<sup>79</sup> Simonetti (2017) argues that the *Ti.* constitutes “Plutarch’s reference-work in this hermeneutical operation,” referencing the construction of his cosmology. She describes Plutarch’s philosophy as “fundamentally guided by the leading idea that a coherent philosophical system is hidden in Plato’s dialogues and can be reconstituted out of them” (193).

<sup>80</sup> Plutarch uses the phrase, “Phaedrus the father of erotic speeches” (τῶν ἐρωτικῶν λόγων πατέρα Φαῖδρον; *Symp.* 177d; II.1000f, also quoting the *Phdr.* in 1001a) in one explanation of why Plato calls “the highest god the father of all” (τὸν ἀνωτάτω θεὸν πατέρα τῶν πάντων) in the *Ti.* (paraphrasing 28c; II.1000e); he raises a possible (and obstensible, to be dispelled) objection to the passage of the *Ti.* that calls the lumps the sun in with other astral objects as the ὄργανα χρόνου (42d), because of the height Plato elevates the sun to in the *Resp.* (VIII.1006f-1007a); See *infra* pg. 323.

introduced as another image to help explain why the intelligible half of the divided line might be longer.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps, Plutarch suggests, to turn towards readers the “vast sea of the beautiful,” and hence a larger and loftier segment of the divided line, Plato “himself teaches that one must turn the soul away from sense-perceptible beauties and towards the intelligible ones.”<sup>82</sup> In the ninth, he sets out to answer which string the *Respublica*’s rational part of the soul is represented by on a lyre, and explains the musical image largely by exegesis of the *Phaedrus*, where “Plato himself likened the form of the soul to a composite two-horse yoke and a charioteer.”<sup>83</sup> Plutarch carefully

<sup>81</sup> “What was he thinking when he divided the whole into unequal sections? And which of the sections, the intelligible or the sensible, is larger? For he did not make it clear himself” (‘τί οὖν διανοηθεὶς εἰς ἄνισα τὰ τμήματα τὸ πᾶν ἔτεμε; καὶ πότερον τῶν τμημάτων, τὸ νοητὸν ἢ τὸ αἰσθητὸν, μείζον ἔστιν;’ αὐτὸς γὰρ οὐ δεδήλωκε; 1001d). Cf. Pritchard (1995: 112n12). In this case, there are two possibilities. It could be, “as it immediately seems” (δόξει δ’ αὐτόθεν), that the sensible part is larger than the noetic parts: among other arguments, limit is befitting for incorporeality, while unlimited for body; it is necessary for the bodies to surpass in quantity because, according to Plato (κατὰ τὸν Πλάτωνα), the intelligibles, the ideas, are the patterns of sense-perceptible things, as with images or reflections; and to contemplate, we have one intellect, but because bodies are multiple, we have multiple senses (1001d-2a). After laying out all of these reasons, Plutarch also makes the contrary case with comparably many arguments, drawing yet other passages of Plato for support: “someone might argue to the contrary” (πρὸς δὲ τοῦναντίον εἶπον τις ἄν): the thing encompassed is always less than the thing encompassing it, even if it is invisible, as with the soul which, according to Plato in the *Leges*, god stretched around the visible world (ἔπειτα πανταχοῦ δήπου τὸ περιεχόμενον ἔλαττον ἔστι τοῦ περιέχοντος, ἢ δὲ τοῦ παντὸς φύσις τῷ νοητῷ περιέχει τὸ αἰσθητὸν· ὁ γὰρ θεός “τὴν ψυχὴν εἰς τὸ μέσον θεὸς διὰ παντὸς τ’ ἔτεινε καὶ ἔξωθεν τὰ σώματα αὐτῇ περιεκάλυψε.” ἔστι δ’ ἀόρατος ἢ ψυχὴ καὶ “πάσαις ταῖς αἰσθήσεσιν ἀναίσθητος” ὡς ἐν τοῖς Νόμοις [X.898e] εἴρηται; 1002b-c). Either solution, it seems, would plausibly explain the intent behind the image. Plato’s consistency goes unquestioned, but the difficulty of elucidating his thought might require several approaches.

<sup>82</sup> ... ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ τοῦ καλοῦ πέλαγος τρέπεσθαι (1002e, cf. Pl. *Symp.* 210d) ... μετὰγοντα τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τῶν αἰσθητῶν καλῶν ἐπὶ τὰ νοητὰ (1002e). Cherniss (1976) is characteristically critical of the selection of the “paraphrase” (47ne). The *Ti.* is quoted earlier in this *Quaestio* (1002c).

<sup>83</sup> καὶ Πλάτων αὐτὸς εἰκάσας συμφύτῳ ζεύγει καὶ ἡνίοχῳ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς εἶδος... (1008c). He uses it in each of the two possibilities for revolving the question. In the second, that reason is the intermediate string: “For the pair, the better of the horses, does not bear the middle, nor should the driving be considered an extreme but rather the intermediate between the horses’ disproportion in sharpness and slowness, as the power of reason lays hold of passions moving irrationally, harmonizes them around (the reason) itself, and sets measure in them with an eye toward the moderation of deficiency and excess” (οὐ γὰρ ἡ συνωρίς μέσον ἔχει τῶν ὑποζυγίων τὸ κρεῖττον, οὐδὲ τὴν ἡνιοχείαν ἀκρότητα θετέον ἀλλὰ μεσότητα τῆς ἐν ὀξύτητι καὶ βραδύτητι τῶν ἵπων ἀμετρίας, ὥσπερ ἡ τοῦ λόγου δύναμις ἀντιλαμβανομένη κινουμένων ἀλόγως τῶν παθῶν καὶ συναρμόττουσα περὶ αὐτὴν εἰς τὸ μέτριον ἐλλείψεως καὶ ὑπερβολῆς μεσότητα καθίστησι; 1009b). This is an imagistic illustration of the idea put abstractly earlier (1009a-b), which illustrates that the role of reason is qualitatively distinguished from the irrational pair, although they are distinguished with reference to the *Phdr.* in 1008c. Conversely, he argues that the same image supports the identification of the rational part (λογιστικῶ) as the highest string (ὑπάτη), rather than an intermediate string: “as then the charioteer of the pair is not the intermediate in virtue and ability, but of the horses...” (ὥσπερ οὖν συνωρίδος οὐχ ὁ ἡνίοχος ἔστιν ἀρετῆ καὶ δυνάμει μέσος, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἵπων...; 1008d). The same image of Plato is used to argue both possibilities. Cf. Opsomer (2012) on this text (329), and on similar reminiscences of the image from the *Phdr.* in *De virt. mor.*, such as εὐήνιος (325fn78). *Quaest. Plat.* VI relatedly asks “how is it said in the *Phaedrus* that the nature of the wing, by which the heavy is lead upwards, has shared most of the things around the

attends to how exactly, moreover, Plato envisioned a lyre and its harmony in the numerological portion of the *De animae precreatione*, when he not only distinguishes how “the ancients” (τοὺς παλαιούς) allocated notes from “contemporaries” (οἱ δὲ νεώτεροι), but also, based on his interpretation of the music of the Sirens image in the myth of Er, how Plato himself innovated upon the ancient in a different way from the modern.<sup>84</sup> Plutarch evidently considers the salient harmonic scale for examining Plato’s imagery or cosmology to be Plato’s own conception. Throughout the *Quaestiones Platonicae*, a few poets and prose writers are quoted sporadically, but usually for a turn or phrase or a formulation rather than as an authority or source for an interpretation.<sup>85</sup> In the second *Quaestio*, for instance, Plutarch illustrates his explanation of why god is the maker (ποιητής) and not father of “mindless and soulless” things by quoting Chrysippus: “no one calls the one that provides the seed the father of the placenta, even though it came from the seed.”<sup>86</sup> This citation is entirely extrinsic to the inquiry and gives no indication that Plutarch was reading any specific interpretation of Plato by Chrysippus, insofar as the interpretation would remain the same without adopting this precise phrase from the Stoic. The

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body in the divine?” (πῶς ποτ’ ἐν τῷ Φαίδρῳ λέγεται τὸ τὴν τοῦ πτεροῦ φύσιν, ὑφ’ ἧς ἄνω τὸ ἐμβριθὲς ἀνάγεται, κεκοινωνηκέναι μάλιστα τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ θείου; 1004c). In *Quaest. conv.* IX.5, Lamprias takes ἄρμα to playfully allude to the “harmonious revolution of the world” (τὴν ἐναρμόνιον τοῦ κόσμου περιφορὰν; 740b).

<sup>84</sup> “But Plato, it is clear, added to the sharp: for he says in the *Respublica*...” (ὁ δὲ Πλάτων δηλὸς ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τὸ ὄξυ προσλαμβάνων· λέγει γὰρ ἐν Πολιτεία...; 1029b-c). Plutarch also discusses the historical arrangement of notes in *De E* 389d-f.

<sup>85</sup> E.g. the long linguistic examples in *Quaest. Plat.* X, drawn from Homer (1009c, 1010b-f) and Demosthenes (1010f-11a).

<sup>86</sup> οὐδὲ γὰρ χορίου φησὶ Χρυσίππος πατέρα καλεῖσθαι τὸν παρασχόντα τὸ σπέρμα, καίπερ ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος γεγονότος (1000f = *SVF* II.1158). The orator Demades is similarly quoted for the phrase “festivals, the glue of democracy” (ὡς ἔλεγε Δημάδης, κόλλαν ὀνομάζων τὰ θεωρικὰ τῆς δημοκρατίας; X.1011b = frg. 36 de Falco). Theognis, for instance, is quoted in I.1000c. More philosophically significantly, in the ninth, he appeals to Xenocrates for a characterization of different kinds of gods: “and Xenocrates calls Zeus the highest he who is among things that are consistent and self-same, while the lowest he who is under the moon” (καὶ Ξενοκράτης Δία τὸν ἐν μὲν τοῖς κατὰ ταῦτὰ καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχουσιν ὑπατον καλεῖ, νέατον δὲ τὸν ὑπὸ σελήνην; 1007f = frg. 18 Heinze).



procedure is fundamentally explaining Plato through Plato, even with these sprinkled embellishments.<sup>87</sup>

This question of what authorities are appropriate for Platonic interpretation, however, divides Middle Platonic interpretation. Alcinous' *Didaskalikos*, as described above, adopts the terminology and categories of Aristotelian logic and projects them back onto Plato. Calvenus Taurus and Atticus, however, take strong positions against ever interpreting Plato through Aristotle. According to Philoponus, Taurus criticizes Theophrastus for introducing the fifth element to explain the *Timaeus*:

It is worthwhile to examine how the Platonic interpreter Taurus not only thinks it is true that Plato says the world was mixed together from four elements alone, but also how he fought against Theophrastus for saying that the heavens are not from these—for Theophrastus is from Aristotle's school. Taurus says that the interpreter of Plato does not think that it has been accepted that, by the authority of Aristotle, there is a fifth element: "for whenever it occurs to him that it exists," he says, "let him stand strong against these things."<sup>88</sup>

Taurus categorically rejects that anyone who appeals to a distinctively Aristotelian concept such as the fifth element, such as Theophrastus, could be thought of as an interpreter of Plato.<sup>89</sup> Even when interpreting the *Timaeus*, a Peripatetic's appeals to the authority of Aristotle preclude

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<sup>87</sup> Embellishments such as these seem to make the work more literary: Hartman (1916) for example, apparently very taken by this *variatio* as well as concision and eloquence, took it to be the source of Plutarch's superlative fame for Platonic interpretation, rendering the *De an. proc.*, which is now more often discussed, only secondary for his reputation as a Platonic exegete (e.g. 581 and 592).

<sup>88</sup> σκοπεῖν ἄξιον, πῶς οὐ μόνον ἀληθὲς οἶεται Πλάτωνα ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων μόνων στοιχείων συγκεῖσθαι τὸν κόσμον λέγειν ὁ τούτου ἐξηγητῆς Ταῦρος, ἀλλὰ καὶ Θεοφράστῳ μάχεται λέγοντι μὴ εἶναι ἐκ τούτων τὸν οὐρανόν (τῆς γὰρ Ἀριστοτέλους διατριβῆς ὁ Θεόφραστος), καὶ ὅτι οὐδὲ οἶεται ὁ τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐξηγητῆς τὸ πέμπτον ἀποδεεῖσθαι στοιχεῖον, ὅτι ἔστιν, ὑπὸ Ἀριστοτέλους· "ὅταν γὰρ ἐκεῖνο παραστήσῃ," φησίν, "ὅτι ἔστιν, τότε πρὸς ταῦτα ἐνιστάσθω" (frg. 26b Lakmann = *De aet. mund.* 520.23-1.6). He goes on to discuss the configuration of the elements in the *Ti*. Almost all of these fragments are preserved by Philoponus, a Christian interpreter of Plato and Aristotle engaged in polemic against the Neoplatonists on the temporality or eternity of the world.

<sup>89</sup> Similarly, but without the use of exegetical terminology, Atticus describes a group of "those who come together to study the thought of Plato, having recognized that the greatest contest of speeches is necessarily very much set in this," meaning the theory of forms (οἱ τ' αὖ τὰ τοῦ Πλάτωνος συνιστάναί ἐγνωκότες τὸν πλεῖστον ἀγῶνα τῶν λόγων ἐν τούτῳ τίθενται πάνυ ἀναγκαίως; frg. 9 = Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XV.13.4). Cf. frg. 7 = *ibid.* XV.9.2.

Platonic exegesis<sup>90</sup>—presented by Taurus as a distinctive sort of philosophical endeavor with particular rules. Atticus, as the extensive fragments quoted by Eusebius under the title of *Against those undertaking the thought of Plato through that of Aristotle* make clear, systematized this position even further.<sup>91</sup> More vehemently than Taurus, he claims that Aristotle was “very stupidly deceiving himself” (παντευκόλως αὐτὸν ἐξαπατήσας) by assigning the world’s circular motion to a fifth element rather than a soul.<sup>92</sup> Aristotle furthermore, Atticus argues, “appears to have desired discord and did not agree with Plato about the other elements, even with the fifth removed.”<sup>93</sup> Both Taurus and Atticus thus treat the Peripatetics as if they should have been doing philosophy by interpreting Plato through Plato, without appealing to Aristotle.

The opposite trend, of interpreting Plato through Aristotle, nonetheless seems to have eventually prevailed in later Platonism. Julian the Apostate, for example, introduces the fifth element with the maxim that “Aristotle’s ideas are incomplete if someone does not lead them into harmony with Plato.”<sup>94</sup> Plutarch, however, does not make this sort of interpretive move, with

<sup>90</sup> Perhaps this was a part of Theophrastus’ polemical work entitled *Against the Academics* (Πρὸς τοὺς ἐξ Ἀκαδημείας α’; DL V.2.49).

<sup>91</sup> Πρὸς τοὺς διὰ τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους τὰ Πλάτωνος ὑπισχνουμένους (frg. 1 = *Praep. evang.* XI.1.2). All of the citations of this work come from Eusebius, who sympathetically deems him “Atticus, a distinguished many among the Platonist philosophers” (Ἀττικὸς διαφανῆς ἀνὴρ τῶν Πλατωνικῶν φιλοσόφων).

<sup>92</sup> “For Plato, because there are four bodies and each moves itself in a simple and straight manner by its nature, fire towards the outward, earth towards the middle, and the others toward the between, but he gave circular motion to soul. But he (Aristotle), just as any other motion to another body, thus attributed the circular motion to the fifth element, as if the motion were something bodily—but he very stupidly deceived himself” (ὁ μὲν γὰρ Πλάτων, ἅτε ὄντων τεσσάρων σωμάτων καὶ πάντων φύσει κινουμένων ἀπλῆν καὶ εὐθειᾶν κίνησιν, πυρὸς μὲν ἐπὶ τὰ ἐκτός, γῆς δ’ ἐπὶ τὸ μέσον, τῶν δὲ ἄλλων ἐπὶ τὰ μεταξὺ, τὴν ἐν κύκλῳ κίνησιν ἀπέδωκε τῇ ψυχῇ· ὁ δ’, ἥπερ ἄλλῳ σώματι ἄλλην, οὕτω δὲ καὶ τὴν ἐν κύκλῳ, καθάπερ σωματικὴν τινα, τῷ πέμπτῳ προσένειμε σώματι...; frg. 6 = Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XV.8.7).

<sup>93</sup> καὶ περὶ τῶν ἄλλων δὲ σωμάτων, ὑπεξαιρουμένου τοῦ πέμπτου, φαίνεται φιλονεικῶν Ἀριστοτέλης μὴ τὰ αὐτὰ λέγειν Πλάτωνι (frg. 6 = Euseb. *Praep. evang.* XV.8.10).

<sup>94</sup> ὀρθῶς ἢ μὴ ταῦτα ἐκεῖνος ἔφη, τοῖς ἄγαν ἐφείσθω Περιπατητικοῖς ὀνυχίζειν, ὅτι δὲ οὐ προσηνῶς ἐμοὶ παντί που δηλον, ὅπου γε καὶ τὰς Ἀριστοτελικὰς ὑποθέσεις ἐνδεεστέρως ἔχειν ὑπολαμβάνω, εἰ μὴ τις αὐτὰς ἐς ταῦτ’ οἱ Πλάτωνος ἄγοι... (*Or.* V.162c-d). The context is the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E. Peripatetic Xenarchus of Seleucia. Both Plato and Aristotle, Julian concludes, must be brought into conformity with “the prophecies given from the gods” (μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ταῦτα ταῖς ἐκ θεῶν δεδομέναις προφητείαις) According to Sheppard (1980), Proclus tried to reconcile the Platonic and Aristotelian positions on the elements by making the fifth element the purest part of each of the other four (166).

perhaps one notable exception—his detection of “an outline of the ten categories” in the *Timaeus*.<sup>95</sup> If Plutarch dedicated a work to the fifth element, as F. H. Sandbach denies, he appears ambivalent in extant works.<sup>96</sup> Even when characters do propose a fifth element, however, such as that of the young Plutarch does in *De E*, the Aristotelian formulation is ignored, in favor of the five geometrical solids described by Plato in the *Timaeus*;<sup>97</sup> Xenocrates had already argued that Plato believed there were five elements, deriving the last, like Plutarch, from the dodecahedron.<sup>98</sup>

Plutarch suggests possible interpretations from Aristotle and Theophrastus only once in the *Quaestiones Platonicae*, in the eighth *quaestio*, where he rejects both as contradicting what Plato said. He asks, “why does Timaeus say that souls are sown into the earth and the moon and the rest of the instruments of time?”<sup>99</sup> Plutarch briefly considers Theophrastus’ claim that Plato changed his mind as an older man, but quickly rejects it, because it would necessitate contradiction:<sup>100</sup>

Or do many of the things that harmoniously appeal to the man stand against these things? And would there be a need to change “time” from the genitive to the dative, and to take instruments not to mean the stars but the bodies of living things? Aristotle thus defined the soul as the “actualization (ἐντελέχειαν) of a natural and instrumental body possessing life in potential (δυνάμει).” This would yield an account such as that souls are sown into the fitting instruments in time. But this also is against his opinion: for not once but many

<sup>95</sup> ἐν τούτοις ἅμα καὶ τῶν δέκα κατηγοριῶν ποιούμενος ὑπογραφήν... (*De an. proc.* 1023e, referencing *Ti.* 37a-b). Whittaker (1987) emphasizes that Plutarch attributes the Aristotelian categories to Plato (111), whereas Alcinoüs assigns the whole of Aristotelian logic to Plato. Plutarch is broadly familiar with Aristotelian metaphysics, but he attributes it to Peripatetics (e.g. *Quaest. conv.* VII.6.708e), rather than adopting it into his own system.

<sup>96</sup> περὶ τῆς πεμπτῆς οὐσίας βιβλία ε' (Lamprias catalogue no. 44); cf. Sandbach (1969): “Possibly πεμπτῆς should be omitted as dittography” (10n1). See also Sandbach (1982: 216-7). Cf. Dillon (1977): “...the Aristotelian fifth element, the aether, which had been accepted (though not quite consistently) by Plutarch” (224). In the treatise *Aquane an ignis utilior*, part of the Plutarchean corpus but sometimes thought to be spurious, the sea is said to be a fifth element that water provides (καὶ μὴν τεττάρων ὄντων στοιχείων τὸ ὕδωρ ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ πέμπτον, ὡς ἂν τις εἴποι, πεποίηκε στοιχεῖον τὴν θάλασσαν; 956e).

<sup>97</sup> 389f-90a. Also see the discussion in *De def.*, on which see further *supra* pg. 122.

<sup>98</sup> Xenocrates frg. 53 Heinze, on which see Dillon (2003a: 128n112).

<sup>99</sup> πῶς λέγει τὰς ψυχὰς ὁ Τίμαιος εἰς τε γῆν καὶ σελήνην καὶ τᾶλλα ὅσα ὄργανα χρόνου σπαρῆναι; (1006a). On this *Quaest.*, see further *infra* pg. 323.

<sup>100</sup> “And Theophrastus includes in his treatment that Plato changed his mind as an old man, when he realized he gave the middle place of everything unworthily to the earth” (Θεόφραστος δὲ καὶ προσιστορεῖ τῷ Πλάτῳ πρεσβυτέρῳ γενομένῳ μεταμέλειν, ὡς οὐ προσήκουσαν ἀποδόντι τῇ γῆ τὴν μέσην χώραν τοῦ παντός; 1006d).

times he called the stars the instruments of time, such as where he said that “the sun came to be for the division and protection of time” along with the other planets.<sup>101</sup>

Plutarch rejects both Theophrastus’ and Aristotle’s interpretations because neither was what Plato said, and both would create tensions.<sup>102</sup> The latter even uses a fundamental distinction in Aristotelian metaphysics in the exact same language as Aristotle famously formulated, the same set of coinages which Apuleius and Alcinous evidently sometimes found useful.<sup>103</sup> Rather than importing Peripatetic concepts and language, however, Plutarch focuses on Plato.<sup>104</sup>

In *De animae procreatione*, explanation of Plato through Plato similarly emerges as the dominant means of interpreting the complicated details of the demiurge’s composition of the world soul from indivisible and divisible essence, a combination of the two, and sameness and difference.<sup>105</sup> Plutarch’s argument is fittingly complicated.<sup>106</sup> He associates “indivisible being” with the intelligence and therefore with orderly motion, while identifying “divisible being,”

<sup>101</sup> ἢ τούτοις μὲν ἀντίκειται πολλὰ τῶν ὁμολογουμένως ἀρεσκόντων τῷ ἀνδρὶ, μεταγραπτέον δὲ τὸ “χρόνου” “χρόνω” λαμβάνοντας ἀντὶ τῆς γενικῆς τὴν δοτικὴν, καὶ δεκτέον ὄργανα μὴ τοὺς ἀστέρας ἀλλὰ τὰ σώματα τῶν ζώων λέγεσθαι; καθάπερ Ἀριστοτέλης ὠρίσατο τὴν ψυχὴν “ἐντελέχειαν σώματος φυσικοῦ ὀργανικοῦ δυνάμει ζωὴν ἔχοντος.” ὥστε τοιοῦτον εἶναι τὸν λόγον· αἱ ψυχαὶ εἰς τὰ προσήκοντα ὀργανικὰ σώματα ἐν χρόνω κατεσπάρησαν. ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦτο παρὰ τὴν δόξαν ἐστίν· οὐ γὰρ ἅπαξ ἀλλὰ πολλακίς ὄργανα χρόνου τοὺς ἀστέρας εἴρηκεν, ὅπου καὶ τὸν ἥλιον αὐτὸν “εἰς διορισμὸν καὶ φυλακὴν ἀριθμῶν χρόνου γεγονέναι” φησὶ μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων πλανήτων (1006d-e). Plutarch is evidently referring to *De an.* II.412a-b, although two nearby passages are merged, as Cherniss (1976: 80na) notes. After rejecting these possibilities, the transition to an acceptable reading is strong, compared to the earlier unmarked “or”s (ἢ): “it is best, then...” (ἄριστον οὖν...; 1006e).

<sup>102</sup> Plutarch goes on to reject Aristotle’s definition of time in a doxography beginning in 1007a-b.

<sup>103</sup> See especially Arist. *Metaph.* X. On Alcinous and Apuleius, see *supra* pg. 128.

<sup>104</sup> In the eighth of the *Quaest. Plat.*, Plutarch does consider definitions from Aristotle and Theophrastus, but these are soundly rejected—unlike the other possibilities he raises.

<sup>105</sup> Toward the end of the essay, he describes the demiurge’s ordering as “taking over the disorder and discord in the motions of the disharmonious soul, differing even from itself, and divided and distinguished and separated some things and combined and composed some things toward others, using harmonies and numbers” (παραλαβὼν γὰρ ὁ δημιουργὸς ἀταξίαν καὶ πλημμέλειαν ἐν ταῖς κινήσει τῆς ἀναρμόστου καὶ ἀνοήτου ψυχῆς διαφορομένης πρὸς ἑαυτὴν τὰ μὲν διώρισε καὶ διέστησε τὰ δὲ συνήγαγε πρὸς ἄλληλα καὶ συνέταξεν, ἀρμονίας καὶ ἀριθμοῖς χρῆσάμενος; 1029e). The harmonizing of motion is a persistent theme of *De an. proc.*, which explains why the questions about ratio and harmony are appended to the main section.

<sup>106</sup> Opsomer (2001) offers a strong identification: “‘that which is indivisible,’ namely the rationality which is the demiurge” (192), building on Ferrari: “the demiurge, who is equated with the first god or the One or the Good, is among the intelligibles and the ideas are around god. This means that they are situated on the same ontological level, without being identical. Plutarch assigns a certain priority to the demiurge, but apparently rejects the popular Middle Platonic view that the ideas are just his thoughts” (192n42).

meaning the primordial soul itself, with chaotic motion.<sup>107</sup> Each is not equivalent with their associated sort of motion, but they are causally responsible for it, it seems. But this is complicated, as they are compounded to form being, and to this compound, sameness and difference were then added.<sup>108</sup> Sameness and difference, in turn, Plutarch claims, “each descend (κάτεισι) from a certain source (ἀρχῆς), sameness from the one, and otherness from the dyad. And they are first mixed then around the soul, by numbers and ratios.”<sup>109</sup> Sameness is not rest and difference is not motion, Plutarch continues to hold;<sup>110</sup> rather, as a result of this mixture, there is a “dyadic and indefinite part” and a “simple and monadic” one.<sup>111</sup> In the compounded world soul, the former part is responsible for disorderly motion, and the latter orderly. This fundamental bipartition is further reflected in the mental faculty of “judgement” (κρίσις), which “bears two principles, the mind from the same towards the general and the sense-perception from the other towards the particulars.”<sup>112</sup>

Plutarch is aware of the difficulty of these arguments, which he cites as part of his motivation to write the treatise.<sup>113</sup> He therefore illustrates these aspects of the world soul by

<sup>107</sup> On this summary, cf. Jones (1916: 80-3), Froidefond (1987: 189-93), Opsomer (2001: 191-3), Opsomer (2004: 140-6), and Simonetti (2017: 182-5).

<sup>108</sup> οὕτως ἐνδείκνυται πολλαχόθεν ἡμῖν τὸ μὴ πᾶν ἔργον εἶναι θεοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀλλὰ σύμφυτον ἔχουσαν ἐν ἑαυτῇ τὴν τοῦ κακοῦ μοῖραν ὑπ’ ἐκείνου διακεκοσμηθεῖσθαι, τῷ μὲν ἐνὶ τὴν ἀπειρίαν ὀρίσαντος, ἴν’ οὐσία γένηται πέρατος μετασχοῦσα, τῇ δὲ ταυτοῦ καὶ τῇ ἐτέρου δυνάμει τάξιν καὶ μεταβολὴν καὶ διαφορὰν καὶ ὁμοιότητα συμμίζαντος, πᾶσι δὲ τούτοις, ὡς ἀνυστὸν ἦν, κοινωνίαν πρὸς ἄλληλα καὶ φιλίαν ἐργασαμένου δι’ ἀριθμῶν καὶ ἀρμονίας (1027a).

<sup>109</sup> ἐκάτερον γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐνός τὸ δὲ θάτερον ἀπὸ τῆς δυάδος· καὶ μέμικται πρῶτον ἐνταῦθα περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἀριθμοῖς καὶ λόγοις... (1024d). On the monad and the dyad, cf. Plutarch’s criticism of Xenocrates (and comparison with “Zaratas teacher of Pythagoras”) in 1012e, as well as Lamprias in *De def. or.* 428e-9d.

<sup>110</sup> ἦν δὲ τὸ θάτερον οὐ κίνησις, ὥσπερ οὐδὲ ταῦτον στάσις, ἀλλ’ ἀρχὴ διαφορᾶς καὶ ἀνομοιότητος (1024d). Earlier in the treatise, as discussed above, Plutarch argues against Xenocrates that such an identification would violate the whole project of the *Soph.* of showing the difference between each of these four types as well as being.

<sup>111</sup> ... τῆς δυαδικῆς καὶ ἀορίστου μερίδος... δὲ τῆς ἀπλῆς καὶ μοναδικῆς... (1025d). Cf. Cherniss (1976): “Plutarch comes near to giving soul an arithmetical character not unlike that to which he objects in the Xenocratean interpretation” (234nf). But there is a difference between being *derived* from metaphysical principles and being *equivalent* to them.

<sup>112</sup> ἡ δὲ κρίσις ἀρχὰς μὲν ἔχει δύο, τὸν τε νοῦν ἀπὸ τοῦ ταυτοῦ πρὸς τὰ καθόλου καὶ τὴν αἴσθησιν ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐτέρου πρὸς τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστα (1024e-f).

<sup>113</sup> “... being not particularly manageable, and through the need of an exhortation to oppose the majority of Platonists” (οὐτ’ ἄλλως εὐμεταχειρίστον ὄντα καὶ διὰ τὸ τοῖς πλείστοις τῶν ἀπὸ Πλάτωνος ὑπεναντιοῦσθαι δεόμενον παραμυθία; 1012b). See *supra* pg. 135.

comparing passages from various other parts of the Platonic corpus: given the assumed harmony of the corpus, various parts help to illustrate the difficult parts of others. Plutarch thus identifies the “divisible being around bodies” with the *Timaeus*’ necessity (ἀνάγκην), the *Philebus*’ immeasurability and unboundedness (ἀμετρίαν καὶ ἀπειρίαν), “congenital desire” (σύμφυτος ἐπιθυμία) of the *Politicus*.<sup>114</sup> Book X of the *Leges* is especially important for his purpose. The Athenian Stranger’s defense of the gods necessitates an exposition of ten sorts of non-psychoic motion, and then that of the soul, as “motion being able to itself move itself.”<sup>115</sup> But, by the principle that there must be an opposite, he also postulates another sort of motion: “is it one soul or several [that conducts the heavens]? I will answer for you: several. Let us not at least suppose less than two, both the one effecting good and the one able to effect the opposite.”<sup>116</sup> Plutarch interprets one sort of motion—“which [Plato] called, as it was said, soul opposite and opponent to the one doing good”—to explain the element of the composition of the world soul which Plato called “becoming divisible around bodies.” As such, it is the “kinetic cause (αἰτίαν) of evil, a motion disorderly and irrational but not soulless.”<sup>117</sup> Earlier on, Plutarch similarly identifies it as what befits the same element “becoming divisible around bodies,” but calls it “that disordered and indefinite self-motion, what [Plato] often calls necessity but in the *Leges* openly called disordered and baleful soul.”<sup>118</sup> These identifications have sometimes<sup>119</sup> been taken to suggest

<sup>114</sup> 1014f-5a. He also identifies the compound of divisible and indivisible being with another part of the *Philebus*: τὴν δὲ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐν Φιλήβῳ μὲν ἀπειρίαν κέκληκεν, ἀριθμοῦ καὶ λόγου στέρησιν οὖσαν ἐλλείψεώς τε καὶ ὑπερβολῆς καὶ διαφορᾶς καὶ διαφορᾶς καὶ ἀνομοιότητος ἐν αὐτῇ πέρας οὐδὲν οὐδὲ μέτρον ἔχουσαν (1014d). See also the young Plutarch in *De E*.

<sup>115</sup> τὴν δυναμένην αὐτὴν αὐτὴν κινεῖν κίνησιν (896a).

<sup>116</sup> μίαν ἢ πλείους; πλείους· ἐγὼ ὑπὲρ σφῶν ἀποκρινοῦμαι. δυοῖν μὲν γέ που ἔλαττον μηδὲν τιθῶμεν, τῆς τε εὐεργετιδὸς καὶ τῆς τάναντία δυναμένης ἐξεργάζεσθαι (896e). This gains easy assent: σφόδρα ὀρθῶς εἴρηκας.

<sup>117</sup> αἰτίαν δὲ κακοῦ τὴν κινητικὴν τῆς ὕλης καὶ περὶ τὰ σώματα γιγνομένην μεριστὴν ἄτακτον καὶ ἄλογον οὐκ ἄψυχον δὲ κίνησιν, ἣν ἐν Νόμοις ὡσπερ εἴρηται ψυχὴν ἐναντίαν καὶ ἀντίπαλον τῇ ἀγαθοῦργῳ προσεῖπε (1015e).

<sup>118</sup> ... ἀλλὰ τὴν ἄτακτον καὶ ἀόιστον αὐτοκίνητον δὲ καὶ κινητικὴν ἀρχὴν ἐκείνην, ἣν πολλαχοῦ μὲν ἀνάγκην ἐν δὲ τοῖς Νόμοις ἄντικρυς ψυχὴν ἄτακτον εἴρηκε καὶ κακοποιόν (1014d-e). On ἄντικρυς, cf. below on the *Leg.* in *De Is*.

<sup>119</sup> Such claims are generally caught up in the scholarship that attributes a sort of “dualism” to Plutarch’s thought, on which see *supra* pg. 61.

that Plutarch introduces two separate souls—which is, according to Calcidius at least, how Numenius later explicitly understood the passage<sup>120</sup>—and so entail a sort of cosmic “dualism.” Rather than positing a second soul, however, Plutarch is clearly identifying the motion from the *Leges* with the chaotic motion of the primordial soul before it became part of the world soul. Plutarch even calls the disorderly motion “soul itself in itself,” or soul *qua* soul, which then “partook of mind and reason and intelligent harmony, so that it would become the soul of the world.”<sup>121</sup> The primordial soul was the only soul before the composition into the orderly world soul: it never existed as a separate and independent soul opposing an orderly or good one.<sup>122</sup>

As a part of the composite soul, the part that was the chaotic soul can still make itself felt, which is a model of cosmic disruption that Plutarch draws from Plato’s *Politicus* myth, as the final section examines further. Rather than drawing on Aristotle or other authorities to explain the difficult implications of Timaeus’ likely myth, he draws on other parts of the corpus. He even explicitly rejects Xenocrates’ interpretation of the composition of the world soul in *De animae procreatione* on the grounds that Plato himself did not specifically say that soul was number.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>120</sup> The human soul does not have three or even two parts (τρία μέρη ψυχῆς μιᾶς), Numenius claims according to Porphyrus, but rather there are two separate souls (δύο ψυχὰς ἔχειν ἡμᾶς), one irrational and the other rational, both somehow being immortal (οἱ μὲν ἄμφοι ἀθάνατοι; frg. 44 des Places = Porph. frg. 253.18-22 Smith). According to Calcidius, Numenius makes a similar claim on the cosmic level by appeal to the same passage of *Leg. X*, but rather than positing two parts again posits two separate souls, “one most benevolent, and one baneful (that is of matter).” Apparently *silua* is a literal gloss for ὄλη. See frg. 52 des Places = *In Tim.* 297. Plutarch’s irrational part, in contrast, is a tendency that is usually suppressed by the rational, and only makes itself felt when the rational part wanes, rather than of its own agency. The first chapter, *supra* pg. 61, discusses attributions of “dualism” to Plutarch further.

<sup>121</sup> αὕτη γὰρ ἦν ψυχὴ καθ’ ἑαυτήν, νοῦ δὲ καὶ λογισμοῦ καὶ ἀρμονίας ἔμφρονος μετέσχευ, ἵνα κόσμου ψυχὴ γένηται (1014e).

<sup>122</sup> The passage is used similarly in *De Is.* 370e-1a, but with more focus on a “third part” that prefers the better: “but he also leaves a certain third nature between (these two), not soulless nor irrational nor unmoving from itself, as some thing, but depending on both of them, always desiring and longing for and pursuing the better” (ὄν τὴν μὲν ἀγαθοῦργόν εἶναι, τὴν δ’ ἐναντίαν ταύτη καὶ τῶν ἐναντίων δημιουργόν· ἀπολείπει δὲ καὶ τρίτην τινὰ μεταξύ φύσιν οὐκ ἄψυχον οὐδ’ ἄλογον οὐδ’ ἀκίνητον ἐξ αὐτῆς, ὥσπερ ἔνιοι νομίζουσιν, ἀλλ’ ἀνακειμένην ἀμφοῖν ἐκείναις, ἐφιεμένην δὲ τῆς ἀμείνονος ἀεὶ καὶ ποθοῦσαν καὶ διώκουσαν; 370f). In 371a, he specifies that power with the superior of part (τῆς βελτίονος τὸ κράτος ἐστίν) but notes that the worse cannot be destroyed (ἀπολέσθαι δὲ τὴν φαύλην παντάπασιν ἀδύνατον).

<sup>123</sup> “Surely Plato never called the soul a number at least, but motion always moving itself and ‘the source and origin of motion’” (ἀριθμὸν γε μὴν ὁ Πλάτων οὐδέποτε τὴν ψυχὴν προσεῖπεν, ἀλλὰ κίνησιν αὐτοκίνητον ἀεὶ καὶ [*Phdr.* 245c] “κινήσεως πηγὴν καὶ ἀρχήν;” *De an. proc.* 1013c).

The objection is not that this numeric interpretation would contradict Plato, but that it is simply not found in the Platonic dialogues. Throughout both of Plutarch's *Quaestiones Platonicae* and *De procreatione*, difficult passages in Plato are explained through recourse to other phrases, images, and passages in other dialogues.<sup>124</sup> Rather than either manipulating Plato to serve some unphilosophical end or passing on some “scholastic” opinion from earlier Platonists, Plutarch consistently interprets the composition of the world soul in the *Timaeus* by identifying connections between the dialogues—and so, reading Plato through Plato.

### *Narrative sequence and distinctions in time*

Plutarch, as the previous sections argue, interpreted Plato through the assumptions that Plato does not contradict himself and that he is best interpreted through his own dialogues, rather than by appeal to other authorities. Many Platonic exegetes, ancient and modern, share these assumptions, as well as Plutarch's contention, which this section examines, that the details of Platonic narrative as such must be significant. In the last book of the *Quaestiones convivales*, for instance, the question of “why Plato said that the soul of Ajax got the twentieth lot” in the myth of Er arises.<sup>125</sup> Lamprias gives a distinctively philosophical answer, but is upstaged:

But while Lamprias was still speaking, the literary scholar Marcus already seemed to be counting up and numerating a sum to himself. Once Lamprias stopped, he said: “of the Homeric souls, how many he named in the *Nekyia* ... if you take away these two [Elpenor and Tiresias], Lamprias, and count up the rest, the very thing occurs—the soul of Ajax arrives twentieth into Odysseus' sight! It seems that Plato plays at this, applying a bit of color with to Homeric *Nekyia*.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Although it was only explicated in the subsequent generations of Platonists, these are all indications that Plutarch's exegesis was a precursor to Taurus and Atticus in this respect.

<sup>125</sup> διὰ τί Πλάτων εἰκοστήν ἔφη τὴν Αἴαντος ψυχὴν ἐπὶ τὸν κληρὸν ἔλθειν; (IX.5.739e). I examine this vignette further *infra* pg. 219. On Plato's myth of Er generally, see *supra* 26.

<sup>126</sup> ἔτι δὲ τοῦ Λαμπρίου λέγοντος ὁ γραμματικὸς ἤδη Μάρκος ἐδόκει τι συλλογίζεσθαι καὶ διαριθμεῖν πρὸς αὐτόν· ἔπειτα παυσαμένου, “τῶν Ὀμηρικῶν,” ἔφη, “ψυχῶν, ὅσας ἐν Νεκυίᾳ κατωνόμακεν, ... ἂν οὖν ταύτας ὑπεξελόμενος, ὃ Λαμπρία, τὰς ἄλλας διαριθμῆς, αὐτὸ συμβαίνει, τὴν Αἴαντος εἰκοστήν εἰς ὄψιν ἀφῆχθαι τοῦ Ὀδυσσεῶς· καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο παίζειν τὸν Πλάτωνα τῇ Ὀμηρικῇ Νεκυίᾳ προσαναχρωννύμενον” (740e-f).



Plutarch, and his characters, are far from alone in striving to cleverly find significance in these sorts of details in Plato’s myths. Among modern interpreters, the Straussian Robert Zaslavsky provides an extreme example.<sup>127</sup>

While the contention that there must be some significance behind Plato’s ordering of narratives is widespread, Plutarch’s position on where the weightier significance lies might not be met with much agreement, as he anticipates. This, he describes in the preface explaining the purpose of the treatise to his sons, is because of the “strangeness and paradox of the account,” as well as his awareness that many Platonists, even “most of those familiar with Plato”—namely the Early Academics<sup>128</sup>—have been overwhelmed by the strangeness of his true interpretation:<sup>129</sup> “fearing and comforting themselves, they contrive and force and spin everything, because they think it necessary to hide and deny something strange and unspoken, the generation and composition of both the world and its soul.”<sup>130</sup> His central claim about the significance of the narrative ordering, that it requires the reader to understand the demiurgic creation of the world soul as a ‘literal’ change of state from pre-cosmic chaos to order, is indeed controversial.<sup>131</sup> Yet, he argues, failure to explain Plato’s narrative would be unacceptable, and, without some sort of temporal or “pseudo-temporal” distinction, how could Plato have meaningfully called the world soul “older” than its body?

Although Harold Cherniss argues that “the creation in the *Timaeus* had already been taken literally by Aristotle and others but so far as is known not by anyone regarded as a

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<sup>127</sup> 1981. His treatment of the myth of Er is long and selectively detailed (156-71), reading the order of lots as an allusion not just to the Homeric *Nekyia*, but a reverse telling of Odysseus’ entire story to the Phaeacians (159-60).

<sup>128</sup> Specifically, Xenocrates, Crantor, and their followers. See *supra* pg. 136.

<sup>129</sup> ... πιστούμενος τῷ εἰκότι καὶ παραμυθούμενος, ὡς ἔνεστι, τὸ ἄηθες τοῦ λόγου καὶ παράδοξον (1014a).

<sup>130</sup> οὗτοί τε κοινῇ καὶ οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν χρωμένων Πλάτωνι φοβούμενοι καὶ παραμυθούμενοι πάντα μηχανῶνται καὶ παραβιάζονται καὶ στρέφουσιν, ὥς τι δεινὸν καὶ ἄρρητον οἰόμενοι δεῖν περικαλύπτειν καὶ ἀρνεῖσθαι, τήν τε τοῦ κόσμου τήν τε τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ γένεσιν καὶ σύστασιν, οὐκ ἐξ αἰδίου συνεστώτων οὐδὲ τὸν ἄπειρον χρόνον οὕτως ἐχόντων, ἰδίᾳ τε λόγου τέτευχε καὶ νῦν ἀρκέσει ῥηθὲν... (1013d-e).

<sup>131</sup> The subsequent section considers the significance of “literal” interpretation further.

Platonist,” Cicero and Philo both seem to indeed take it “literally” in the sense of involving a change of state, rather than representing different aspects of a timeless truth as Xenocrates and Crantor understood it.<sup>132</sup> The modern debate too over the significance of the generation of the world soul in the *Timaeus* is still immense and contentious.<sup>133</sup> In this section, I argue that Plutarch not only applied this distinct sort of “literal” reading, as opposed to Cherniss’ dismissive category of “narrow literalism,” to several of Plato’s narratives, such as the Diotima’s tale of Porus and Penia in the *Symposium* and the complicated *Politicus* myth, as well as his better known and more elaborated interpretation of the birth or composition of the world soul in the *Timaeus*.

A substantial element of Plutarch’s objection to the Early Academics he takes to be representative authorities is that they take the narrative ordering of the *Timaeus* to be essentially arbitrary.<sup>134</sup> Xenocrates argued that the essence of soul is number moving itself, while for Crantor it is a mixture of intellectual and sense-perceptive nature.<sup>135</sup> Although their explanations are strikingly divergent, Plutarch levels a methodological criticism against both of their interpretive assumptions:

But all of them similarly think that the soul did not become in time and is not begotten, but bears numerous faculties, into which Plato divided them for the sake of

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<sup>132</sup> 1976: 137, 176na, cf. Vallejo (1997: 147). See e.g. Cic. *Tusc.* I.70: “... if these things came into existence, as it seems to Plato, or, if they always were, at it seems to Aristotle...” (*si haec nata sunt, ut Platoni uidetur, uel, si semper fuerunt, ut Aristoteli placet...*) See further §63. Philo in *De aet. mund.* dismisses “metaphorical” interpretations (§14-5) and similarly appeals to the Stagirite: “Aristotle also witnesses these things about Plato, and because of his respect for philosophy he could not lie about anything” (καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης ταῦτα μαρτυρεῖ περὶ Πλάτωνος, διὰ τὴν τῆς φιλοσοφίας αἰδῶ μηδὲν ἄν ψευσάμενος; §16). This is perhaps not a convincing claim for Aristotle’s doxographic fidelity, but it need not mean that Philo took Aristotle to be the “decisive authority” for the interpretation. On Philo’s general attitude toward the *Ti.*, see Runia (1986b) and Niehoff (2007: 171-7).

<sup>133</sup> For the issue in modern scholarship, cf. Zeyl (2000: xx-xxv) and Slaveva-Griffin (2005: 312), with more citations. Carone’s (2004) proposal of a “middle path” is perhaps indicative of the frustration. Already for Jones (1916), there are too many opinions to describe more than briefly (70).

<sup>134</sup> It would be hard to evaluate Plutarch’s charity or fidelity in his characterization of the earlier Academics, as he provides most of what we know about their interpretations of this aspect of the *Ti.*

<sup>135</sup> ἐπεὶ δὲ τῶν δοκιμωτάτων ἀνδρῶν τοὺς μὲν Ξενοκράτης προσηγάγετο, τῆς ψυχῆς τὴν οὐσίαν ἀριθμὸν αὐτὸν ὑφ’ ἑαυτοῦ κινούμενον ἀποφηνάμενος, οἱ δὲ Κράντορι τῷ Σολεῖ προσέθεντο, μιν γύνντι τὴν ψυχὴν ἕκ τε τῆς νοητῆς καὶ τῆς περὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ δοσαστῆς φύσεως (1012d). Cf. Plotinus *Enn.* III.5.24-7.

understanding, supposing that the essence came to be and is mixed together in word. But they think that Plato supposed these very things about the world while knowing that it is eternal and ungenerated, but seeing that it is not easy to learn the way in which it has been composed and is managed, for those who do not suppose in advance either the generation of it or conjunction of generated things from a cause; so he chose this path for the sake of understanding.<sup>136</sup>

These interpreters apparently take the narrative's parts, distinguished by sequence or time, to represent simultaneous and eternal qualities. According to Plutarch, Xenocrates argues that the first qualities of the world soul's composition, divisible and indivisible essence, represent the unitary and the multiple, "and that from these things number comes to be, with the one limiting the multiple and with limit being implanted in limitlessness;" then the functions of motion and rest added through the addition of difference and sameness, respectively.<sup>137</sup> But soul never lacked the latter aspects—Plato only introduces them, Xenocrates seems to have argued, sequentially as parts to make the whole easier to understand. Crantor similarly posits intellectual and sense-perceptible essences as the definite and indefinite being, adding sameness and difference to serve as the mechanisms for intellection and opinion.<sup>138</sup> Implicitly, the soul never lacked the ability to distinguish sameness and difference, but they are added later to make the composition easier to distinguish. This seems to be what Plutarch means by the qualification "for the sake of

<sup>136</sup> ὁμαλῶς δὲ πάντες οὗτοι χρόνῳ μὲν οἴονται τὴν ψυχὴν μὴ γεγονέναι μηδ' εἶναι γενητήν, πλείονας δὲ δυνάμεις ἔχειν, εἰς ἃς ἀναλύοντα θεωρίας ἕνεκα τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτῆς λόγῳ τὸν Πλάτωνα γιγνομένην ὑποτίθεσθαι καὶ συγκεραυνυμένην· τὰ δ' αὐτὰ καὶ περὶ τοῦ κόσμου διανοοῦμενον ἐπίστασθαι μὲν αἰδίων ὄντα καὶ ἀγένητον, τὸ δ' ὅτι τρόπῳ συντέτακται καὶ διοικεῖται καταμαθεῖν οὐ ῥάδιον ὀρῶντα τοῖς μήτε γένεσιν αὐτοῦ μήτε τῶν γενητικῶν σύνοδον ἐξ ἀρχῆς προὑποθεμένοις ταύτην τὴν ὁδὸν τραπέσθαι (1013a-b). Plutarch later emphasizes his disagreement with this final qualification further: "that he intended these thoughts about these things, not for the sake of understanding..." (ὅτι δὲ περὶ τούτων διανοεῖτο ταῦτα, καὶ οὐ θεωρίας ἕνεκα...; 1017b).

<sup>137</sup> οἱ μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲν ἢ γένεσιν ἀριθμοῦ δηλοῦσθαι νομίζουσι τῇ μίξει τῆς ἀμερίστου καὶ μεριστῆς οὐσίας: ἀμερίστον μὲν γὰρ εἶναι τὸ ἐν μεριστῶν δὲ τὸ πλῆθος, ἐκ δὲ τούτων γίνεσθαι τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦ ἐνὸς ὀρίζοντος τὸ πλῆθος καὶ τῆ ἀπειρία πέρας ἐπιτιθέντος, ἦν καὶ δυάδα καλοῦσιν ἀόριστον. ... τὸ γὰρ κινητικὸν καὶ τὸ κινητὸν ἐνδεῖν αὐτῶ. τοῦ δὲ ταύτου καὶ τοῦ ἑτέρου συμμιγέντων, ὧν τὸ μὲν ἐστι κινήσεως ἀρχὴ καὶ μεταβολῆς τὸ δὲ μονῆς, ψυχὴν γεγονέναι, μηδὲν ἦν τὸν τοῦ ἴσταναι καὶ ἴσασθαι δυνάμιν ἢ τοῦ κινεῖσθαι καὶ κινεῖν οὔσαν (1012d-f).

<sup>138</sup> οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν Κράντορα μάλιστα τῆς ψυχῆς ἴδιον ὑπολαμβάνοντες ἔργον εἶναι τὸ κρίνειν τὰ τε νοητὰ καὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ τὰς τε τούτων ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ πρὸς ἄλληλα γιγνομένας διαφορὰς καὶ ὁμοιότητας, ἐκ πάντων φασίν, ἵνα πάντα γινώσκῃ, συγκεκρᾶσθαι τὴν ψυχὴν: ταῦτα δ' εἶναι τέτταρα, τὴν νοητὴν φύσιν αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτα καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχουσαν καὶ τὴν περὶ τὰ σώματα παθητικὴν καὶ μεταβλητὴν, ἔτι δὲ τὴν ταύτου καὶ τοῦ ἑτέρου διὰ τὸ κάκεινων ἑκατέραν μετέχειν ἑτερότητος καὶ ταυτότητος (1012f-3a).

understanding” (θεωρίας ἔνεκα): to make it easier to understand difficult concurrent qualities through narrative sequencing.<sup>139</sup> Distinctions in stages of a story stand for different metaphysical aspects, but these aspects exist concurrently, rather than at separate times, as the narrative account would more obviously suggest. This is a way to make difficult presentations, such as the extensive creation narrative of the *Timaeus* is making more broadly, easier to understand. Understood in this sort of way, the world’s body and soul always existed co-eternally, but Timaeus distinguishes stages of creation, such as the difficult composition of the soul from sameness and the rest, easier to understand. Xenocrates and Crantor seem to be using this sort of interpretive method to explain this one element of the text, presumably in part to undercut the criticisms of Aristotle and others.

Plutarch finds this approach lacking and insists that the ordering of events must have a non-arbitrary significance. His interpretation is often called, as a result, “literal,” but this term can confusingly be understood in various ways.<sup>140</sup> The most vehement critic of the “literal” aspect of Plutarch’s exegesis of the world soul’s generation, the Proclus, was nevertheless intimately concerned with another sort of “literal” meaning of the *Timaeus*’ narratives—the historicity of the Atlantis myth.<sup>141</sup> It is necessary for understanding Plutarch’s approach to

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<sup>139</sup> Calvenus Taurus testifies that Theophrastus, apparently unlike Aristotle, similarly took Plato to be saying the world was generated “perhaps for the sake of clarity” (παρεμφαίνει δὲ, ὅτι ἴσως σαφηνείας χάριν γενητὸν αὐτὸν ὑποτίθεται; frg. 22b.18-9 Lakmann = Philoponus *De aet. mund.* 145.23-4).

<sup>140</sup> Usually what is meant by “literal” is not specified, e.g. by Simonetti (2017): “the treatise contains Plutarch’s personal and literal reading of the *Timaeus* psychogony” (182); Tarrant (2000): “to those used to reading Neoplatonic texts Plutarch will perhaps appear as rather an unimaginative interpreter, thoughtful but inclined to dwell too much on the details of what was said rather than on the wider Platonic enterprise. He is one who insisted on taking the *Timaeus*’ picture of temporal creation literally, and he wants to find some explanation of every word that Plato wrote” (82). Cf. Opsomer (2004): “a ‘literal’ reading of the *Timaeus* could mean various things. ... It is not necessary that the champions of the literal reading take every single element of Timaeus’ story literally; they do not have to believe, for instance, that the demiurge actually *looked* at eternal being (29a3), of which it was previously denied that it is of a perceptible nature (27d5-8a4). Neither do they have to endow the demiurge with all the anthropomorphic traits with which Timaeus depicts him” (146-7).

<sup>141</sup> Proclus’ critique of Plutarch’s interpretation of the world’s generation is particularly fierce—the most detailed discussion is on the lemma of *Ti.* 30a (I.381.22-2.12), but cf. Phillips (2002) on Proclus’ sources (232n2)—although

Platonic narrative, I argue, to divide the issue between nouns and verbs, as his own linguistic discussion in the tenth of the *Quaestiones Platonicae* does, attempting to explain why, in Plato's *Sophista*, speech is only divided into nouns and verbs.<sup>142</sup> Plutarch is clearer about the former. He signals “literal” translations by forms of the adverb κύριως, such as when he demarcates different kinds of signification in poetry.<sup>143</sup> In *De Iside et Osiride*, Plutarch discusses Plato and

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he is no less convinced that parts of Plato must be read literally. Critias' description of the Atlantis myth as “very strange, but entirely true nonetheless” in the beginning of the *Ti*. spurs Proclus to insist on its literal as well as metaphorical meaning: “for the entire truth is not true in one place and false in another, nor is it false on the surface but true according to a hidden meaning (ὑπόνοιαν)—for this would not be a sort of entire truth” (‘μάλα μὲν ἄτοπος ὁ λόγος, παντάπασί γε μὴν ἀληθής’ ... τὸ γὰρ παντάπασιν ἀληθές οὐ πῆ μὲν ἐστὶν ἀληθές, πῆ δὲ οὐκ ἀληθές, οὐδὲ ψεῦδος μὲν κατὰ τὸ φαινόμενον, ἀληθές δὲ κατὰ τὴν ὑπόνοιαν· οὐ γὰρ ἂν εἶη πάντα τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀληθές; *In Tim.* I.76.13-6). He takes it as certain, however, that the surface meaning of the generation of the world is false. They both use a mixture of interpretive strategies, although Proclus' metaphors are more elaborate than those of Plutarch. Proclus' vehemence about the ostensible meaning of the *Ti*. is probably heightened by polemic with Christians over the destructibility of the world, which seems to be take Plato's implicit and Aristotle's systematic argument that a generated world is a destructible one as the starting point: the Neoplatonist Simplicius upheld the eternity of the world against the Christian Philoponus, who in turn argued for its temporality against Proclus' *De aet. mund.* See Lang & Macro (2001). Philoponus also addressed another *De aet. mund.* against Aristotle, which is preserved partially in Simplicius' responses, collected by Wildberg (1987). On Philoponus and his pagan teacher Ammonius, see Westerink (2016: 351-2). See also Sall. *De diis et mund.* on the Gallus myth: “these things never happened, but always are; while the mind sees everything at once, the account says it as first and second things” (ταῦτα δὲ ἐγένετο μὲν οὐδέποτε, ἔστι δὲ αἰεὶ, καὶ ὁ μὲν νοῦς ἅμα πάντα ὄρᾳ, ὁ δὲ λόγος τὰ μὲν πρῶτα τὰ δὲ δευτέρα λέγει; §4).

<sup>142</sup> “We perhaps call what clarifies actions a ‘verb...’ And the linguistic signifier of the people doing these things is set as ‘noun.’” (τὸ μὲν ἐπὶ ταῖς πράξεσιν ὄν δῆλωμα ῥῆμά που λέγομεν... τὸ δὲ γ' ἐπ' αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἐκεῖνα πράττουσι σημεῖον τῆς φωνῆς ἐπιτεθέν; *Soph.* 261e-2a; cf. Plut. *Quaest. Plat.* X.1009b). Plutarch asks why Plato left off articles, prepositions, pronouns, and so on. His answer is that the ancients considered nouns and verbs the primary parts of speech: “What should be said in defense of Plato? Possibly that the ancients were calling ‘first speech’ what was called then a ‘proposition’ and now a ‘premise,’ denoting that first thing which they judge true or false? For this is comprised of noun and verb...” (τί δὴ ῥητέον ὑπὲρ τοῦ Πλάτωνος; ἢ ὅτι πρῶτον λόγον οἱ παλαιοὶ τὴν τότε καλουμένην πρότασιν νῦν δ' ἀξίωμα προσηγόρευον, ὃ πρῶτον λέγοντες ἀληθεύουσιν ἢ ψεύδονται; τοῦτο δ' ἐξ ὀνόματος καὶ ῥήματος συνέστηκεν...; 1009c). Plutarch closes by comparing terminology, characteristically closing with Plato's own *dictum*: “therefore each of these [other sorts of words] bear some utility for speech, but none is a part and element of speech, except as has been said the verb and the noun, which make a proposition first receive truth and falsity, which some call a ‘proposition,’ others a ‘premise,’ but Plato ‘speech’” (διὸ χρεῖαν μὲν τινα τῶ λόγῳ παρέχεται τούτων ἕκαστον, μέρος δὲ λόγου καὶ στοιχεῖον οὐδέν ἐστι, πλὴν ὥσπερ εἴρηται τὸ ῥῆμα καὶ τοῦνομα, ποιούντα τὴν πρώτην τὸ τ' ἀληθές καὶ τὸ ψεῦδος δεχομένην σύνθεσιν, ἣν οἱ μὲν πρότασιν οἱ δ' ἀξίωμα, Πλάτων δὲ λόγον προσηγόρευκεν; 1011e). The arguments between these passages discuss how each other part of speech is potentially superfluous, such as the article, which does not appear in Latin (1010d), and the pronoun (ἀντωνυμία), which “is manifestly a sort of noun” (περιφανῶς γένος ὀνόματος ἐστίν; 1011c).

<sup>143</sup> Plutarch contrasts, for instance, “the bulk of the things said seeming to be said strangely about Zeus” (... τὰ πολλὰ τῶν ἀτόπως περὶ τοῦ Διὸς λέγεσθαι δοκούντων...; 24a), such as Achilles' image of the two jars in the *Iliad* (XXIV.528-51), and things said “rightly:” “these things were said as if about fate or destiny, in which the illogicality of the cause and the entire externality to us is signified. But where it is fitting and according to reason and likely, then let us think that the god is named *kuriōs*, as in the following” (ὡς περὶ τῆς τύχης ἢ τῆς εἰμαρμένης λεγομένων, ἐν αἷς τὸ ἀσυλλόγιστον ἡμῖν τῆς αἰτίας σημαίνεται καὶ ὅλως οὐ καθ' ἡμᾶς, ὅπου δὲ τὸ προσῆκον καὶ κατὰ λόγον καὶ εἰκός ἐστίν, ἐνταῦθα κυρίως ὀνομάζεσθαι τὸν θεὸν νομίζομεν, ὥσπερ ἐν τούτοις...; 24b).

contrasts the *Timaeus*, which hides the identification of two opposing parts of the world soul, with *Leges* X, which is open or rather “literal”:

Plato many times seems to disguise or conceal what he thinks when he calls one of the opposing principles by the name of “the same” (ταὐτὸν) and the other by that of “the different” (θάτερον); but he speaks in the *Leges*, because of his older age, not through riddles or symbols, but using literal words (κυρίως ὀνόμασιν), that the world is moved not by one soul, but by perhaps more than two but certainly not less...<sup>144</sup>

This claim not only reveals that Plutarch takes the nouns in the *Leges* to be literal, but that he takes the ones in the *Timaeus* to be in a sense metaphorical. This explains why, as explored in the previous section, he explains “divisible essence” by comparing different terms from different dialogues. Plutarch evidently assumes that nouns in the *Timaeus* generally have metaphorical signification. The second of the *Quaestiones Platonicae*, in which Plutarch asks why Plato has *Timaeus* call “the highest god the father and maker of all,” begins, “or perhaps, as he was accustomed, he is using a metaphor, and called the one responsible for the universe its ‘father?’”<sup>145</sup> Plutarch expects Plato to use certain nouns non-literally, to refer to separate names or concepts.

If the “literal” part of Plutarch’s interpretation is not in the nominal, that leaves the verbal. Such a “literal” reading could mean a few things, but for Plutarch, there is evidently a

<sup>144</sup> Πλάτων δὲ πολλαχοῦ μὲν οἶον ἐπηλυγαζόμενος καὶ παρακαλυπτόμενος τῶν ἐναντίων ἀρχῶν τὴν μὲν ταὐτὸν ὀνομάζει, τὴν δὲ θάτερον· ἐν δὲ τοῖς Νόμοις ἤδη πρεσβύτερος ὢν οὐ δι’ αἰνιγμῶν οὐδὲ συμβολικῶς, ἀλλὰ κυρίως ὀνόμασιν οὐ μὲν ψυχῆ φησι κινεῖσθαι τὸν κόσμον, ἀλλὰ πλείοσιν ἴσως δυεῖν δὲ πάντως οὐκ ἐλάττωσιν (370e-f). Earlier on, Plutarch compares a Persian king nicknamed for his brutality: “For they gave the name of ‘dagger’ to the cruelest and most fearsome king of the Persians, Ochus, who killed many and finally slaughtered and dined upon Apis with his friends. They still call him this now in the catalogue of kings, not because they are signifying his substance literally (κυρίως), but rather likening the crookedness and evil of his character to the murderous instrument” (καὶ γὰρ τὸν ὀμώτατον Περσῶν βασιλέα καὶ φοβερῶτατον Ὀχον ἀποκτείναντα πολλούς, τέλος δὲ καὶ τὸν Ἄπιν ἀποσφάζαντα καὶ καταδειπνήσαντα μετὰ τῶν φίλων ἐκάλεσαν “μάχαιραν” καὶ καλοῦσι μέχρι νῦν οὕτως ἐν τῷ ἀπολόγῳ τῶν βασιλέων, οὐ κυρίως δὴπου τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ σημαίνοντες, ἀλλὰ τοῦ τρόπου τὴν σκληρότητα καὶ κακίαν ὀργάνῳ φονικῷ παρεικάζοντες. οὕτω δὲ τὰ περὶ θεῶν ἀκούσασα καὶ δεχομένη παρὰ τῶν ἐξηγουμένων τὸν μῦθον ὀσίως καὶ φιλοσόφως καὶ δρῶσα μὲν αἰεὶ καὶ διαφυλάττουσα τῶν ἱερῶν τὰ νενομισμένα, τοῦ δ’ ἀληθῆ δόξαν ἔχειν περὶ θεῶν μηδὲν οἰομένη μᾶλλον αὐτοῖς μήτε θύσειν μήτε ποιήσειν [αὐτοῖς] κεχαρισμένον, οὐδὲν ἔλαττον ἀποφεύξει κακὸν ἀθεότητος δεισιδαιμονίαν; 355c-d). Cf. Cic. *Fin.* II.5.15.

<sup>145</sup> τί δήποτε τὸν ἀνωτάτω θεὸν πατέρα τῶν πάντων καὶ ποιητὴν προσεῖπεν (*Tim.* 28c); ... ἢ τῆ μεταφορᾷ χρώμενος, ὥσπερ εἴωθε, τὸν αἴτιον πατέρα τοῦ κόσμου κέκληκεν; (1001e-f).

usual meaning: that a narrative with temporal sequences actually represents a change of state, rather than a metaphorical representation of different timeless qualities. His exposition in *De Iside et Osiride* of Diotima's myth in Plato's *Symposium* makes this clear. After summarizing the story of Penia (Poverty) contriving to conceive a child with the sleeping Poros (Plenty)—leaving out the details such as the latter's drunkenness and the setting of the feast of the birth of Aphrodite in the garden of Zeus<sup>146</sup>—Plutarch describes what the divine parents and their child

Eros represent:

For Poros is none other than the primordially lovely and desirable and complete and self-sufficient: but he says Penia is the material, lacking in and of herself the good, but being filled by him and desiring and partaking of him. And the world that was born from them is also Horus, not everlasting and not impassive and not indestructible, but he is “always coming to be” (ἀειγενής) and contrives to always be young in the changes and cycles of incidents, going on to remain unperishing.<sup>147</sup>

Apparently, like the world soul in the *Timaeus*, Eros or Horus is taken to be formed from two pre-existing figures and is always in generation. This interpretation thus entails a metaphorical understanding of the verbal action: a goddess becoming pregnant by use of the unconscious body of a very drunk god would not square easily with the view of the gods either of Plato or Plutarch. This is further clarified in the following sentence, which cautions that “we must not use myths as if they are entirely accounts but must take each thing suitably according to its similarity (to the

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<sup>146</sup> “But these things somehow or other call as witness the myth of Plato, which Socrates described in the Symposium about the birth of Eros. He says that Penia lacked children, laid beside sleeping Poros, and conceived and bore from him Eros, mixed and manifold by nature, because indeed his father is good and wise and entirely self-sufficient, but his mother is without recourse and resource and always desiring another because of lack and desperate after another” (προσκαλείται δὲ καὶ τὸν Πλάτωνος ἀμωσγέπως τὰ πράγματα μῦθον, ὃν Σωκράτης ἐν Συμποσίῳ [203a-e] περὶ τῆς τοῦ Ἐρωτος γενέσεως διήλθε, τὴν Πενίαν λέγων τέκνων δεομένην τῷ Πόρῳ καθεύδοντι παρακληθῆναι καὶ κῆσασαν ἐξ αὐτοῦ τεκεῖν τὸν Ἐρωτα φύσει μικτὸν ὄντα καὶ παντοδαπόν, ἅτε δὴ πατὴρ μὲν ἀγαθοῦ καὶ σοφοῦ καὶ πᾶσιν αὐτάρκους, μητὴρ δ' ἀμηχάνου καὶ ἀπόρου καὶ δι' ἔνδειαν αἰεὶ γλιχομένης ἑτέρου καὶ περὶ ἕτερον λιπαρούσης γεγεννημένον; *De Is.* 374c-d).

<sup>147</sup> ὁ γὰρ Πόρος οὐχ ἕτερός ἐστι τοῦ πρώτως ἐρατοῦ καὶ ἐφετοῦ καὶ τελείου καὶ αὐτάρκους· Πενίαν δὲ τὴν ὕλην προσεῖπεν ἐνδεᾶ μὲν οὔσαν αὐτὴν καθ' ἑαυτὴν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, πληρουμένην δ' ὑπ' αὐτοῦ καὶ ποθοῦσαν αἰεὶ καὶ μεταλαμβάνουσαν. ὁ δὲ γενόμενος ἐκ τούτων κόσμος καὶ Ἴωρος οὐκ αἰδῖος οὐδ' ἀπαθῆς οὐδ' ἄφθαρτος, ἀλλ' ἀειγενής ὢν μηχανᾶται ταῖς τῶν παθῶν μεταβολαῖς καὶ περιόδοις αἰεὶ νέος καὶ μηδέποτε φθαρησόμενος διαμένειν (374d). On the epithet, cf. *Ti.* 52d: οὗτος μὲν οὖν δὴ παρὰ τῆς ἐμῆς ψήφου λογισθεὶς ἐν κεφαλαίῳ δεδόςθω λόγος, ὃν τε καὶ χώραν καὶ γένεσιν εἶναι, τρία τριχῆ, καὶ πρὶν οὐρανὸν γενέσθαι.

truth).”<sup>148</sup> Yet the result of this union is nevertheless taken to be generated, apparently at a distinct point in time. The “metaphorically” understood verbal action nevertheless represents a “literally” significant change of state.<sup>149</sup>

The narrative of the generation of the world soul in the *Timaeus* similarly entailed a change of state Plutarch, particularly from pre-existing but chaotic elements into an ordered whole. This narrative, however, of composition or harmonization does not seem to require a metaphorical interpretation in the same way the scandalous verbal action of the myth of Penia and Porus does. Metaphors might help make it more comprehensible, such as the comparison of worked artifact and pre-existing material discussed earlier in the distinction in sorts of “becoming.” But this sort of framework is not necessary and the attention that Plutarch bestows upon the ratios that follow the combination of essences, sameness, and difference indicates that he takes at least this aspect of the demiurge’s composition, the binding by numbers and ratios, seems to entail taking the nominal elements seriously, such as the technical final ratio mentioned by Plato, 256:243, which Plutarch analyzes under the the technical name *λεῖμμα*.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> χρηστέον δὲ τοῖς μύθοις οὐχ ὡς λόγοις πάμπαν οὔσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ πρόσφορον ἐκάτου [τὸ] κατὰ τὴν ὁμοιότητα λαμβάνοντας (374e). On this, cf. Froidefond (1987): “la déclaration de méthode du ‘De Iside’, 58, 374E (‘il ne faut pas en user avec le mythes comme avec des exposés parfaitement objectifs de la vérité, mais emprunter à chacun d’eux en fonction de la vrai-semblance’) peut faire penser à ce sens moderne de ‘mythe’, mais au fond, pour Plutarque (interprète) comme pour Platon (créateur), le mythe est, en même temps qu’un sujet d’étude, une matière polyvalente prête à être utilisée pour une démonstration (comme une ébauche de clé fait connaître à la fois la clé achevée et la serrure)” (212n114).

<sup>149</sup> Not much is usually made of this interpretation: Vernière (1977) treats it as proof that Plutarch approached the myths of Plato in the manner of “un texte déjà sacré,” as she thinks he also treated “mythes traditionnels” (37). Brenk (1999) finds the section embarrassing. Cf. the brief treatment in the Egyptological commentary of Griffiths (1970) and the philological one of García Valdés (1995: 277-8).

<sup>150</sup> On the ratio, see further *supra* pg. 112. Cherniss (1976) notes that Plutarch was not the only thinker to attribute the term to Plato, comparing Theon of Smyrna (273nc). He begins the second portion of the treatise with a renewed second-person address: “regarding these (numbers and harmony), even if you heard many times and happened upon many speeches and writing, it is not worse for me to go through it quickly, prefacing the passage of Plato” (περὶ ὧν εἰ καὶ πολλάκις ἀκηκόατε καὶ πολλοῖς ἐντετυχήκατε λόγοις καὶ γράμμασιν, οὐ χειρόν ἐστι κάμει βραχέως διελθεῖν, προεκθέμενον τὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος; 1027a). An extended quotation of Ti. 35b-36b follows (1027b-c), as if a continuation of the quotation of 35a-b in the first part of the treatise (1012b-c), and then Plutarch distinguishes three questions: “in these, it is first asked about the quantity of numbers, second about the arrangement, and third the function” (ἐν τούτοις ζητεῖται πρῶτον περὶ τῆς ποσότητος τῶν ἀριθμῶν, δεύτερον περὶ τῆς τάξεως, τρίτον περὶ τῆς



This latter interpretation, however, raises a potential tension with another part of the dialogue. In the *Timaeus*, time in the phenomenal world, in contrast to the demiurge's everlasting and unchanging model, only comes to be along with the birth of the world.<sup>151</sup> Time and the world soul not only came into existence simultaneously in some sense, but they are in fact inseparable, given the impossibility of one being dissolved without the other. Before the world, then, it would ostensibly be impossible to temporally distinguish anything, because time did not exist yet. Hence, perhaps, Timaeus' qualifications that humans rely on chance and likelihood, and that the demiurge's action was "in a way of this sort" (τοιῶδε τρόπῳ) rather than in any precise manner. Yet why would Timaeus break the narrative to stress the relative age of the world's soul and body if they did not meaningfully come to be? One possibility, which is more explicitly produced by modern interpreters of the *Timaeus* such as Richard Mohr, is that only "ordered" time is generated simultaneously with the world soul, such that before that there is disorderly pre-cosmic time.<sup>152</sup> Jan Opsomer, for instance, similarly argues that Plutarch "avoids saying that the universe had a beginning κατὰ χρόνον," and instead posits that, especially in the eighth of the *Quaestiones Platonicae*, "well-ordered time" was only "made possible by the well-ordered

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δυνάμεως; 1027c). Similarly to the first portion, which begins with the opinions of Xenocrates and Crantor, the second begins by introducing Theodorus' and Crantor's opinions on the arrangement of numbers (1027d). Although Cherniss (1976) takes this to reveal some of "Plutarch's characteristic weaknesses" (135), he nevertheless grounds his analysis in "what Plato understood" (ὡς αὐτὸς ὑφηγεῖται; 1027e) "or said" (καὶ τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ὃ φησιν ὁ Πλάτων; 1021e).

<sup>151</sup> "So time then came about with the world, so that things which came into being are also dissolved, *if* there should ever come about some dissolution of them; and, following the model of the everlasting nature, in order that the world might be as similar as possible to the model: for the model exists throughout all time, and the world, through this beneficence, for the duration of all time has come to be, persists, and continues on" (χρόνος δ' οὖν μετ' οὐρανοῦ γέγονεν, ἵνα ἅμα γεννηθέντες ἅμα καὶ λυθῶσιν, ἂν ποτε λύσις τις αὐτῶν γίγνηται, καὶ κατὰ τὸ παράδειγμα τῆς διαιωνίας φύσεως, ἵν' ὡς ὁμοιότατος αὐτῷ κατὰ δυνάμιν ἦ· τὸ μὲν γὰρ δὴ παράδειγμα πάντα αἰῶνά ἐστιν ὄν, ὁ δ' αὖθις διὰ τέλους τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον γεγονώς τε καὶ ὄν καὶ ἐσόμενος; 38b-c). This follows a correction that it does not make sense to talk about any tense of time—past, present, or future, all said to have "become" rather than "exist"—in regard to the eternal model: ταῦτα δὲ πάντα μέρη χρόνου, καὶ τό τ' ἦν τό τ' ἔσται χρόνου γεγονότα εἶδη, ἃ δὴ φέροντες λανθάνομεν ἐπὶ τὴν αἰδιδιον οὐσίαν οὐκ ὀρθῶς (37e).

<sup>152</sup> Mohr (1985: 53-81), revised in Mohr (2005: 51-80). See also Vallejo (1997: 147).

movement of the world-soul.”<sup>153</sup> While he does not discuss disorderly pre-cosmic time, it would not be surprising, given Plutarch’s position on pre-cosmic motion if he had a conception such as this in mind, although he is in no way specific. Both of these interpretations are, I argue, “literally” significant, in that their narratives are taken to entail an actual change in state. This, more than the question of whether the verbal action is taken as a metaphor, is what causes Plutarch’s disagreement with Xenocrates and Crantor, who did not take the differences in states to signify either literal or metaphorical meaning, and what furthermore provokes Plutarch’s often hostile reception among the later Neoplatonists such as Proclus. The principle of narrative sequence “literally” entailing either a change of states or—however much difficulty this might cause when the event in question relates to the beginning of ordered time—temporal distinctions, rather than just those of logical priority, such as Proclus’ unfolding but co-eternal “gifts of the demiurge,” for instance.<sup>154</sup> Plutarch nevertheless meets the burden of explaining how Plato’s narrative is significant, unlike Xenocrates and Crantor, and he is consistent in applying this principle. Plutarch also interprets the myth in Plato’s *Politicus* in such a way that he takes the distinctions in narrative time to represent actual temporal distinctions, particularly between cosmic cycles of order and disorder, rather than different aspects of a single eternal state.<sup>155</sup> Only a

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<sup>153</sup> Opsomer (2001: 188-9), citing *Quaest. Plat.* VIII.1007d. Calvenus Taurus distinguishes two sorts of positions among those who think the world was literally generated: that “some time is signified” (σημαίνεται χρόνος τις) other than time (so pseudo-time), and that the world came to be “through the demiurge” (frg. 22b.50). Plutarch, it seems, would better fit the latter category.

<sup>154</sup> Proclus also assumes that the order of Timaeus’ presentation is significant rather than arbitrary, although he contends that all the elements of the demiurge’s creation were always present. Rather, he constructs an elaborate reading of each element as an increasingly greater “gift of the demiurge.” Proclus takes the “most beautiful of bonds” (δεσμῶν... κάλλιστος) between fire and earth in *Ti.* 31b-c, for instance, interprets this as the image of the principle of unification (ὁ μὲν δεσμός ὡς εἰκόνα παρεχόμενος ἑαυτὸν τῆς ἐνώσεως...; II.13.19-20), which is the “second gift from the demiurge to the world” (δεύτερον τοῦτο δῶρον ἐκ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ τῷ κόσμῳ διδούς; II.14.2). Presumably he finds confirmation in the discussion of middle numbers and binding in the abstract in 31c-2b. Baltzly (2015) gives a good description of this aspect of the structure of Proclus’ commentary (1). Kutash (2011) reads the series of gifts as “a philosophical document... that is inextricably hieratic” (1).

<sup>155</sup> Plutarch does not discuss the myth elsewhere, but the idea of similar cycles of cosmic irrationality also arise in *Quaest. conv.* VIII.2, for instance, when the character Plutarch concludes: “for through the innate necessity of the

few scholars have discussed Plutarch's interpretation of this myth, and either take it as "literal"—such as Roger Miller Jones<sup>156</sup>—or a mixture of "literal" and "metaphorical"—such as Radek Chlup and Jan Opsomer.<sup>157</sup> But the exact details of Plutarch's interpretation are difficult to determine, given how summarily he discusses the myth in *De animae procreatione*. It seems though, that he is using a similar sort of interpretation of the sequential or temporal distinctions as meaningful, as with his interpretation of generation in the *Timaeus*, from which he concludes that cosmic disruptions are a recurring feature of the world soul.<sup>158</sup>

In Plato's *Politicus*, the Eleatic stranger, after making an initial attempt to dialectically reach a definition of the "statesman," presents a choice between mythic and dialectic discourse. He begins with the former and tells Young Socrates about how the world's divine governance entails cosmic cycles, at first in summary:<sup>159</sup>

Stranger: Hear then. For god himself was once guiding and conducting the world in its spherical course, but then, whenever the cycles have already obtained the measure of some seeming fit to him, he lets go, and it still rotates into the opposite of its own accord, possessing a mind from him harmonizing it through principles. But moving inversely becomes innate (ἐμφυτον) in it by necessity, for this reason.  
Socrates: For what sort of reason?

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body, it [the world] is always in generation and upheaval and all matter of incidents, but it is aided by its father and demiurge, who by proportion (*logos*) limits being in reference to the paradigm" (ἀεὶ γὰρ ὄν διὰ τὴν σύμφυτον ἀνάγκην τοῦ σώματος ἐν γενέσει καὶ μετατροπῇ καὶ πάθει παντοδαποῖς ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ δημιουργοῦ βοηθεῖται τῷ λόγῳ πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα τὴν οὐσίαν ὀρίζοντος; 720b-c).

<sup>156</sup> Jones (1916), explaining this present passage of *De an. proc.*: "in this Plutarch follows literally the *Politicus* myth" (83n37). Cf. Brenk (1977): "the world soul thus acts like Plato's human soul..." (132).

<sup>157</sup> Chlup (2000: 145-7) and Opsomer (2001). Cf. Schicker (1995: 382). This sort of conception might fit Severus who, according to Proclus, claimed that the world was both generated and ungenerated by interpreting the "mythic cycles" of the *Plt.* (τὰς ἀνακυκλήσεις τὰς μυθικὰς προσέμενος καὶ γενητὸν οὕτω ποιῶν καὶ ἀγένητον τὸν κόσμον; *In Resp.* II.95.29-6.1, citing *Plt.* 269a in 95.27). See further Dillon (1995: 368-9). There is good evidence for Severus' authorship of a comprehensive commentary on the *Ti.*, because Proclus mentions where he *started* his inquiry (after the προοίμιον), implying an otherwise systematic treatment (*In Tim.* I.204.16-7). Little is known about Severus otherwise, but Dillon (1977), based on Proclus' "reverse chronological order" of "Severus-Atticus-Plutarch" in *In Tim.* III.212 (262), places him after Atticus.

<sup>158</sup> Dillon (1995) similarly connects the importance of the interpretation of the *Plt.* myth to the *Ti.* for Neoplatonic interpreters (366). See also Schicker (1995: 386-8).

<sup>159</sup> On the myth as a whole, see especially Brisson (1995) and Carone (2004b).

Stranger: Because always being the same, and in the same state and conditions, belongs to the most divine things alone, but the nature of the body is not of this rank.<sup>160</sup>

The stranger identifies the age of guidance with the rule of Cronus, when he still steered the rudder directly and humans were born from the earth rather than one another. After all of the humans had died and souls had engendered new embodied humans the ordained amount of times, he lets go. At first, the world maintains its course, as the summary describes, but eventually the lower parts of its nature overcome it, until Zeus comes to its aid, lest what order of the world remains should be entirely destroyed.<sup>161</sup> Plutarch does not present a concise interpretation of the myth, but discusses it in three contexts, two of which are especially salient: the first asks how the “necessity and inborn desire” that disrupted the world in the *Politicus*, as well as what he takes to be Plato’s other names for the primordial soul, could be in matter if Plato regularly claims matter is inert; second, he quotes three passages from the myth to show that Plato attributed evil to this tendency in the world soul, and not to matter.<sup>162</sup> The first citation takes two causal agents—“necessity and inborn desire” (ἀνάγκη καὶ σύμφυτος ἐπιθυμία)—from the *Politicus* passage quoted above—where inborn (ἔμφυτον) propensity comes about by necessity (ἐξ ἀνάγκης)—and applies it to a narrative portion later in the myth. The “great

<sup>160</sup> ΞΕ: ἀκούοις ἄν. τὸ γὰρ πᾶν τόδε τοτὲ μὲν αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς ξυμποδηγεῖ πορευόμενον καὶ συγκυλκεῖ, τοτὲ δ’ ἀνήκεν, ὅταν αἱ περίοδοι τοῦ προσήκοντος αὐτῷ μέτρον εἰλήφωσιν ἤδη χρόνου, τὸ δὲ πάλιν αὐτόματον εἰς τάντῃα περιάγεται, ζῶον ὃν καὶ φρόνησιν εἰληχὸς ἐκ τοῦ συναρμόσαντος αὐτὸ κατ’ ἀρχάς. τοῦτο δὲ αὐτῷ τὸ ἀνάπαλιν ἰέναι διὰ τὰδ’ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἔμφυτον γέγονεν. ΝΕ ΣΩ: διὰ τὸ ποῖον δῆ; ΣΩ: τὸ κατὰ ταῦτά καὶ ὡσαύτως ἔχειν ἀεὶ καὶ ταῦτόν εἶναι τοῖς πάντων θειοτάτοις προσήκει μόνους, σώματος δὲ φύσις οὐ ταύτης τῆς τάξεως (269c-d).

<sup>161</sup> 272b, 271a-c, 272d-3a. Scholars have detected various influences in the myth, particularly Hesiodic—see e.g. Van Noorden (2015: 142-67)—and Empedoclean—see e.g. Coates (2018); Plutarch, however, focuses narrowly on the reversal of cosmic courses.

<sup>162</sup> 1015a, c-d. The third utilization of the *Plt.* myth is, again, as a source for one of a series of paraphrases to show that Plato always speaks of the universe as generated, while he calls soul both generated and ungenerated: “in the *Politicus*, the Parmenidean Stranger says that the world was composed by god and partook of many good things, and if it bears some baseness or harshness, this is because it has been mixed together from a prior, unharmonious and irrational state” (ἐν Πολιτικῷ δ’ ὁ Παρμενίδειος ξένος τὸν κόσμον ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ συντεθέντα φησὶ ‘πολλῶν ἀγαθῶν μεταλαβεῖν, εἰ δὲ τι φλαῦρόν ἐστιν ἢ χαλεπόν, ἐπ’ τῆς προτέρας ἔξεως ἀναρμόστου καὶ ἀλόγου συμμεμιγμένον ἔχειν; 1017c). These are the only explicit references Plutarch makes to Plato’s myth in the extant corpus. Cf. Dillon (1995: 374n24) on *Quaest. conv.* VIII.2.720c and *Plt.* 273b; see also Proclus *Theo. Plat.* V.6-10.

partaking in chaos, congenital to its old nature, before it arrived into the present world,” as well as “necessity and innate desire,” are all taken to be parallels to “turning back the world toward the opposite.”<sup>163</sup> Rather than connecting the one great upheaval to the narrative of Cronus, Plutarch draws the name and explanation for its cause from the Stranger’s statement of a cosmic principle—that only the divine can remain eternally stable—and casts the destabilizing element as the desire of its primordial nature.

When Plutarch returns to the *Politicus* myth, he gives a series of quotes introduced by the claim that Plato “removed matter from all divergence, and set the responsibility for evil very far off from god, and so wrote these things about the world in the *Politicus*”: that everything harsh and unjust is said to be from the prior condition, that “time and forgetfulness strengthen the effect of ancient disharmony,” and finally that the world risked “sinking again into the great place of disparity.”<sup>164</sup> Plutarch is taking the sequence of the world soul’s “forgetting” to be its falling asleep as the “innate desire” entailed by the primordial part is gaining control. The identification of the innate desire and necessity makes this part of a recurrent cycle, and so, in a sense, unmoors it from the narrative of Cronus’ reign and retreat. John Dillon raises the possibility that Plutarch did not actually accept “the literal account of the alternating cycles,” because in a similar discussion he describes the world as “assisted by its father and creator...

<sup>163</sup> ἢ γὰρ ἀναστρέφουσα τὸν οὐρανόν, ὥσπερ ἐν Πολιτικῷ λέγεται, καὶ ἀνελίπτουσα πρὸς τοῦναντίον ἀνάγκη καὶ σύμφυτος ἐπιθυμία καὶ τὸ τῆς πάλαι ποτὲ φύσεως σύντροφον πολλῆς μετέχον ἀταξίας, πρὶν εἰς τὸν νῦν κόσμον ἀφικέσθαι, πόθεν ἐγγέγονε τοῖς πράγμασιν, εἰ τὸ μὲν ὑποκείμενον ἄποιος ἦν ὕλη καὶ ἄμοιρος αἰτίας ἀπάσης, ὁ δὲ δημιουργὸς ἀγαθὸς καὶ πάντα βουλόμενος αὐτῷ κατὰ δύναμιν ἐξομοιωσαί, τρίτον δὲ παρὰ ταῦτα μηδέν; (1015a-b). On the derivations from Platonic phrasing, cf. Cherniss (1976: 191ne, f).

<sup>164</sup> ὁ δὲ Πλάτων οὐχ οὕτως, ἀλλὰ τὴν γ’ ὕλην διαφορᾶς ἀπάσης ἀπαλλάττων καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν τῶν κακῶν αἰτίαν ἀποτάτω τιθέμενος ταῦτα περὶ τοῦ κόσμου γέγραπεν ἐν τῷ Πολιτικῷ παρὰ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ ζυνοθέντος πάντα τὰ καλὰ κέκτηται παρὰ δὲ τῆς ἔμπροσθεν ἕξεως ὅσα χαλεπὰ καὶ ἄδικα ἐν οὐρανῷ γίγνεται, ταῦτ’ ἐξ ἐκείνης αὐτὸς τε ἔχει καὶ τοῖς ζῴοις ἐναπεργάζεται. καὶ μικρὸν ἔτι προελθὼν ‘προϊόντος δέ’ φησι ‘τοῦ χρόνου καὶ λήθης ἐγγιγνομένης ἐν αὐτῷ, μᾶλλον δυναστεύει τὸ τῆς παλαιᾶς ἀναρμοστίας πάθος καὶ κινδυνεύει διαλυθεῖς εἰς τὸν τῆς ἀνομοιότητος ἄπειρον ὄντα τόπον δῦναι πάλιν’ ἀνομοιότης δὲ περὶ τὴν ὕλην, ἄποιον καὶ ἀδιάφορον οὐσαν, οὐκ ἔστιν (1015c-d, closely paraphrasing a selection of sentences in *Plt.* 273b-e). See also *Quaest. Plat.* VIII.1009a on slackening and sleep.

which it would precisely *not* be according to a literal understanding of the myth.”<sup>165</sup> But if Plutarch took the statement of the impossibility of stability from the beginning of the myth seriously, then every cycle would end as the great one did, in the narrative surrounding the final quotation listed above: “god who ordered the world sees that it is in dire straits and is concerned—lest it should be tossed by upheaval, sundered apart, and sink into that boundless sea of disparity—again sits near to the rudder...”<sup>166</sup> Plutarch, I think, takes it to be a feature of the cosmic intellect that it will never let the chaotic motions of the world deteriorate too far, as he also states in the passage about the world’s tendency to disorder quoted above from *De animae procreatione*. It seems to rouse itself and to ameliorate the situation, as the nameless god in the *Politicus* myth does.<sup>167</sup>

How Plutarch interpreted many of the details and points of tension in the myth is unclear from *De animae procreatione*, but from the few passages that he quoted and the brief interpretation, it seems that he took the myth to represent some sort of cyclical propensity such as this. It is not quite “literal” in every possible sense, in that the Eleatic Stranger stresses that there was one disruption in particular, which is the single source of the myth of Atreus and “the

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<sup>165</sup> 1995: 374n24.

<sup>166</sup> διὸ δὴ καὶ τότε ἤδη θεὸς ὁ κοσμήσας αὐτόν, καθορῶν ἐν ἀπορίαις ὄντα, κηδόμενος ἵνα μὴ χειμασθεῖς ὑπὸ ταραχῆς διαλυθεῖς εἰς τὸν τῆς ἀνομιότητος ἄπειρον ὄντα πόντον δύη, πάλιν ἐφεδρος αὐτοῦ τῶν πηδαλίων γιγνόμενος (273d-e).

<sup>167</sup> There seems to be a tension later, when Plutarch asks in the numerological section how, in contrast to astronomers who cleverly but “bearing nothing of truth or accuracy at all” try to describe heavenly positions and motions with numerical relationships (1029a), whether instead the heavens are ordered by the harmony and ratios in the world soul itself (σκοπεῖτε δὲ μὴ τὸν μὲν οὐρανὸν ἄγει καὶ τὰ οὐράνια ταῖς περὶ αὐτὴν ἐμμελείαις καὶ κινήσεσιν ἢ ψυχῇ...; 1029d). The tension is that the world soul is claimed to guide them in a superlative state because of its harmonious ratios (... ἢ ψυχῇ φρονιμωτάτη καὶ δικαιοτάτη γεγυνοῦσα, γέγονε δὲ τοιαύτη τοῖς καθ’ ἁρμονίαν λόγοις), yet his exegesis of the *Plt.* myth would seem to imply periods where it is less than superlatively harmonious. The description of the demiurge (or the rational part of the ordered soul) taking up the disordered and dissonant soul and ordering it (παραλαβὼν γὰρ ὁ δημιουργὸς ἀταξίαν καὶ πλημμέλειαν ἐν ταῖς κινήσεσιν τῆς ἀναρμόστου καὶ ἀνοήτου ψυχῆς διαφορομένης πρὸς αὐτήν τὰ μὲν διώρισε... συνέταξεν ἁρμονίας καὶ ἀριθμοῖς χρῆσάμενος...; 1029e) can be taken in two ways: it could describe the initial composition and harmonization of the world soul, or it could represent one of these sorts of cycles where the intelligent part rouses itself and orders the discordant part before it falls to chaos entirely. The former is more natural given the specification of the demiurge, but Plutarch’s own hermeneutics would also allow for the second meaning, especially if a contradiction were alleged.

countless other things more marvelous still than these,” whereas Plutarch seems to take this to represent all upheavals.<sup>168</sup> He seems, moreover, to think about the “backwards” motion as a more general chaotic deterioration of order, and not as motion diametrically opposed to the forward under divine guidance, as part of the myth ostensibly implies.<sup>169</sup> Yet it seems plausible (given that he paraphrases from the line), that stability is impossible for the phenomenal world, and so the drowsing of the rational intellect’s guidance and the reemergence of primordial soul’s chaotic tendency is inevitable, as is the intervention of the divine. In contrast to the Neoplatonic interpretation of Proclus, Plutarch is indeed “literal” in the same corresponding regard as Proclus is “metaphorical,” in that he takes the temporal distinctions to nevertheless represent qualities of an eternal truth. In his commentary on the *Timaeus*, Proclus argues that “if he is the demiurge of all things existing always, he does not act as demiurge at one moment, and let go of the tillers at another.”<sup>170</sup> Similarly, he takes the governing divinities in the *Politicus* myth, Cronus and Zeus, to represent coeternal presences in the world, the one concerned with “unseen and more intellectual,” the other with the “physical and the visible” orders of the world.<sup>171</sup> As with the *Timaeus* narrative, Plutarch takes the sequence of events as significant literally, while Proclus takes the *Politicus* myth to be metaphorically representing eternal and simultaneous qualities.

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<sup>168</sup> 269a, cf. 270b-c.

<sup>169</sup> “... we say that this is the cause of the most marvelous of things... that the motion of the world is sometimes borne through the ways it is turns now, and at other times the opposite” (ὁ πάντων ἔφαμεν εἶναι τῶν θαυμαστῶν αἴτιον... τὸ τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φορὰν τοτὲ μὲν ἐφ’ ἃ νῦν κυκλεῖται αἴτιον, τοτὲ δ’ ἐπὶ τὰναντία; 270b). Plutarch uses the terms ἀναστρεφουσα τὸν οὐρανόν and ἀνελίσσει, but is this strictly meant as diametrically reversing, or more generally overthrowing or upsetting? Cf. Chlup (2000), citing *De an. proc.* 1026e-f: “[Plutarch] reads the myth literally, seeing the backward and divine revolution as two alternate temporal stages in the history of the universe. It is not clear what his exact idea of historical movements is, but it seems not unlikely that he connected them to some cyclic scheme of the rise and fall of civilizations” (146).

<sup>170</sup> ἔτι τοίνυν εἰ ὁ δημιουργὸς τῶν αἰεὶ ὄντων ἐστίν, οὐχὶ ποτὲ μὲν δημιουργεῖ, ποτὲ δὲ ἀφήσῃ τοὺς οἴακας (*In. Tim.* I.228.14-5. Dillon (1995: 366-7), with parallels from Proclus. He argues furthermore that Plotinus, from the few mentions he made of the *Plt.* myth, took it similarly metaphorically (365-6), and points out that Proclus cites his teacher Syrianus’ commentary on the dialogue (367-8).

<sup>171</sup> διττῆς γὰρ οὐσίας ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ ζωῆς, τῆς μὲν ἀφανοῦς καὶ νοερωτέρας, τῆς δὲ φυσικωτέρας καὶ ἐμφανοῦς... ἡ μὲν δευτέρα καὶ πολυειδῆς καὶ διὰ τῆς φύσεως ἐπιτελουμένη τῆς Δίας ἐξήρηται τάξεως, ἡ δὲ ἀπολουστέρα καὶ νοερά καὶ ἀφανῆς τῆς Κρονίας (*Theo. Plat.* V.6).

Plutarch, however, invokes and implicitly interprets the myth's periodic reversal of cosmic motion in parallel with other passages from other texts, to help illustrate the characteristic tendency of primordial soul—the *Timaeus*' divisible being before it was composed into the world soul, or soul *qua* soul. This appeal to other Platonic passages, both mythic and non-mythic, further reflects the principle of reading Plato through Plato; the temporal distinctions in cosmic states coheres to his general methodology of reading Platonic narratives as “literally” temporal, just as with his treatment of the composition of the world soul in the *Timaeus*. The resulting interpretation of the *Politicus* myth might seem idiosyncratic, but a rather similar one appears in the summary of the dialogue in the Middle Platonic Latin summary of Plato, simply known as the *Expositio*, as well.<sup>172</sup> Gabriela Carone's consciously “literal” interpretation, moreover, similarly also entails pre-cosmic chaos and continuous cycles of cosmic upheaval.<sup>173</sup> The central idea of Plutarch's interpretation of the myth in the *Politicus*, that of universal cycles of chaos, also seems to appear in a disputed passage of *De animae procreatione*. He argues, because a rational part has been imposed upon the primordial, erratic part of the world soul, that the latter still occasionally makes its nature felt, when its chaotic motion predominates as the rational part exerts less influence:

For the soul gives the impassioned part from itself but partakes of mind from the presence of a greater principle. Nor has the nature of the world been spared from this twofold communion, but leaning on one side now it is straightened because the cycle of

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<sup>172</sup> “Moreover, it seems to him that the world is ruled in certain ages now by god himself, and at other times it returns to the opposite in turn because it is a rational and ensouled. And because it is corporeal, its return is somehow a sort of passion. For all bodies bear a mortal nature. God therefore is not the instigator of this return, because he is always like unto himself” (*placet illi praeterea mundum certis saeculis nunc ab ipso deo regi, alias ipsum se inuicem remeare in contrarium quia sit animal rationale; et quia corporalis sit, hanc illius remeationem quasi quandam passionem esse. omnia enim corpora naturam habere mortalem. nam deum idcirco remeationis non esse auctorem quia semper sit sui similis*; 31.4-9). Stover (2016) argues that the *Expositio* is both Apuleian and the third book of *De Platone*, despite the radical difference in form, but cf. Moreschini (2017), who is much more skeptical about the identity of the author: “Certo essa non è così tarda come quell'accessus, ma può risalire ad un ambiente medioplatonico di occidente, ancora non influenzato dal neoplatonismo (un'ipotesi: prima di Macrobio; altra ipotesi: un'opera tarda, ma antiquata, come quella di Calcidio).”

<sup>173</sup> 2004b: 91 (principle of “literal reading”), 95-6 (alternating cycles and pre-existing time). Carone, like Plutarch, takes seriously the “law” of alternating cycles (92), rather than just the ages of Zeus and Cronus.



the same bears power and pilots the soul, but there will be some portion of time, and there has already been many times, in which the reason becomes dull and falls asleep, filled with forgetting of what befits it, the part accustomed to the body and empathetic with it drags and weighs down and unravels the conveyance of everything on the right side, but it is not able to break through entirely, since the better parts carry it back and look toward the model of god, who helps to turn and guide it.<sup>174</sup>

John Dillon finds it “rather disturbing that Plutarch should introduce [this image] here, as it implies a cyclic sequence of order and disorder in the universe which he does not seem to hold elsewhere.” His solution is that Plutarch “merely wants to emphasize the continued presence of the Disorderly Soul in the world.”<sup>175</sup> The two are not mutually exclusive, however: there could always be some disorder present in the world soul, while cosmic cycles are an occasional, extreme cases. How this disorder manifests precisely is unclear, although his praise of the enduring stability of the *pax Romana* in *De fortuna Romanorum* might indicate that Plutarch does not conceive of history as an unending series of the decline and rise of civilizations,<sup>176</sup> yet if

<sup>174</sup> τὸ γὰρ παθητικὸν ἀναδίωσιν ἐξ ἑαυτῆς ἢ ψυχῆ, τοῦ δὲ νοῦ μετέσχευ ἀπὸ τῆς κρείττονος ἀρχῆς ἐγγενομένου. τῆς δὲ διπλῆς κοινωνίας ταύτης οὐδ’ ἢ περὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀπήλλακται φύσις, ἀλλ’ ἑτερορρεπούσα νῦν μὲν ὀρθοῦται τῆ ταυτοῦ περιόδῳ κράτος ἐχούση καὶ διακυβερνᾷ τὸν κόσμον· ἔσται δὲ τις χρόνου μοῖρα καὶ γέγονεν ἤδη πολλάκις, ἐν ᾗ τὸ μὲν φρόνιμον ἀμβλύνεται καὶ καταδαρθάνει λήθης ἐμπιπλάμενον τοῦ οἰκείου, τὸ δὲ σώματι σύνηθες ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ συμπαθὲς ἐφέλκεται καὶ βαρύνει καὶ ἀνελίσσει τὴν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ παντὸς πορείαν, ἀναρρῆξαι δ’ οὐ δύναται παντάπασι, ἀλλ’ ἀνήνεγκεν αὐτῆς τὰ βελτίω καὶ ἀνέβλεψε πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα θεοῦ συνεπιστρέφοντος καὶ συναπευθύνοντος (1026e-f). The opinions of the primordial world soul, in contrast, are described not in terms of nodding to sleep, but drenched in dream: “the power arranged around it [the indefinite] neither had articulate opinions nor did it have motions which were all ordered, but rather everything dreamlike (ἐνυπνιώδεις) and frenzied and disturbing the bodily, except when it by change it was falling upon the better” (ἢ τε περὶ τοῦτο τεταγμένη δύναμις οὔτε δόξας ἐνάρθρους οὔτε κινήσεις ἀπάσας εἶχε τεταγμένας, ἀλλὰ τὰς πολλὰς ἐνυπνιώδεις καὶ παραφόρους καὶ ταρατούσας τὸ σωματοειδές, ὅσα μὴ κατὰ τύχην τῷ βελτίονι περιέπιπτεν; 1024b).

<sup>175</sup> 1977: 205. See also Alt (1993: 19-20). Dillon then quotes a passage that describes the demiurge’s ordering “as far as practicable, there be communion and affinity and affinity accomplished through numbers and harmony” (ὡς ἀνυστὸν ἦν, κοινωνίαν πρὸς ἄλληλα καὶ φιλίαν ἐργασαμένου δι’ ἀριθμῶν καὶ ἀρμονίας, 1027a). He takes to mean that Plutarch “merely wants to emphasize the continued presence of the Disorderly Soul in the world, but that qualification is significant: the practicability of stability and harmony is implied to be limited, perhaps by varying degrees.” Dillon is interpreting Plutarch in the manner that Proclus interprets Plato.

<sup>176</sup> “The greatest powers and empires among men thus clashed and were driven together by chance, everyone wanting to win power over all others but no one being able, there was enormous destruction, wandering, and migration, throughout every people, until the time that Rome took strength and expansion, binding tribes and peoples in itself, even foreign kingdoms across the sea. She obtained a magnificent and stable seat, her reign enduring as an order of peace and a single, inevitable cycle” (οὕτω τῶν μεγίστων ἐν ἀνθρώποις δυνάμεων καὶ ἡγεμονιῶν κατὰ τύχας ἐλαυνομένων καὶ συμφερομένων ὑπὸ τοῦ μηδένα κρατεῖν βούλεσθαι δὲ πάντας, ἀμήχανος <ἦν> ἢ φθορὰ καὶ πλάνη καὶ μεταβολὴ πᾶσα πάντων, μέχρις οὗ τῆς Ῥώμης ἰσχὺν καὶ αὐξῆσιν λαβούσης καὶ ἀναδησαμένης τοῦτο μὲν ἔθνη καὶ δῆμους ἐν αὐτῇ τοῦτο δ’ ἀλλοφύλους καὶ διαποντίους βασιλείων ἡγεμονίας ἔδραν

he had a physical upheaval in mind, a periodic waning of the laws that govern demiurge's cosmic order, then human chaos would be merely a corollary.

But some scholars fasten upon the detail of becoming dull and sleeping (ἀμβλύνεται καὶ καταδαρθάνει), and compare a passage of Alcinous:

And god does not make the soul of the world, which exists always, but orders it, and someone might even say that in this way he makes it, waking and turning its mind and it towards himself, as if from some heavy sleep or slumber, so that the soul might look toward the intelligible things in him and receive the forms and shapes, aiming after his thoughts.<sup>177</sup>

From this, Dillon, for instance, postulates a shared source for Alcinous and Plutarch.<sup>178</sup> But the salient similarity is image of a sleeping or waking world soul and, as J. H. Loenen thoroughly details, the two authors use it in strikingly differently ways, and toward different ends.<sup>179</sup>

Plutarch's description of the world soul's chaotic tendency, however, is much more consistent with his earlier interpretation of the myth in Plato's *Politicus*: given his commitment to the unity of the Platonic corpus, it would be surprising if his conception of the instability of the world soul differed between interpretations.

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ἔσχε τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ἀσφάλειαν, εἰς κόσμον εἰρήνης καὶ ἓνα κύκλον τῆς ἡγεμονίας ἄπταιστον περιφερομένης; 317b-c). Plutarch's view of civilizational cycles is more reminiscent of Hegel than Herodotus. This work may, however, be early if it was prompted by Plutarch's own travels to Rome. Dillon (1997) thus suggests 78 C.E. (236n5).

<sup>177</sup> καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν δὲ αἰεὶ οὕσαν τοῦ κόσμου οὐχὶ ποιεῖ ὁ θεός, ἀλλὰ κατακοσμεῖ, καὶ ταύτη λέγοιτ' ἂν καὶ ποιεῖν, ἐγείρων καὶ ἐπιστρέφων πρὸς αὐτὸν τὸν τε νοῦν αὐτῆς καὶ αὐτὴν ὥσπερ ἐκ κάρου τινὸς βαθέος ἢ ὕπνου, ὅπως ἀποβλέπουσα πρὸς τὰ νοητὰ αὐτοῦ δέχεται τὰ εἶδη καὶ τὰς μορφάς, ἐφιεμένη τῶν ἐκείνου νοημάτων (XIV.3).

<sup>178</sup> 1977: "this image of the sleeping World Soul... is rather mysterious in origin. It is not a Platonic image in this form, though the image of our life as a sleep or dream is an old and respectable one. It may simply be an imaginative development of the *Politicus* myth, but the fact that it is found in both Plutarch and Albinus suggests that it is far older than both" (206). Cf. Bos (2004: 177).

<sup>179</sup> 1957: "in Albinus there is no trace of the view that the world soul is the principle of evil. Although he does not speak about it explicitly, it is probable that, in accordance with the current opinion of his time, he regarded matter as such. The most important difference, however, is that, according to Plutarch, God formed the cosmos out of (in a literal sense) pre-existent (animated and chaotically moving) matter... In Albinus, on the contrary, the cosmos is co-existent with chaos, and God's causality has a metaphysical and extra-temporal character" (48).

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that Plutarch presents the interpretation of Plato as a distinctive sort of discourse, which implicitly consists in consistently applied exegetical axioms, such as the deeply held assumption of Plato's consistency. Apparent contradictions arise, it seems, because of the vexing difficulty and importance of the subject, which forms a fundamental part of Plutarch's metaphysics. The *Timaeus* is presented as a complex puzzle, which requires careful comparison with other dialogues to fit together. Numenius, as the next chapter argues, marks a departure from Plutarch by arguing that Plato used myth to piously shroud important philosophical ideas from the vulgar masses, while Plutarch never imputes this motive to Plato. Rather, he associates it with Egyptian and Pythagorean symbolism.<sup>180</sup> As a result, interpretation is required to bring out the hidden truth, not just in the central myth of Isis and Osiris, which prompts Plutarch to propose a variety of allegorical interpretations in his largely exegetical treatise, but also even in single hieroglyphs. After he lists great sages who travelled to Egypt—Solon, Thales, Plato, Eudoxus, Pythagoras, and perhaps Lycurgus—he emphasizes Pythagoras' particular debt to Egyptian wisdom:<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> On the latter, see Hardie (1992: 4781-3), Struck (2004: 96-104), and Thom (2013). Because Plutarch refers to them as *σύμβολα* or *αἰνίγματα*, I prefer the term *symbola* to *acusmata*, which appears often in the scholarship but, as Zhmud (2012) points out, only found in Iamblichus in antiquity (173-4). Lists of *symbola* and interpretations, with some differences, are found in e.g. DL VIII.17-8, Porph. *VP* §42. See further Struck (2004: 103n58). This tradition is particularly associated with Anaximenes, Aristotle, and Androcydes, who is especially associated with ethical interpretation—e.g. Burkert (1972: 174). According to Porphyry, divine names and the exhortations are two different sorts of *symbola*, the former of which Aristotle collected together (§41). He divides Pythagoreans into two groups (οἱ μὲν ἐκαλοῦντο μαθηματικοί, οἱ δ' ἀκουσματικοί; §37), apparently associating one group with one sort of utterance (ἢ διεξοδικῶς ἢ συμβολικῶς). The degree to which this represents an authentic distinction, however, haunts the scholarship on Pythagoreanism: Zhmud (2012) argues that some of the *symbola* were early but the distinction of sects is "Imperial" (169-205), while Horky (2013) argues that the division is latent in Aristotle (3-35), reflecting an early disagreement which is central to his reconstruction of "mathematical Pythagoreanism." On their connection to Hesiodic adages, see Proc. *In Hes. ad* 707-8, 744-5, Struck (2004: 103-4), and Zhmud (2012: 204-5).

<sup>181</sup> Plutarch tends to present unnamed followers of Pythagoras as particularly interested in Egyptian tradition, such as when he claims that "it is clear the Pythagoreans too consider Typhon a *daimonic* power" (φαίνονται δὲ καὶ οἱ Πυθαγορικοὶ τὸν Τυφῶνα δαιμονικὴν ἰγγοῦμενοι δύναμιν; *De Is.* 363a), before relating a list of identifications between gods and shapes that he attributed to Eudoxus. He explains one Pythagorean *symbolon*, "the sea is a tear of Cronus" (ἡ θάλαττα Κρόνου δάκρυόν ἐστιν), by reference to Egyptian attitudes to fish and the sea (364a). See further 367e-f. On the connection between Egypt and Pythagoras, see *supra* pg. 113.

He most of all, as it seems, was struck by awe and marveled at the men: he imitated their symbolic and mysterious manner, mixing doctrines with riddles. Many of the Pythagorean exhortations desist from none of the manner of the letters called hieroglyphics, such as the “do not sit upon a chariot” and “do not sit on a bushel” and “do not stir fire in a house with a sword.”<sup>182</sup>

Plutarch then gives examples of hieroglyphs where the symbolism of the letter illustrates a quality of what it signifies. The representation of the heavens with a cobra, for instance, signifies “agelessness because of everlastingness;”<sup>183</sup> nor do they call Hermes the Dog literally (κυρίως), but rather because of the mental traits Plato attributes to dogs in the *Respublica*.<sup>184</sup>

Plutarch, it seems, views these Pythagorean *symbola* as a distinctive non-literal sort of signifier, motivated by the Egyptian concern for secrecy. A few examples of interpretations, particularly of their ethical significance, are scattered through the corpus.<sup>185</sup> Most extensively, in the symposiastic vignette surrounding Moderatus’ student Lucius, the Neopythagorean boasts

<sup>182</sup> μάλιστα δ’ οὔτος, ὡς ἔοικε, θαυμασθεὶς καὶ θαυμάσας τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀπεμιμήσατο τὸ συμβολικὸν αὐτῶν καὶ μυστηριῶδες ἀναμίξας αἰνίγμασι τὰ δόγματα· τῶν γὰρ καλουμένων ἱερογλυφικῶν γραμμάτων οὐθὲν ἀπολείπει τὰ πολλὰ τῶν Πυθαγορικῶν παραγγελμάτων, οἷόν ἐστι τὸ μὴ “ἐσθίειν ἐπὶ δίφρου” μηδ’ “ἐπὶ χοίνικος καθῆσθαι” μηδὲ “φοίνικα φυτεῦειν” μηδὲ “πῦρ μαχαίρᾳ σκαλεῦειν ἐν οἰκίᾳ” (354e). The *symbolon* about stirring fire was common enough in the Imperial period for Lucian to parody it in *Ver. hist.* II.28. Many doubt the historicity of Pythagoras’ travels, but cf. Kingsley (1994).

<sup>183</sup> ... ἀγήρω δι’ ἀϊδιότητα... (355a). He later specifies that the snake does not age (ἀγήρω, 381a). Griffiths (1970) surveys possible referents for this hieroglyph (288). See also 354f, 355b, and 363f. Cf. Porph. *VP* §12.

<sup>184</sup> 355b. On the hermeneutic significance of *κυρίως*, see *infra* pg. 165.

<sup>185</sup> In the *Numa*, Plutarch compares the king’s religious institutions, such as assuring that men attend thoughtfully with the exhortation *hoc age* (ὄκ ἄγε) with Pythagorean piety (XIV.1-2). He compares other institutions more extensively: “many of his other exhortations also resemble those of the Pythagoreans” (ἦν δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων παραγγελμάτων αὐτοῦ πολλὰ τοῖς Πυθαγορικοῖς εὐκότα), listing three Pythagorean examples—“of which they keep the meaning hidden from the many” (ὧν ἐκάστου τὴν διάνοιαν ἀπεκρύπτοντο πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς)—with three attributed to Numa—“some of which thus bear a hidden significance” (οὕτως ἕνα... ἀπόρητον ἔχει τὸν λόγον; §3). Plutarch also compares Roman customs to the Pythagorean *symbola* in *Quaest. Rom.* LXXII.281a-b and CXII.290e-f. See also Plutarch in *Quaest. conv.* VII.4.703e-f. A fragment in Stobaeus (III.1.199 = frg. 202 Sandbach) gives a more abstract account that compares Pythagorean obscurity with Orphic, Delphic, Heraclitean sorts, culminating: “thus with Pythagorean *symbola* what is signified seems to be hidden and what it hidden is understood” (οὕτω τῶν Πυθαγορικῶν συμβόλων καὶ τὸ φράζεσθαι δοκοῦν κρυπτόμενόν ἐστι καὶ τὸ κρύπτεσθαι νοούμενον). The ascription is based only on Wytenbach’s stylistic intuition, and therefore, as Sandbach (1969) notes, “far from certain” (377). Cf. Scannapieco (2012: 197n20). In the treatise *De libris educandis*, transmitted as the beginning of the Plutarchean *Morlia* but generally thought to be inauthentic, praises the practice of teaching them to children as “riddles” (αἰνίγμασιν) that must be interpreted (ἄπερ ἐγὼ παραθεὶς ἐξηγήσομαι), providing short interpretations as examples. “Do not stir fire with steel” (πῦρ σιδήρῳ μὴ σκαλεῦειν), for instance, means “do not provoke an angry man” (12e); “do not eat beans” (κυάμων ἀπέχεσθαι) means say out of politics, for “votes through beans” (κυαμενταὶ... ψηφοφορία) were once an institution for removing archons (12f).

that his people, the Etruscans, were the only ones to truly preserve and live in accordance with them, implying disagreement over what they mean.<sup>186</sup> Perhaps in an attempt to impress the other symposiasts, Lucius offers five evidently more obscure examples, such as “shake bedclothes out upon awaking,” “do not leave the mark of a lifted pot in the ashes,” and “do not allow swallows in the house.”<sup>187</sup> The crowd discusses the last, beginning with a traditional ethical explanation: “the means by which some of the men of old thought sufficient to solve the *symbolon*, that it warns through riddles about the slanderous chitterings of companions, but Lucius himself did not approve,” because whispering is not distinctive to swallows, which are not particularly noisy for birds.<sup>188</sup>

Sulla, the host, ventures to offer a mythological aetiology with the tragedy of Philomela, but the character of Plutarch offers a two-pronged interpretation that wins over the crowd. First, he gives a zoological explanation that latches onto unsavory characteristics of the swallow that are particularly objectionable in a Pythagorean context: it is a flesheater (σαρκοφάγος), with a perverse proclivity for “divine and musical cicadas,” and, although they build their nests in human structures, “the swallow is by nature misanthropic, forever untamable because of its distrust and suspicion.”<sup>189</sup> Taking a start from this specific scientific lore, Plutarch articulates a specifically Pythagorean ethical interpretation:

<sup>186</sup> ταῦτα γὰρ ἔφη τῶν Πυθαγορικῶν λεγόντων καὶ γραφόντων μόνους ἔργῳ Τυρρηνοῦς ἐξευλαβεῖσθαι καὶ φυλάττειν (*Quaest. conv.* VIII.7.727c).

<sup>187</sup> ... τὸ συνταράττειν ἀναστάντας ἐξ εὐνῆς τὰ στρώματα καὶ χύτρας τύπον ἀρθείσης ἐν σποδῷ μὴ ἀπολείπειν ἀλλὰ συγγεῖν καὶ χελιδόνας οἰκία μὴ δέχεσθαι... (727c). Braccini & Pellizer (1998) list parallels (262-3).

<sup>188</sup> καὶ γὰρ ᾧ μόνῳ τινὲς τῶν παλαιῶν ᾤοντο λύειν τὸ σύμβολον, ὡς πρὸς τοὺς διαβόλους καὶ ψιθύρους τῶν συνήθων ἠνιγμένον, οὐδ' αὐτὸς ὁ Λεύκιος ἐδοκίμαζεν· ψιθυρισμοῦ μὲν γὰρ ἤκιστα χελιδόνι μέτεστι, λαλιάς <δὲ> καὶ πολυφωνίας οὐ μᾶλλον ἢ κίτταις καὶ πέρδιξι καὶ ἀλεκτορίσιν (727c-d). The use of λύειν as resolve a question before the symposiasts mirrors its use with *problema* in the context of Platonic interpretation. The reference to ancient interpretations could perhaps refer to Androcydes' ethical interpretation of the *symbolon*. Cf. Braccini & Pellizer (1998): “risale verosimilmente ad Anassimandro e conobbe un certo sviluppo” (260).

<sup>189</sup> σαρκοφάγος γὰρ ἐστὶν καὶ μάλιστα τοὺς τέττιγας, ἱεροὺς καὶ μουσικοὺς ὄντας, ἀποκτίνουσι καὶ σιτεῖται (727e, cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 258e-9d)... ἢ δὲ χελιδὼν τῷ φύσει μισάνθρωπος εἶναι καὶ δι' ἀπιστίαν ἀτιθάσειτος ἀεὶ καὶ ὑποπτος (728a). In contrast, the stork (πελαργός) kills dangerous snakes but takes nothing from humans (727f).

If, therefore, it is necessary in these sorts of things to speculate not through the obvious path, but considering them as if reflections of something in another thing, then he sets the swallows as the example of the fickle and ungrateful man and forbids us from taking on people who opportunistically approach and steal upon us as companions for long, nor to let them share in hearth and home and the most sacred of things.<sup>190</sup>

The issue with the earlier interpretation was not the ethical orientation, but the facts it was built upon. Correcting these, Plutarch constructs a plausible explanation which spurs the other guests to more boldly “make plausible ethical solutions” (ἠθικὰς ἐπιεικῶς ποιούμενοι τὰς λύσεις) for the *symbola*. The prohibition against letting the pot leave a mark, Philinus explains, is an admonition against anger, or perhaps resentment.<sup>191</sup> Sulla, who had previously offered an unpersuasive mythological answer, gets the final word to show that he learned how to play the game: the shaking of bedsheets is an admonition against napping. He takes another Pythagorean trope, that companions do not relieve each other from burdens but rather increase them to discourage laziness, to “corroborate” (συμμαρτυρεῖν) his interpretation.<sup>192</sup>

Just as Plutarch presented Platonic interpretation as a symposiastic activity with a certain set form and consistent interpretive principles, so too are interpretations of Pythagorean *symbola* presented here as a distinctive sort of intellectual pastime. While the literal details are evidently important, the greater task for exegesis is discerning the human qualities implied by the qualities of the literal details, especially in an ethical context that emphasizes ‘Pythagorean values such as secrecy and austere living. Interpreting Plato’s *Timaeus* and the Pythagorean *symbola* are thus both presented as distinctive forms of discourse.<sup>193</sup> Yet while the latter are relatively simple

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<sup>190</sup> εἶπερ οὖν δεῖ τὰ τοιαῦτα μὴ κατ’ εὐθυωρίαν ἀλλ’ ἀνακλάσαντας ὥσπερ ἐμφάσεις ἐτέρων ἐν ἐτέροις θεωρεῖν, παράδειγμα τὰς χελιδόνας τοῦ ἀβεβαίου καὶ ἀχαρίστου θέμενος οὐκ ἔξ τούτων ἕνεκα καιροῦ προσφερομένους καὶ ὑποδουμένους ποιήσεις συνήθεις ἐπὶ πλεόν, ἐστίας καὶ οἴκου καὶ τῶν ἀγιοτάτων μεταδιδόντας (728a-b).

<sup>191</sup> Philinus, perhaps relevantly, is described several times in the *Quaest. conv.* as a refraining from meat, including earlier in this vignette.

<sup>192</sup> ὁ δὲ Σύλλας μᾶλλον εἶκαζε κοιμήσεως μεθημερινῆς ἀποτροπὴν εἶναι τὸ σύμβολον... τούτοις δὲ συμμαρτυρεῖν ἐδόκει καὶ τὸ παρεγγυᾶν τοὺς Πυθαγορικοὺς τοῖς ἐταίροις μηδενὸς ἀφαιρεῖν βάρους, συνεπιτιθέσθαι δὲ καὶ συνεπιφορτίζειν, ὡς μηδεμίαν σχολὴν μηδὲ ῥαστώνην ἀποδεχομένους (728c).

<sup>193</sup> As is, perhaps, the interpretation of Egyptian symbolism and myths, especially in *De Is*.

signifiers that are constrained to a specifically ethical context, Plutarch treats the *Timaeus* as a complex narrative whose difficult details, when illuminated by passages from the rest of the Platonic corpus, offers an account of the relationship between the highest metaphysical objects and the ordered, ensouled world we inhabit now. Both discourses can perhaps be seen as serious games, but the game of Platonic interpretation is central to Plutarch's philosophy. As the next chapters demonstrate, Plutarch's imitations of Plato's eschatological and teleological myths reflect the centrality of Platonic interpretation no less than the *in prima persona* exegesis of the *Quaestiones Platonicae* and *De animae procreatione*.

#### *Appendix: the genres of Platonic exegesis*

It might seem strange that Plutarch, who evidently wrote commentaries on poetic texts such as Hesiod, Empedocles, and Aratus—presumably in the Alexandrian tradition<sup>194</sup>—should have composed the *Quaestiones Platonicae* and *De animae procreatione* in the genre of problems and answers, rather than composing a full commentary on the *Timaeus* as, it seems, Calvenus Taurus would write only one or two generations after his death.<sup>195</sup> In this appendix, I

<sup>194</sup> The evidence for Plutarch's poetical commentaries tends to come from Aulus Gellius: he mentions a discussion of onions he found *apud Plutarchum in quarto in Hesiodum commentario* (XX.8 = frg. 102 Sandbach), and discussions of Pythagoras and Epicurus *in primo librorum quos de Homero composuit* (IV.11 = frg. 122) and *in secundo* (II.8-9, frgs. 123-4). Hippolytus claims: καὶ Πλούταρχος ποιεῖται λόγους ἐν ταῖς πρὸς Ἐμπεδοκλέα δέκα βίβλους (*Refutatio* V.20.5 = frg. 24). He apparently also appears in the *scholia* on Aratus, Hesiod, and Nicander, although these (except the *Hesiodica* that discuss textual criticism) could have been taken from other sources. Plutarch discusses critical marks (παράσημα) used on Homeric text, however, in *Quaest. Plat.* X.1010d. On the Alexandrians, Pfeiffer's (1968) standard account reveals uncertainty when he identifies some ὑπομνήματα (defined broadly in 29) as comprising "a loose series of notes" (e.g. Lycophron and Eratosthenes) and others "commentaries on individual plays," which is how he understands Εὐφρόνιος ὁ γραμματικὸς ἐν Ὑπομνήματι Πλούτου Ἀριστοφάνους (161). The ὑπομνήματα attributed to Aristarchus, he argues, discuss the entire text of Homer (among others), with perhaps two versions, the first based on Aristophanes' text, and the second his own (217). Diogenes Laertius attributes six books of ἀπορημάτων Ὀμηρικῶν to Aristotle (V.26), and Gudeman (1927) lists Alexandrian ζητήματα Ὀμηρικά, such as Zenodotus' (2513-4), but none of these survive.

<sup>195</sup> It has been suggested from a title in the Lamprias catalogue that Plutarch wrote a commentary on Aristotle's *Categoriae*—which seems to have already been the subject of a commentary by the first century B.C.E. Peripatetic Boethius—but cf. Sandbach (1982).

argue that there is no indication of a commentary on Plato when Plutarch was writing, so that this genre of *Quaestiones*, which persists in importance until Late Antiquity, was still the predominant vehicle for philosophical interpretation.<sup>196</sup> This, I suggest, might not be coincidental, although the evidence is only partial: the philological argumentation of *De animae procreatione* is relatively sophisticated and elicited philological responses from Taurus, which perhaps indicates that sort of argumentation in particular spurred Platonists to begin composing commentaries by adapting the form of lemmatic poetic commentaries.<sup>197</sup> It is only as the philosophical authority of Plato and Aristotle developed further in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries C.E. that this becomes the predominant genre for philosophical inquiry.

Many scholars, however, argue that the Early Academic Crantor composed a commentary on the *Timaeus*, although the only evidence for this is that Proclus describes him with the term “exegete.”<sup>198</sup> Others are more confident about Eudorus’ time, the first century

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<sup>196</sup> The Latin term *Quaestiones* is apparently something of a catch-all category, as the the Greek terms are varied: the contrast there is between Συμποσιακῶν προβλημάτων βιβλία and Πλατωνικὰ ζητήματα, compared to Αἰτίαι Ρωμαϊκά and Αἰτίαι φυσικαί (also traditionally translated *Quaestiones*). There are also extant Αἰτίαι Ἑλληνικαί, as well as six other lost Αἰτίαι in the Lamprias catalogue (nos. 119, 139, 149, 160, 161, 167). Gudeman (1927) already identified Plutarch with “eine besonders rührige Tätigkeit” in this broader genre (2535). Cf. Harrison (2000): “Although Plutarch would seem to have been determined to preserve the distinctions among the genres, perfect consistency is illusory. Even Plutarch himself occasionally mixed terms, and consistent use of *quaestiones* for the four genres by medieval and Renaissance scholiasts and commentators recognizes a connection between the give-and-take of sympotic literature and the more straightforward question-and-answer format of αἰτίαι” (194). Genre can perhaps influence or delimit the sorts of arguments Plutarch makes. E.g. Meeusen (2016): “We are very remote from the arguments in the ‘tierpsychologische Schriften’, where Plutarch, in an overt anti-Stoic fashion, often emphasises the rational abilities of animals in combination with their moral capacities. Interestingly, the irrational nature of animals is also a common topic in Ps.-Aristotle’s *Problems*, which served as Plutarch’s model in his own natural problems. One may presume, then, that the conceptual differences and inconsistencies in Plutarch’s writings on animals are genre-related” (65).

<sup>197</sup> Aulus Gellius attributes a commentary on the *Grg.* to Taurus—*noster Taurus in primo commentariorum, quos in Gorgiam Platonis composuit* (VII.14.5)—before quoting part of the final myth (525a) in Greek (§7). Philoponus claims “certainly Taurus says in his commentary on the *Timaeus* these things on the lemma” (λέγει γοῦν ἐν τοῖς εἰς τὸν Τιμαίων ὑπομνήμασιν ἐπὶ λέξεως ταῦτα, frg. 22b.9-10), which seems to mean a relatively formal commentary. Favorinus’ fragments include ὑπομνήματα, but scholars of philosophy often dismiss him: e.g. Dillon (1977) “Favorinus of Arles, a noted sophist” (307); Tarrant (1996): “I believe there is very little indication that Favorinus was interested in exegetical matters. The case of Taurus is quite different” (176n6; cf. 192-3); cf. Moreschini (2015: 153-5). Plutarch’s aim, however, was more immediately and specifically to elucidate solutions to the particularly hard parts of the *Ti.*, and not to systematically comment on the text as a whole.

<sup>198</sup> ὁ πρῶτος τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐξηγητής (*In Tim.* I.76.2). See e.g. Jones (1916: 71n7), Mette (1984: 23-8), Dillon (2003a: 218), and Obbink (2003: 179).



B.C.E. Luc Brisson, for instance, characterizes it as a time when “philosophical courses became primarily commentaries on texts” as a result of Sulla’s sacking of Athens in 87 B.C.E. and the consequential diaspora of “the four philosophical schools.”<sup>199</sup> The sort of running commentary on Plato imagined here would presumably have the aim of comprehensive comment, a prologue on the work as a whole, and perhaps *lemmata*, such as the anonymous *Commentarius in Platonis Theaetetum* offers.<sup>200</sup> Yet aside from this, the evidence is rather lacking until the generations immediately after Plutarch, of Taurus and the Peripatetic Aspasius, the teachers of Aulus Gellius and Galen, respectively.<sup>201</sup> Eudorus, for example, is sometimes held to be an early commentator, but according to Stobaeus, his “book worth buying,” called a “division of the account about philosophy” (διαίρεσις τοῦ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν λόγου), was apparently organized “problem by problem” (προβληματικῶς), and we have no indication of the structure of his other works.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> 2004: 57.

<sup>200</sup> Dörrie & Baltes (1993), for instance, deemed *De an. proc.* “der erste Kommentar zu einem Platondialog, der uns erhalten ist” (213) and Tarrant (1996) takes this work, along with the *Quaest. Plat.*, as evidence that “the commentary was therefore becoming an important vehicle in the teaching of Plato” in the second century (175). Sluiter’s (2000) survey of commentaries “whose interest is not primarily literary from the fourth to the first centuries B.C.E.” is indicatively light until the 1<sup>st</sup> century (185-7). Niehoff (2007) is even more skeptical (166n14).

<sup>201</sup> The dating of Aspasius is indeed based on Galen’s report that, among the other philosophers his father had him study under, such as a student of Gaius (see above), one was also a student of Aspasius (Ἀσπασίου τοῦ Περιπατητικοῦ μαθητῆς; *Aff. dig.* VIII.41-2). Barnes (1999) takes a mention of the Olympeion (106.1-6), completed by Hadrian in 131 CE, to perhaps hint that Aspasius was an Athenian living shortly thereafter (3). The manuscripts of his commentary on the *Eth. Nic.*, the earliest extant commentary on Aristotle, contains lemmas, which Wittwer (1999) argues were, with perhaps one exception (82-3), indeed perhaps planned by Aspasius.

<sup>202</sup> ἔστιν οὖν Εὐδώρου τοῦ Ἀλεξανδρέως, Ἀκαδημαικοῦ φιλοσόφου, διαίρεσις τοῦ κατὰ φιλοσοφίαν λόγου, βιβλίον ἀξιόκτητον, ἐν ᾧ πάσαν ἐπεξελήλυθε προβληματικῶς τὴν ἐπιστήμην (II.7.2.64-7 = frg. 1 Mazzarelli). Griffin (2015), however, is skeptical: “several further works and commentaries are inferred from fragments and testimonia, but I take it that, in reality, any of the following testimonies may equally well derive from essays in the Διαίρεσις” (80); See also Tarrant (2000: 51-5) and Niehoff (2007: 168n23). We have no idea what form this commentary took, and it would have been strange if it were lemmatic, centuries before conclusive evidence of another. Cf. Dillon (2006): “the earliest commentator is probably Eudorus of Alexandria (fl. c. 25 BCE). We know from Plutarch (*Mor.* 1013b, 1020c) that he composed a fairly comprehensive commentary on the *Timaeus*, but we know of no comments from him on any other dialogue” (20). Neither passage actually specifies what sort of work Plutarch found an opinion in: the former takes the vague form of ὁ μὲν Εὐδωρος ... οἶεται, and the latter similarly of ὁ μὲν οὖν Εὐδωρος ἐπακολουθήσας Κράντορι πρῶτον ἔλαβε... Cherniss (1976) skeptically offers as a *comparandum* a papyrus fragment (*POxy.* 1609, vol. xiii, pgs. 94-96), then argues that the argument for attributing this to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE Alexandrian is entirely circular—“Eudorus, who has recently been proposed as the source of an ever-increasing number of later texts” (171nc). For Eudorus, however, Tarrant (2000) argues that he had a shaping influence over the *Tht.* commentator (72-4, 162, 165), whom he had earlier suggested as Eudorus himself (1983). One could argue

Whether the title of ὑπομνήματα signals this sort of comprehensive commentary is part of the controversy, since it could just mean notes, as Plutarch manifestly uses it in *De tranquillitate animi*, or it could mean comprehensive philosophical commentary, as Porphyry seems to use it.<sup>203</sup> Ferrari and Baldi, on the other hand, suggest the category of a “Spezialkommentare,” evidently a restricted commentary on a particular problem or set of problems, which might prove preferable for considering Plutarch’s *De animae procreatione*.<sup>204</sup> This treatise, on the other hand, shares affinities with the *Quaestiones* genre, such as the language of “solution.”<sup>205</sup> Plutarch’s interpretive principles, moreover—such as the consistency of Plato and, implicitly, the

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that the emendations attributed to him by Aspasius (frg. 2 Mazzarelli = Alexander Aphrodisias, *In Met.* 58.25-9.8) implies the sort of philological context of commentary writing, on which cf. Bonazzi (2007: 375-6).

<sup>203</sup> In the scholarship on Plutarch, it is tied to his notes which he describes himself as consulting at the beginning of the treatise 464f. Although Plutarch emphasizes that he made these ὑπομνήματα for himself in the last clause, rather than gathering them from other sources, this was a significant impetus for *Quellenforschung*-minded scholars to find shadowy “sources,” as the introduction to the Loeb still evidences. Van der Stockt (1999) has extensively pushed back against this idea by arguing that Plutarch reuses the same notes. Demulder (2016) has similarly argued that Plutarch used such a note on the *Ti.* both in *De an. proc.* and in a speech of Lamprias in *De fac.* Does this mean that Plutarch’s ὑπομνήματα were commentaries (particularly on Plato) for personal use? Or were they more similar to what we find in the *Quaest. Plat.*? But beyond Plutarch, the term can be understood and translated as “commentary,” such as when Porphyry describes the reading practice of Plotinus’ circle: ὑπομνήματα is thus used by Porphyry to describe what was read in meetings (ἐν δὲ ταῖς συνουσίαις), and he mentions works by Severus, Cronius, Numenius, Gaius, Atticus, and some Peripatetics (§14.10-14).

<sup>204</sup> 2002: 11-6. They also trace this genre to Crantor. The other extant example would be the second century C.E. treatise by Theon of Smyrna entitled *De utilitate mathematicae*. They also emphasize the generic similarities between the *Quaest. Plat.* and *De an. proc.*: “Per quanto concerne questo secondo aspetto, la vicinanza tra il De procreatione e le Quaestiones Platonicae non attiene solamente alla presenza di un comune repertorio di procedure esegetiche, ma arriva a interessare la struttura stessa dei due scritti che non sempre risulta chiaramente distinguibile” (9). By allowing him to argue against ostensible contradictions in the *Ti.* by reference primarily to other Platonic texts, with the expectation that this would yield a *plausible* elucidation of the qualities of the world soul, the *Quaest. Plat.* and *De an. proc.* suited his purpose, as we will see in the subsequent sections. As Sheppard (1980) argues, in her characterization of the background of Proclus’ 5<sup>th</sup> Essay in *In Remp.*, itself a series of ten questions on book II of Plato’s *Resp.*, and thus a form rather unlike his more common lemmatic commentaries: “although this is not line-by-line commentary, it is commentary in a wider sense of the term as a comment on problems that arise in the course of studying a particular text. ... just as today, the study of texts could also take the form of the selection and discussion of specific problems” (21-2). She also compares Proclus’ *De decem dubitationibus circa providentiam*.

<sup>205</sup> The “first exposition” is called thus (ἀπόδειξις δὲ πρώτη μὲν ἢ... λύσις; 1015f), which sets the problem in the same terms as the various *Quaest.* genres, where satisfaction is reached when a problem is dissolved (sometimes thus using a form or compound of λύειν). This is how the symposiasts talk about difficult philosophical, scientific, and literary inquiries in the *Quaest. conv.*, e.g. 702e: γέλασας δ’ ὁ Φλωῶρος ‘οὐκοῦν’ εἶπεν ‘ἐπεὶ τοῦτο τὸ πρόβλημα λέλυται, ...’; 689d: ... ἄνευ δὲ τούτων οὐδὲ λέλυται τῆς ἀπορίας τὸ μέγιστον...; 720d: καὶ ὁ Ἀμμώνιος ἔφη τοῦτο μὲν ὑπ’ Ἀριστοτέλους [*Probl.* 903b13] λελύσθαι (similarly, 734e). The term λύσις is also connected with ζητήματα, the Greek term for the *Quaest. Plat.*, as Gudeman (1927), still the standard account, argues (2511).

preferability of interpreting Plato through Plato, rather than appealing to other philosophers or authorities—are shared between the two works.

The *Quaestiones Platonicae* genre, furthermore, remains apart of Platonist communities well past the age of Plutarch. In Porphyry’s presentation of intellectual life in the *Vita Plotini*, for instance, there it still plays a role in the third century C.E., despite the appearance by that point of lemmatic commentaries. He mentions that “Euboulus the Platonic Successor from Athens wrote and sent treatises about some Platonic questions” (συγγράμματα ὑπὲρ τινῶν Πλατωνικῶν ζητημάτων) to Plotinus, but Porphyry only mentions that he was personally entrusted with studying and responding to them, and gives no idea about their content.<sup>206</sup> Given the dearth of evidence, the scholarship on Plutarch’s ten *Quaestiones Platonicae* is unsurprisingly divided on their nature and status as texts.<sup>207</sup> Are they “literary” texts drawn from “a solid foundation of notes (*hypomnēmata*),” as Klotz and Oikonomopoulou argue, or themselves “ten separate notes on Platonic passages that [Plutarch] had written at different times and had found no suitable occasion to incorporate into his other compositions,” as Cherniss posits?<sup>208</sup> On this issue, the use of imperatives such as “consider whether...” or “see that...” seems to favor the “literary” view, because they imply a didactic context.<sup>209</sup> The generic origins of Plutarch’s *Quaestiones* in general

<sup>206</sup> γράφοντος δὲ Εὐβούλου Ἀθήνηθεν τοῦ Πλατωνικοῦ διαδόχου καὶ πέμποντος συγγράμματα ὑπὲρ τινῶν Πλατωνικῶν ζητημάτων ἐμοὶ Πορφυρίῳ ταῦτα δίδοσθαι ἐποίει καὶ σκοπεῖν καὶ ἀναφέρειν αὐτῷ τὰ γεγραμμένα ἡξίου (§15.18-22).

<sup>207</sup> The first eight books of Plutarch’s *Quaest. conv.* each contain exactly ten problems, and the preface to the ninth and last urges one against surprise (οὐ θαυμαστόν) that “the number questions might exceed the customary ten of *zētēmata*” (ὁ δ’ ἀριθμὸς ἂν υπερβάλλῃ τὴν συνήθη δεκάδα τῶν ζητημάτων; 736c).

<sup>208</sup> Klotz and Oikonomopoulou (2011: 17); Cherniss (1976: 4). Meeusen (2016) argues that the *Quaestiones* in general were intended as school texts (177-82) and discusses the conceptual difficulty of the *Quaest. nat.* (which require “a minimal acquaintance with the theoretical and terminological apparatus”) compared to the more complex and difficult *Quaest. Plat.* (210-1). But Adams (2017) compares Philo’s systematicity and concludes: “It is unlikely, though, that Plutarch’s *Questions* are school related and more likely that they come from his own reading” (176).

<sup>209</sup> This imperative construction (similarly, ὄρα δὲ μὴ in I.1000d), I think, indicates that these texts are intended to be didactic, and not for Plutarch’s own use; cf. the ‘didactic tag’ *nonne uides* in Lucretius (e.g. II.196, 207, 263, etc.). There are other tags broadly of this sort, such as “or is it laughable...” (ἢ... γελοῖόν ἐστιν, ...; *Quaest. Plat.* IX.1008e). Cf. below on poetic quotations, another feature I take to be literary.

presents a puzzle, because they seem related to multiple extant works, such as Philo's *Quaestiones*, the Aristotelian *Problemata* tradition, and the Alexandrian tradition of poetic commentaries which Plutarch himself may have been following directly in some works.<sup>210</sup>

Leaving these questions dependent upon perhaps scant evidence aside, however, I want to suggest that both these shorter *Quaestiones Platonicae* and the longer *De animae procreatione* are reflections of the living practice that Plutarch depicts in his dialogues: they are explorations of difficult issues in Platonic interpretation that Plutarch evidently had a practice of sending to people such as the orator Paccius and his sons. They reflect a sort of “textual community,” where the truth is pursued by piecing together exegesis through fixed—mutually understood, even if sometimes unspoken—principles for reading a central text, such as the *Timaeus*. This practice is at the heart of Platonism, an emerging trend in the early Empire, but not entirely unlike Porphyry's depiction of the flourishing school of Plotinus, or what emerges from even later Neoplatonic *Vitae*.<sup>211</sup> Plutarch's creative imitation of Plato in dialogues—and particularly

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<sup>210</sup> Philo's *Quaestiones in Genesim* and *in Exodum* might seem similar in some respects, at least insofar as they interpret authoritative philosophical texts in the question-and-answer format. But, as Adams (2017: 180) argues, these span hundreds of questions each, apparently totaling 636, concerning passages distributed throughout their target texts. This vastness and distribution gives the collection an exhaustive quality which is unlike Plutarch's set of ten problems. On the Aristotelian *Problemata* tradition, Oikonomopoulou (2013) argues that it is a literary antecedent for all of Plutarch's *Quaestiones*, and characterizes each of the relevant works as essentially “Peripatetic” as a result: “the encyclopaedic zeal of his intellectual predecessors, the Peripatetics” (139); the *Problemata* are discussed in 133-138. The introduction and some of the essays in Klotz and Oikonomopoulou (2011) are similar (e.g. 18-21, although the genre of “The imperial miscellany” is also discussed in 22-4). Roskam (2011) similarly connects the *Quaest. Plat.* to the “Aristotelian and Peripatetic philosophical tradition” (423). This seems likely in certain places in the *QC*, such as when Plutarch depicts one character as reading “physical problems of Aristotle” and being spurred to further inquiry and discussion: προβλήμασιν Ἀριστοτέλους φυσικοῖς ἐντυγχάνων Φλωρος εἰς Θερμοπύλας κομισθεῖσαν κομισθεῖσιν αὐτὸς τε πολλῶν ἀποριῶν, ὅπερ εἰώθασι πάσχειν ἐπιεικῶς αἱ φιλόσοφοι φύσεις, ὑπεπίπλατο καὶ τοῖς ἐταίροις μετεδίδου (VIII.10, 734d); Oikonomopoulou (2013: 134-5). This discourse, moreover, is titled “why is it that we trust our autumnal dreams least?” and begins with the διὰ τί tag which is distinctive to the Aristotelian *Problemata*, as are many other of the *Quaest. conv.* do as well (in book VIII, for instance, 3, 4, 5, and 8; very often in the *Quaest. nat.*). But of the *Quaest. Plat.*, only the fifth begins with this distinctly Aristotelian tag, so the strict generic similarity seems limited in this case. Cf. Harrison (2000): “All but one of the ten ζητήματα in Plutarch's *Quaestiones Platonicae* are longer and more elaborate than the individual αἰτίαι, and most also begin with τί δήποτε, τί οὖν, πῶς or πῶς ποτέ rather than διὰ τί, the most frequent phrase introducing the question in the several collections of αἰτίαι” (195).

<sup>211</sup> The rules for interpretation differ between Plutarch's depiction of his own intellectual circle and that of Plotinus, however, such as on the role of Aristotle. Cf. Niehoff (2007: 178-91) on Celsus' and Porphyry's “textual communities” as polemic against Christianity.

through the myths examined in following chapters—is unparalleled in the evidence for subsequent Platonism, but it no less than the *Quaestiones* forms a particular sort of discourse for Platonic interpretation. While his myths themselves require interpretation, as with Plato’s, they imbue the dialogues with a deeper pleasure and wonder than the relatively dry, dialectical puzzle-solving of *De animae procreatione*.

### *Chapter three. Myth as ethical exhortation: hellish cures in Thespesius' myth in De sera*

Plutarch's dialogue *De sera numinis vindicta* opens with a character simply named Epicurus delivering a whirlwind assault on the concept of divine providence and sauntering off before the dumbstruck crowd of Plutarch and his fellow-Platonists can respond.<sup>1</sup> As they regain composure, they address one contention in particular: if the world is justly governed, why does so much evil seem to go unpunished? The interlocutors raise further questions and the character of Plutarch responds at length. His concluding speeches are structured into two parts. After introducing the prospect of ancestral guilt, he considers relating what he fears his audience might take for a *mythos*:<sup>2</sup>

“For I even have a certain *logos* that I heard recently, but I hesitate lest it should appear to be a *mythos* to you: therefore allow me to use only the likely.”

“Not at all,” Olympichus said, “but recount this as well.”

When the rest were also asking for the same, I said, “Allow what is likely to be offered by the *logos*, but let us later, if it seems right, rouse the *mythos*, if that is what it is.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The dialogue thus begins: “Epicurus said things of this sort went off, Quietus, and left even before someone could respond, as we arrived at the end of the of the stoa: and how we marveled at the strangeness of the man, standing in silence looking at one another...” (τοιαῦτα μὲν ὁ Ἐπίκουρος εἰπὼν, ὃ Κυῆτε, καὶ πρὶν ἀποκρίνασθαι τινα, πρὸς τῷ πέρατι τῆς στοᾶς γενομένων ἡμῶν ὄχετ' ἀπιών· ἡμεῖς δ' ὅσον τι θαυμάσαι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τὴν ἀτοπίαν, ἐπιστάντες σιωπῇ καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαβλέψαντες...; 548a-b). The manuscripts print Ἐπίκουρος, although Paton, Pohlenz, & Sieveking (1972) print Fabricius' unnecessary emendation, Ἐπικούρειος. “Aristotle” is similarly a character in *De fac*. Opsomer (2016) draws out further coloring through the other Hellenistic schools in this opening passage (39); cf. Vernière (1974), who argues for Fabricius' emendation (129n1). See also Griffiths (1991: 78) and Einarson (1958: 266n4). Plutarch eventually characterizes Epicurus' speech as “attacking and inveighing against providence” (σπαράττων ἅμα κατεφόρει τῆς προνοίας), before Patrocleas claims more specifically that “the slowness and delay of vengeance against the wicked by the divinity seems the most fearsome to me” (ἡ περὶ τὰς τιμωρίας... τῶν πονηρῶν βραδυτῆς τοῦ δαμμονίου καὶ μέλλησις ἔμοι δοκεῖ μάλιστα δεινὸν εἶναι; 548c-d). In *De def. or.*, a certain Cynic named Didymus inveighs against oracles—including any connection they might have to providence (413a)—before Heracleon bids him to calm and he similarly flees (412f-3d).

<sup>2</sup> On the problem of ancestral guilt in ancient Platonism, see also Cic. *De fin.* III.86. In Pl. *Leg.* VI.775c-e, the Athenian Stranger relatedly argues that actions of the father—drunkenness, committing injustices—can adversely impact the bodies and souls of offspring. The passage appears in Plut. frg. 157.2.

<sup>3</sup> “ἔχω μὲν τινα καὶ λόγον εἰπεῖν ἔναγχος ἀκηκόως, ὀκνῶ δὲ μὴ φανῆ μῦθος ὑμῖν· μόνον οὖν χρῶμαι τῷ εἰκότι.” “μηδαμῶς,” εἶπεν ὁ Ὀλύμπιχος, “ἀλλὰ δίελθε κάκεῖνον.” τὰ δὲ αὐτὰ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων δεομένων, “ἔασατε,” εἶπον, “ἀποδοῦναί τε τῷ λόγῳ τὸ εἶκος· ὕστερον δὲ τὸν μῦθον, ἐὰν δόξῃ, κινήσωμεν, εἴ γε δὴ μῦθος ἔστιν” (561b).

Plutarch echoes the same concern as Socrates right before the myth in the *Gorgias*.<sup>4</sup> Olympichus indeed expects a myth, and so playfully spurs Plutarch on:

And when I said these things and stood silent, Olympichus smiled and said, “I do not praise you, lest we should seem to let the *mythos* pass by on the grounds that the *logos* is sufficient for the exposition. Rather, we will give the decision whenever we hear it.”<sup>5</sup>

Why does Plutarch introduce this myth at the end of the otherwise dialectic *De sera*? His motivation is partly revealed through its long-recognized similarity to the myth that concludes Plato’s *Respublica*, especially in the frames that explain the source for each.<sup>6</sup> In the latter, a man named Er appeared to die in war, but rose on his pyre twelve days later to describe what he learned during the flight of his soul out of the body and throughout the world—surveying the meeting place of souls, the public punishment of incurable tyrants, the spindle of Necessity, the plain of forgetting, and the drawing of lots to determine the order in which the souls would pick their next lives.<sup>7</sup> Plutarch ascribes his myth to a rather different sort of man—rather than a soldier, a knavish youth who squandered his inheritance with vice, then began stooping to any means to regain his formerly luxurious lifestyle, although this protagonist undergoes a similarly extraordinary circumstance: “he tumbled from some height onto his neck, suffered only a blow

<sup>4</sup> ἄκουε δὴ, φασί, μάλα καλοῦ λόγου, ὃν σὺ μὲν ἠγήση μῦθον, ὡς ἐγὼ οἶμαι, ἐγὼ δὲ λόγον: ὡς ἀληθῆ γὰρ ὄντα σοι λέξω ἃ μέλλω λέγειν (Plut. *De sera* 561a); cf. Pl. *Grg.* 523a.

<sup>5</sup> ἐπεὶ δὲ ταῦτ’ εἰπὼν ἐσιώπησα, διαμειδιάσας ὁ Ὀλύμπιχος “οὐκ ἐπαινοῦμέν σ’” εἶπον, “ὅπως μὴ δόξωμεν ἀφιέναι τὸν μῦθον ὡς τοῦ λόγου πρὸς ἀπόδειξιν ἰκανῶς ἔχοντος, ἀλλὰ τότε δώσομεν τὴν ἀπόφασιν, ὅταν κάκεῖνον ἀκούσωμεν” (562e).

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Barrow (1967) sees “the only defense” for the myth in *De sera* as “the Platonic tradition,” citing the myth of Er (101). Bernstein (1993) is more positive: “Plutarch of Chaeronaea deserves a place in this survey for his use of Plato’s themes and his skillful adaptation of a near-death experience like Er’s to an extended investigation of divine justice and punishment after death” (73); Moellering (1962): “the precedent established by the myth of Er... must have pushed him with an almost irresistible impulse to compose something similar” (153). Vernière (1974), on the other hand, reduces both to Zoroastrian influence: “Directement ou indirectement, cette mort provisoire suivie de réurrection est bien dans la ligne des Mages” (110). At most, in this view, the myth of Er is one of several potential “intermédiaires.” She later adds Pythagoras, Empedocles, and, following Frutiger, Orphics as further sources for Plato (115). Cürsger (2002), however, in his survey of Plutarch’s adaptations of the myth of Er only discusses the myths of *De gen.* and *De fac.* (126-8), ignoring the Thespesius narrative despite its much more manifest affinities with the myth of Er.

<sup>7</sup> See further *supra* pg. 26.

rather than a mortal wound, but appeared dead, and recovered just on the third day, during his funeral rites.”<sup>8</sup> Outside of the body, the soul travels throughout the cosmos and beholds the imaginatively depicted forces of cosmic governance, especially those of eschatological punishment. After this experience, Aridaeus makes an unbelievable (ἀπιστόν) change in his life and becomes renowned for his superlative justice and piety—so thoroughly changed that even his name has become Thespseius, as the dead relative who serves as his guide decrees at the beginning of the otherworldly narrative.<sup>9</sup>

*De sera* and its myth, particularly because of their presentation of providence and punishment, tend to provoke strong reactions.<sup>10</sup> The Enlightenment behemoth David Hume, for example, singles out this dialogue as the only one of Plutarch’s works deserving ridicule (other than *De defectu oraculorum*’s “wild, absurd, and contradictory opinions”): “It is also writ in dialogue, contains like superstitious, wild visions, and seems to have been chiefly composed in rivalry to Plato, particularly his last book *de republica*.”<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, even Proclus, who vehemently criticizes Plutarch’s interpretation of the *Timaeus*, apparently found it worth

<sup>8</sup> κατενεχθεις γὰρ ἐξ ὕψους τινὸς εἰς τράχηλον οὐ γενομένου τραύματος ἀλλὰ πληγῆς μόνον ἐξέθανε, καὶ τριταῖος ἦδη περὶ τὰς ταφὰς αὐτὰς ἀνήνεγκε (563d). This type of morality tale was common in the Early Modern world, e.g. in Hogarth’s *A Rake’s Progress* (1732-1734), but perhaps less so today.

<sup>9</sup> “Then he said that he recognized some kinsman, but not very clearly, since he was still a boy when he died. But he approached him straightaway and said ‘hail, Thespseius.’ But he marveled and said that his named was not Thespseius, but Aridaeus. The relative said, ‘it was Aridaeus before, but from this point on it is Thespseius. For you have not died, but by some apportionment of the gods you arrive to here in your intellect, as you leave the rest of the soul behind in the body like an anchor’” (ἐνταῦθα μίαν ἔφη <γνώσαι> συγγενοῦς τινος, οὐ μέντοι σαφῶς· ἀποθανεῖν γὰρ ἔτι παιδὸς ὄντος· ἀλλ’ ἐκείνην προσαγαγοῦσαν ἐγγὺς εἶπεῖν ‘χαῖρε, Θεσπέσιε.’ θαυμάσαντος δ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ φήσαντος ὡς οὐ Θεσπέσιος ἀλλ’ Ἀριδαῖός ἐστι, ‘πρότερόν γε’ φάναι, ‘τὸ δ’ ἀπὸ τοῦδε Θεσπέσιος. οὐδὲ γὰρ τοι τέθνηκας, ἀλλὰ μοῖρα τινὶ θεῶν ἤκεις δεῦρο τῷ φρονοῦντι, τὴν δ’ ἄλλην ψυχὴν ὥσπερ ἀγκύριον ἐν τῷ σώματι καταλέλοιπας;’ 564b-c). Stewart (1905) interprets this detail as initiatory (338), but cf. even Vernière (1974: 113).

<sup>10</sup> Vernière (1974) describes the history of editions and translations of the dialogue (124-6). Since this Budè edition, there is also Tauffer’s (2010) Italian edition, focused solely on the myth. Despite the relatively broader attention it receives, W. Hamilton published one article in 1934 on Plutarch’s myth in *De fac.* and another article on *De gen.* in the same year, but never addressed *De sera*. Roig Lanzillotta (2015) even sets out to defend “the unity of Plutarch’s cosmological views as expressed in *De genio*, *De facie* and *De sera*” (180), but later qualifies, “the three famous mythological expositions, of which I have only analysed *De genio* and *De facie*...” (191).

<sup>11</sup> 1752: 261. This is despite his positive general impression that “the plain sense of Plutarch” is very unlike “the visionary systems or ravings of Plato” (260). See also Smith (1990) on the Enlightenment hostility of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson to Plato’s *Resp.* (8) and what they took to be his corruption of Christianity (9-13).



using heavily as a source for the eighth and ninth of his *De decem dubitationibus circa providentiam*.<sup>12</sup> Andrew Peabody, a nineteenth century Unitarian chaplain associated with Harvard, is more explicit with his positivity, declaring in his introduction to the dialogue that it is “the most remarkable of all Plutarch’s writings, and the most valuable equally in a philosophical and an ethical point of view, and the most redolent of what we almost involuntarily call Christian sentiment.”<sup>13</sup> The contentiousness of the dialogue seems indelibly related to the most salient question for this: why did Plutarch conclude his largely dialectic work with an eschatological myth such as this, in this dialogue in particular?

Some scholars, as part of a broader trend in thought on Plutarch’s philosophical myths, argue that the *mythos* is necessary to transcend the limits of the *logos*.<sup>14</sup> H. Armin Moellering

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<sup>12</sup> §49-60. See Opsomer & Steele (2013: 50-9). Van den Berg (2014), however, argues that there is a significant philosophical difference: “Proclus has adapted these similarities to fit his argument from which the notion of therapeutic punishment is absent” (250). Gagné (2013) responds that Proclus understands “the therapy of Providence” as “exercised directly on the *genos* or the city,” an ontologically higher entity; thus: “It is not the case that the imagery of healing is central to one and secondary to the other; it simply plays a different role in each text” (47). Both van den Berg (252n39) and Gagné (29-30, 39) discuss the Proclean *scholion* to Hesiod, *Op.* 284—which compares divine punishment to a preemptive medical cure (προκαθαίροντες)—and suggest that it has been adapted from Plutarch. On Proclus’ positions on evil and providence more generally, see Chlup (2012: 201-33), who finds the “nutshell” of the latter in *Leg.* X.903b-4b (228-9). On Proclus’ knowledge of other Plutarcean works, Hunter & Russell (2011) argue that Proclus, particularly in the fifth and sixth essays of *In Remp.*, “knew and used” Plutarch’s essay on poetry (4n16). The first chapter surveys Proclus’ polemic against Plutarch’s interpretation of the *Ti*.

<sup>13</sup> 1885: xxvi. Peabody’s assessment of Plutarch’s character is similar: “nor can we find, even in Christian literature, the record of a firmer belief than his in human immortality, and in a righteous retribution beginning in this world and reaching on into the world beyond death” (xii, cf. xiv-xvii). Similarly, Scholten (2009): “Kein Übeltäter kommt ungeschoren davon, keiner entgeht seiner gerechten Strafe, alle unterliegen am Ende dem göttlichen Strafgericht - was wie ein Gedanke aus der christlichen Vorstellungswelt klingt, ist die Kernaussage der religionsphilosophischen Schrift Plutarchs, *De sera numinis vindicta*” (99). In a similar vein, Super (1899) published a translation of *De sera* together with Sen. *Prov.* as a sort of best of collection of pagan treatments of providence and theodicy from what he took to be a proto-Christian world. Bernstein’s (1993) monograph on the development of the afterlife in early Christianity, places *De sera* as the last case study after Plato’s myths and *Aeneid* VI in his chapter on “Moral Death” (73-83). Similarly, Opsomer (2016) describes the praise of this dialogue by De Maistre, “a Catholic reactionary, and adversary of the Revolution and the Enlightenment and an apologist of the inquisition” (37). See further 38, 40, and 53. Cf. Torraca (1991: 91).

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Oakensmith (1902): “In the ‘*De Sera Numinis Vindicta*’ we saw that he could not accept as a subject of rational demonstration the theory of rewards and punishments in a future life; but so convinced is he of the ethical value of that belief that he has recourse to a most solemn myth, which he clearly hopes will poerate for goodness through the imagination if not in the intellect” (173). Vernière (1977) connects this myth, above the other two, with “Oriental” mysticism: “C’est une indication précieuse, comme l’origine pampylienue d’Er, dont l’Épicurien Colotès, au dire de Porphyre, s’amusait à remplacer le nom par celui de Zoroastre. Après le merveilleux occidental de Sylla, le merveilleux hellénique de Timarque, voici, baignant l’histoire de Thespesios, le merveilleux oriental” (110).

argues that he faced problems that “reason could not answer, so that with the choice limited to silence or myth, Plutarch understandably chose myth.”<sup>15</sup> Reginald Haynes Barrow goes farther in claiming that, because Plutarch realizes “that the problems are in the end insoluble by argument, he concludes the dialogue with a myth, a story which shall place the issue on the level of imagination rather than reason.”<sup>16</sup> The essay in the commentaries on selected parts of the *Moralia* organized by Hans Dieter Betz argues that the details of the mythic afterlife are essential to the dialogue:

What popular religion calls “punishments” must, according to Plutarch, be reinterpreted soteriologically as corrective and preventive measures deriving from the divine therapy for the soul. The confirmation of this truth cannot be achieved by the *lóγoc*, but only by the *μῦθoc*, since it is in this myth that we learn about the destiny of the soul in the afterlife.<sup>17</sup>

In this chapter, however, I argue that the *mythos* is complementary to the *logos*, in that both advance the argument that afterlife punishment is essentially curative, understood as a part of the providential care of the world.<sup>18</sup> Although scholars cite various influences, the most salient

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<sup>15</sup> 1962: 154.

<sup>16</sup> 1967: 95. Similarly, Ziegler (1951): “Der Mythos, in den P. angesichts der Unlösbarkeit des Problems mit rationalen Methoden sich rettet und in dem er durch die Erfindung von der besonders harten Bestrafung derer, die durch ihre Schuld ihre Nachkommen ins Unglück gestürzt haben, mit dem *κολοφών τῆς ἀπορίας* (4, 549d) fertig zu werden meint—als ob sie daran schuld wären, daß die strafende Gerechtigkeit Gottes sie auf Erden nicht ereilt hat—, knüpft deutlich an den Mythos am Ende des platonischen Staates an und fügt pythagoreische und heraklitische Gedanken und Motive ein, ist aber zugleich das stärkste Dokument der poetischen Erfindungs- und Gestaltungskraft des Autors” (cols. 849-50). Barrow concludes rather negatively, however, on what he takes to be a disjunction between the myth and the rest of the dialogue: “A modern reader who has read with some admiration the earlier part of this dialogue with its conception of God as an infinitely patient and sympathetic healer of souls and its conviction that sin is its own punishment, will find the concluding myth to be a crude anticlimax, however well narrated” (101).  
<sup>17</sup> Betz et al. (1975: 182). They further note an “apologetic purpose”: “The vision of punishment occurring in the afterlife ultimately acquits the god of any injustice in his delaying the punishment of the wicked while they are still on earth” (182). Cf. Gallo (2003): “Perché la divinità punisce tardivamente i peccatori? La spiegazione fornita dal ragionamento ha bisogno di essere completata dal mito, che non sostituisce ma rafforza il *logos*. Non si tratta di dimostrazione, ma di rivelazione” (204).

<sup>18</sup> Much of the scholarship on providence in Plutarch addresses the context of the Hellenistic schools. Vernière (1974) argues that Seneca’s *Prov.* used “même sources que Plutarque” in *De sera* (105). Dillon (2014) compares Plutarch’s conception of providence to Stoicism more generally but critically (223-36), the difference being the transcendence of the highest god, represented by Apollo (228-9). On the arguments on Stoic providence in *De stoic. rep.*, cf. Algra (2014: 117-9, 131-5). Dörrie (1977) sees Middle Platonism as generally following Stoicism in regard to providence, but sees Plutarch as an exception—“Plutarch hat Platon auf das höchste verehrt; indes vertrat er keinen schulgerechten Platonismus”—particularly due to his emphasis on eschatology (77). Cf. Boys-Stones (2018),

models are more likely the Platonic dialogues. Many Greek intellectuals, moreover, thematize medicine as the curing of the body and philosophy as the curing of the soul, including Plato and Plutarch.<sup>19</sup> In *De sera*, however, Plutarch extends Plato's more distinctive and innovative identification of punishment as the cure for the ailing soul, which he expands to ancestral punishment through a postulation that ethical traits are genetically inherited from parents like physical ones.<sup>20</sup> Like the *logos*, the *mythos* has the epistemological status of a "likely account," which is grounded on Plutarch's conception of providence such that central arguments can be distinguished from the imaginative and colorful—even pleasurable, if at times gruesome—

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who usefully compares the Aristotelian conception, which extends "only as far as the moon," with the Platonist system of agents of providence, comprised of *daemones*, the world soul, and even virtuous humans (323-9).

<sup>19</sup> Pl. *Chrm.* 157a-c; in *De superst.*, Plutarch's the superstitious man (δεισιδαίμων) "dares to neither come to aid nor to dissolve the misfortune nor service nor resist, lest he seem to fight against the gods or to resist being punished: rather, when he is sick, the doctor is ejected from the house, and when he is sorrowing, the philosopher is shut off from chastising and exhorting him. 'Leave me,' he says, 'man, to pay the penalty—me, impious, cursed, hated by gods and *daemones*' (ὄθεν οὐδὲ τολμᾷ βοηθεῖν οὐδὲ διαλύειν τὸ συμβεβηκὸς οὐδὲ θεραπεύειν οὐδ' ἀντιτάττεσθαι, μὴ δόξη θεομαχεῖν καὶ ἀντιτείνειν κολαζόμενος, ἀλλ' ὠθεῖται μὲν ἔξω νοσοῦντος ὁ ἰατρός, ἀποκλείεται δὲ πενθοῦντος ὁ νοουθετῶν καὶ παραμυθούμενος φιλόσοφος. "ἔα με," φησὶν, "ἄνθρωπε, δίδόναι δίκην, τὸν ἀσεβῆ, τὸν ἐπάρατον, τὸν θεοῖς καὶ δαίμοσι μεμισημένον;" 168c). He blames fate when he suffers, saying to himself: "'you suffer, wretched man, at the hands of providence and the commands of god'" ("ταῦτα πάσχεις, ὃ κακὸ δαίμων, ἐκ προνοίας καὶ θεοῦ κελεύοντος;" 168f). If the philosopher could break through, one infers, Plutarch expects he would correct the superstitious man's misapprehension of providence. The metaphor of philosopher as the doctor of the soul is particularly prevalent in the Stoics, beginning, evidently, with Chrysippus: "It is not the case that there is an art for the ailing body, called medicine, yet no art for the ailing soul" (οὔτε γὰρ περὶ τὸ νοσοῦν σῶμά ἐστὶ τις τέχνη ἢν προσαγορευόμεν ἰατρικὴν, οὐχὶ δὲ καὶ περὶ τὴν νοσοῦσαν ψυχὴν ἐστὶ τις τέχνη; Galen *De plac. Hipp. et Plat.* V.2.22 = *SVF* 3.471). Musonius Rufus uses this motif particularly frequently in the extant remains of his discourses, such as in the beginning of the first of his extant discourses. On the Stoic metaphor of soul-healing in general, see further Nussbaum (1994: 316). Cf. Sorabji (1997).

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Socrates in *Resp.* II.380a-b. Plato's medical metaphor, as Saunders (1994) elucidates, represents a radical innovation upon the traditional Greek conception of punishment, which was primarily retributive (162-5). Cf. Mackenzie (1981: 183-6, 214-6). Mackenzie finds the eschatological punishments, however, to be fundamentally retributive: "Exculpation has been dropped, and the humanitarian approach has lapsed. Punishment in the eschatology is certainly not reformatory. Nor is it deterrent in the Platonic mould..." (230); on the myth in the Pl. *Phd.*, cf. Sedley (1991: 381n43). The two metaphors, philosophy or punishment as the healing of the soul, can be related, however, as Edmonds (2012) argues by emphasizing the painful effect of philosophical *elenchos* in Pl. *Grg.*: "While the exposure of contradictions corresponds to the examination by the judge in the hereafter, the pain and shame (*to elenchos*) the interlocutor feels as he loses the argument and his way of life is turned on its head correspond to the punishments (*kolaseis*) the judged soul undergoes" (177). Boethius at one point adopts the medical metaphor and refers to "god, the ruler and healer of minds" (*rector ac medicator mentium deus*; IV.6.121), but he nevertheless allows for purely retributive punishment: "All fortune that seems bitter, unless it trains or heals, punishes" (*omnis enim quae uidetur aspera nisi aut exercet aut corrigit punit*; IV.7.54-5). This position seems to abandon a critical element of Plato's formulation of curative punishment and Marenbon (2003) accordingly argues that Philosophy's argument on providence "does little to explain the existence of wicked people, who may be justly punished but, because they remain wicked, receive no benefit from punishment" (121).

details of the narrative.<sup>21</sup> Yet the frame of the *mythos* depicts an additional function besides the reinforcement of a key dialectical argument: the imagistic and pleasurable narrative serves as a forceful ethical exhortation, which prompts the protagonist to reform his wayward ways before he should become so evil as to require the same punishments as, among others, his own father.<sup>22</sup> This use of fiction to argue that afterlife punishment must be fundamentally curative, I argue, is directed against Epicurean criticisms of the myth of Er, upon which the *De sera* myth is in part modelled.

This sort of punishment, I argue, is drawn from Plutarch's interpretation of the two functions or justifications for afterlife punishment that are described in Plato's *Gorgias*.<sup>23</sup> In Socrates' final speech in that dialogue, after describing the mythic change of regime concerning infernal punishment, he argues:

It is fitting for everyone condemned to punishment, if they are to be punished rightly, to either become better and themselves benefit, or to become an example for others, in order that they, who see what the punished suffer, should become better out of fear lest they should suffer it themselves.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Edmonds (2012) on the myths of punishment in the *Grg.*: “The myth of the water-carriers, like the myth of judgement at the end, serves to amplify and clarify the arguments in the dialogue, not to present ideas ungraspable by reason or to supplement a deficient argument with threats ungraspable by reason or to supplement a deficient argument with threats of hell-fire hereafter” (182).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Gagné (2013): “The punishments of the afterlife and the punishments of ancestral fault through generations are complementary. ... The two sanctions are simply facets of the same operation. They have different audiences, and different forms of communication. One can only be told through μῦθος, whose pedagogical role is thus reclaimed at the end of the text, and the other, the spectacle of ancestral fault, can be understood through probability, τὸ εἰκόσ” (44).

<sup>23</sup> On punishment in the *Grg.* myth, see especially Edmonds (2012: 171-82).

<sup>24</sup> προσήκει δὲ παντὶ τῷ ἐν τιμωρίᾳ ὄντι, ὑπ’ ἄλλου ὀρθῶς τιμωρουμένῳ, ἢ βελτίονι γίγνεσθαι καὶ ὀνίνασθαι ἢ παραδείγματι τοῖς ἄλλοις γίγνεσθαι, ἵνα ἄλλοι ὀρῶντες πάσχοντα ἃ ἂν πάσχη φοβούμενοι βελτίους γίγνωνται (*Ep.* VII: “For it is in no way worthwhile to consider good and evil applying to soulless things, rather it will come to each soul, either in a body or separated. And it is entirely necessary to thus always believe the old and sacred accounts, which indeed reveal to us that our soul is immortal and bears judges and pays the greatest penalties, whenever someone is freed from body” (κακὸν γὰρ καὶ ἀγαθὸν οὐδὲν λόγου ἄξιόν ἐστιν τοῖς ἀψύχοις, ἀλλ’ ἢ μετὰ σώματος οὕση ψυχῇ τοῦτο συμβήσεται ἐκάστη ἢ κεχωρισμένη. πείθεσθαι δὲ ὄντως ἀεὶ χρὴ τοῖς παλαιοῖς τε καὶ ἱεροῖς λόγοις, οἳ δὴ μὴνούσιν ἡμῖν ἀθάνατον ψυχὴν εἶναι δικαστάς τε ἴσχειν καὶ τίειν τὰς μεγίστας τιμωρίας, ὅταν τις ἀπαλλαχθῇ τοῦ σώματος; 334e-5a).

Plato emphasizes the justifications for punishment. The curably wicked are punished for their own good, and so as to deter others from wickedness for as long as the punishments last, while as the incurably wicked can only serve as negative examples for any souls who see their torments.

The first section sketches the polemical context of *De sera* and the myth that concludes it. The dialogue is explicitly oriented against Epicurus' attacks on providence and the affinity of the narrative with Plato's myth of Er connects it to the broader Epicurean polemic against Platonic myth. Specifically, Epicurus' dear student Colotes criticized the myth of Er on three grounds:<sup>25</sup> first, that it is absurd to teach truth with fiction, as a poet might try; second, that it is absurd for Plato to criticize the poets for terrifying depictions of the underworld, while nevertheless depicting gruesome tortures; and third, it is absurd that either philosophers or non-philosophers could benefit from this sort of fiction. The Epicurean is particularly disturbed by the depiction of the tortures of the incurable tyrant Ardiaeus in the myth of Er, which is indeed unusually gruesome for Plato:

When they finally thought to approach, the mouth did not receive them, but bellowed whenever someone incurably wicked like them, or escaping punishment early, should attempt to approach. And then there were men rough and fiery to behold, who stood by and perceived the noise. They intercepted and lead them off, binding Ardiaeus and other tyrants all together by the hands, feet, and head, hurling them down and flaying of their skin, hauling them beside the road and contorting them over spikes as a warning forever to whoever should approach."<sup>26</sup>

Plutarch, I argue, is implicitly aiming to outmaneuver these criticisms in his imitation of the myth of Er. Colotes occupies a prominent position in Plutarch's anti-Epicurean polemic, to such

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<sup>25</sup> Sodano (1966) also summarizes these arguments and attributes them to Porphyry (206-7).

<sup>26</sup> οὓς οἰομένους ἤδη ἀναβήσεσθαι οὐκ ἐδέχετο τὸ στόμιον, ἀλλ' ἐμυκάτο ὅποτε τις τῶν οὕτως ἀνιάτως ἐχόντων εἰς πονηρίαν ἢ μὴ ἰκανῶς δεδωκῶς δίκην ἐπιχειροῖ ἀνιέναι. ἐνταῦθα δὲ ἄνδρες... ἄγριοι, διάπυροι ἰδεῖν, παρεστῶτες καὶ καταμανθάνοντες τὸ φθέγμα, τοὺς μὲν διαλαβόντες ἦγον, τὸν δὲ Ἀρδιαῖον καὶ ἄλλους συμποδίσαντες χεῖράς τε καὶ πόδας καὶ κεφαλὴν, καταβαλόντες καὶ ἐκδείραντες, εἶλκον παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ἐκτὸς ἐπ' ἀσπαλάθων κνάμπτοντες, καὶ τοῖς ἀεὶ παριοῦσι σημαίνοντες ὧν ἕνεκά τε καὶ ὅτι εἰς τὸν Τάρταρον ἐμπεσοῦμενοι ἄγοιντο (*Respublica* X.615e-6a). Cf. Bernstein (1993): "We must note the unusual harshness of this punishment and how rarely Plato gives any physical details at all" (59).

an extent that the dialogue *Adversus Colotem* is dedicated to mocking him for “refuting the writings and beliefs of Epicurus” in his attempt to refute every philosopher except for his teacher.<sup>27</sup> Although Plutarch never addresses Colotes’ polemic against the myth of Er directly—it is only preserved by the Neoplatonists Macrobius and Proclus—*De sera* nevertheless reflects responses to each of his particular criticisms.

Colotes remained a prominent target for Platonists after Plutarch. The second section argues that Porphyry, drawing to some extent on Numenius’ comparison between fictive exteriors and the mysteries, develops a positive defense of Platonic myth through the distinction between poetic and philosophical myth, which was elaborated by subsequent Neoplatonists until Olympiodorus in the sixth century.<sup>28</sup> Yvonne Vernière argues that Plutarch is essentially a precursor to Numenius and Porphyry, with the qualification “jamais le Chéronéen ne s’est laissé aller à de tels excès.”<sup>29</sup> In the third section, however, I argue that Plutarch’s response to the

<sup>27</sup> “I do not know if Colotes refuted anything of the others so much as he truly refuted the writings and beliefs of Epicurus” (οὐκ οἶδα τί τηλικούτο κατέψευσται τῶν ἄλλων ὁ Κωλώτης, ἠλίκον ἀληθῶς τῶν Ἐπικούρου λόγων καὶ δογμάτων κατηγορήκεν; 1127e). Plutarch begins the dialogue: “Colotes, my dear Saturninus, whom Epicurus used to call affectionately his ‘Colly’ and ‘Collikins,’ brought out a book entitled *On the Point that Conformity to the Doctrines of the Other Philosophers Actually Makes it Impossible to Live*” (trans. Einarson & De Lacy [1967]; Κωλώτης, ὃν Ἐπίκουρος εἰώθει Κωλωταρᾶν ὑποκορίζεσθαι καὶ Κωλωτάριον, ὃ Σατορνῖνε, βιβλίον ἐξέδωκεν ἐπιγράψας περὶ τοῦ ὅτι κατὰ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων φιλοσόφων δόγματα οὐδὲ ζῆν ἐστιν; 1107d-e). The dialogue begins with an epistolary heading (as he does in *De sera* and, more elaborately, *De E*), but, as with many of Cicero’s dialogues (such as *Amic.* and *Sen.*), the frame emerges soon after: “just now, as (Colotes’) treatise was being read, one of the companions...” (ἐναγχος οὖν ἀναγινωσκομένου τοῦ συγγράμματος εἰς τῶν ἐταίρων; 1107e). Even the fellow-atomist Democritus evidently did not escape Colotes’ attack (especially 1108d-e).

<sup>28</sup> Porphyry’s role in the formulation of this idea has largely eluded the scholarship, probably because the evidence is preserved by the often-neglected Latin Neoplatonist Macrobius. Jackson et al. (1998) compare Olympiodorus, *In Gorg.* 46.4 with Proclus, Ammonius (*Int.* 249.11-23), Philoponus (*In De An.* 69.30-70.2, 116.23-26) and the Anon. *Proleg.* (17.18-33) but conclude that “these parallels prove disappointing” (291n878). Further, Jackson (1995): “Contrast Proclus’ more elaborate distinction of types of poetry into inspired (especially Homeric, non-mimetic, corresponding to the highest level of soul), didactic or mimetic (appealing to the lowest soul, emotions and phantasia), itself based, Proclus tells us, on Syrianus’ comments on *Phaedrus* 245. The nearest point of contact appears to be that by ‘poetic myth’ Olympiodorus refers only to what Proclus calls inspired poetry, particularly that of Homer and Hesiod, and particularly concerning the gods” (279n8). The parallel with Olympiodorus, however, shares common elements with both Macrobius’ treatment (full distinction between poetic and philosophical myth, comparison of pious coverings in the mysteries) and Proclus’ (Plato rejects scandalous poetic myth, comparison of pious coverings in the mysteries, and identification of the *phantasia* as the audience for the fictive in myth). This suggests that Olympiodorus was drawing, directly or indirectly, on a source that included elements from both Macrobius and Proclus, which I suggest is Porphyry’s defense of the myth of Er against Colotes.

<sup>29</sup> 1977: 333.

Epicurean polemic, although more sporadic than that of these Neoplatonists, is rather different, focusing especially on the idea of myth as a “likely account” that must be interpreted by distinguishing intrinsic core ideas from extrinsic, or at best pleasurable or bolstering, details. Rather than distinguishing philosophical myth from poetry, Plutarch treats it precisely as sort of fiction that must be interpreted in the same manner as poetry, which yields a rather different conception than Vernière’s inviolable *hieros logos* from the mysteries.<sup>30</sup>

The fourth section then argues that Plutarch’s argument throughout the *logos* of *De sera*, that divine punishment is essentially curative, is another part of his response to Colotes’ criticism of the myth of Er. This conception of afterlife punishment, moreover, is consistent broadly throughout Plutarch’s corpus, despite the scholarly arguments that the treatment in *De superstitione* is so dissimilar that either Plutarch could not have written the treatise, or, if he did, only when he was substantially younger than when he wrote works such as *De sera*.<sup>31</sup> The fifth and final section then argues that the myth serves a complementary argumentative role by depicting the system of afterlife punishment as aiming entirely at the prevention and correction of wickedness, without the sort of purely deterrent displays like the incurable tyrant Ardiaeus in the myth of Er. By naming the protagonist of the *De sera* myth Aridaeus, and depicting the vision as corrective or redemptive, Plutarch emphasizes the diminution of the incurables in his sketch of the cosmic penal system, where punishments are curative and thus performed primarily for the good of the punished.

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<sup>30</sup> Against the mysteries as an impetus for doctrine, cf. Nilsson (1948): “Much more important than the mysteries were the generally accepted religious idea which seemed a matter of course to that age, and of which the mysteries are only one expression. The mysteries did not create but adopted ideas” (161).

<sup>31</sup> See *supra* pg. 70.

Both the *logos* and the *mythos* of *De sera* therefore contribute to a common defense against the same Epicurean critiques:<sup>32</sup> myths contain fictional details, but these are used in an plausible and useful way to support central ethical arguments in the narrative; the depictions of ethically required or justified afterlife punishments are not harmful, but even beneficial to the audience. Rather than transcending the *logos*, Aridaeus-Thespesius' transformative vision presents the same central idea in a different, more imagistic and even pleasurable manner. These are, moreover, not dogmatic accounts, because the difficulty of the topic requires laying aside claims to certainty about the workings of the divine, as Plutarch emphasizes in his initial speech: "But first, beginning from the caution of the philosophers of the Academy towards the divine as if from an ancestral hearth, let us acquit ourselves of saying something about these things as if we surely know it."<sup>33</sup> Both the dialectical arguments and the myth are accordingly only likely accounts, based on the assumption of the goodness of the divine ordering of the world.<sup>34</sup> The character of Plutarch in *De sera* nevertheless sees fit to secure and encourage his companions—who are rattled by the difficult charges of the Epicureans yet still inclined toward defending the idea of providence—through this combination of both sorts of discourse. The seriousness of the topic, it seems, merits a variety of approaches, even if they aim towards the same end.

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<sup>32</sup> Karamanolis (2014) attends carefully to the dual structure in *De sera*, and emphasizes the Platonic model: "On the *Delays of the Divine Vengeance*, where Plutarch sets out to defend divine providence, yet, following Plato's claim of presenting only a likely account (*eikôs mythos*) in the *Timaeus*, he claims to be offering only what seems likely to him about divine actions (549E-F), and also like Plato, Plutarch structures his work into argument (*logos*) and a narrative (*mythos*)." There surely is a looming reference to the idea of Plato's *eikôs mythos* here, but it is not explicit. Plutarch's presentation of the *logos* as parallel to the *mythos* is more immediately reminiscent of the same structure in *Prt.* 320c. Wiener (2004) similarly sees Plutarch's myth as responsive to Colotes' critique of the myth of Er, but focuses on other details, such as the criticism that Er's body, from an atomistic standpoint, would have rotted (60).

<sup>33</sup> πρῶτον οὖν ὥσπερ ἀφ' ἑστίας ἀρχόμενοι πατρώας τῆς πρὸς τὸ θεῖον εὐλαβείας τῶν ἐν Ἀκαδημία φιλοσόφων τὸ μὲν ὡς εἰδότες τι περὶ τούτων λέγειν ἀφοσιωσόμεθα (549e-f).

<sup>34</sup> Bremmer (2002) more generally emphasizes the "literary nature" and "lack of authenticity" in the frame of *De sera* (94), and argues further on the Platonic model: "The incredible, dramatic details of Er's survival surely should read as a warning to the reader of the fictional character of the account, not as an attempt to provide an eye witness report" (90).



*Colotes' Epicurean assault upon the myth of Er*

Although there is relatively little discussion of the form of Platonic myth in the ancient world, at least one Epicurean, Colotes, did attack Plato for it, apparently principally on the grounds that they are too similar to poetic falsehoods, especially in their depictions of fearsome eschatological punishments.<sup>35</sup> This polemic against Platonic myth is preserved solely in two Neoplatonic commentaries: Proclus' on Plato's myth of Er in the *Respublica* and Macrobius' on Cicero's imitative narrative, the *Somnium Scipionis*, the capstone of his own *Respublica*.<sup>36</sup> Colotes, whom Macrobius calls "conspicuous among the students of Epicurus for his fulsomeness," was evidently a prolific critic of non-Epicurean philosophers, but particularly hostile to Plato.<sup>37</sup> He apparently targeted specific dialogues, but what remains of his criticism of the *Respublica* is aimed at the myth of Er.<sup>38</sup> Macrobius translates one passage into Latin, in

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. *supra* pg. 45.

<sup>36</sup> Plato's myth of Er is vastly influential on subsequent literature and philosophy. Bremmer (2002), for example, describes Origen's use of it "in his attempt to explain the resurrection to his pagan readers" (90 with n 16).

<sup>37</sup> *Colotes uero, inter Epicuri auditores loquacitate notabilior, ...* (I.2.3). Macrobius' commentary. begins with a consideration of why Plato uses the form of a myth (I.2.1-2), because any attacks that apply to Plato's form of myth also apply to Cicero's *Somm.*: "While these things are hurled against Plato's Er, because they also impugn the rest of our dreaming Africanus—each persona, which is held to be fitting to the things needing to be articulated, is chosen according to an argument—let us oppose the critic, and let the one arguing in vain be refuted, and, as is just, let the single refuted criticism maintain the established dignity of each intact. Philosophy does not oppose all myths, not does it concede to all of them. So that it might be easily distinguished from what those things it rejects from itself, just as if shutting the profane out from the very entrance of the holy argument, and what it often and gladly permits—the division must be expounded step by step" (*haec quoniam, dum de Platonico Ere iactantur, etiam quietem Africani nostri somniantis accusant—utraque enim sub adposito argumento electa persona est quae accommoda enuntiandis haberetur—resistamus urgenti et frustra arguens refellatur, ut una calumnia dissoluta utriusque factum incolumem, ut fas est, retineat dignitatem. nec omnibus fabulis philosophia repugnat, nec omnibus adquiescit; et ut facile secerni possit quae ex his a se abdicet ac uelut profana ab ipso uestibulo sacrae disputationis excludat, quae uero etiam saepe ac libenter admittat, diuisionum gradibus explicandum est; I.2.5-6; cf. I.1.3).*

<sup>38</sup> He seems to have targeted the *Euthyd.* and *Lys.* individually, as the papyri fragments printed by Wessely (1965) suggest (4-8). Warren (2011) argues that Colotes wrote against various parts of the *Resp.* and not just the myth of Er (290-3). In *De Stoic. rep.*, Plutarch addresses works by Chrysippus directed against Plato by topic rather than by dialogue (1040a-1e), particularly "in the works against Plato himself on justice" (ἐν δὲ τοῖς πρὸς αὐτὸν Πλάτωνα περὶ Δικαιοσύνης; 1040a), although he also refers more simply to "the works against Plato" (ἐν μὲν τοῖς πρὸς Πλάτωνα; 1041c).

which the Epicurean argues that it is categorically impossible to use *any* fictionality in the pursuit of the truth:

He says that it is not fitting for a myth (*fabulam*) to be composed by a philosopher, because no sort of fiction is fitting for teacher of truth. “Why indeed,” he says, “if you want to teach us the conception of celestial things or the condition of souls, was it not arranged simply and without pandering; rather, artificial character, affected novelty, and a stage set for a contrived fiction all stain with lies the door of the truth being sought?”<sup>39</sup>

Colotes implicitly compares Plato to a tragic poet absurdly playing at physics and psychology, perhaps building on Epicurus’ argument that it is impossible for anyone who “suspects something in the myths” might be true to learn physics and thus expel fear from life.<sup>40</sup>

Proclus’ commentary on the myth of Er, which makes up the extensive sixteenth essay of his *In Rempublicam*, provides further testimony by distinguishing Colotes’ argument into three specific points of contention.<sup>41</sup> First, similarly to Macrobius’ translation, Colotes alleges that

<sup>39</sup> *ait a philosopho fabulam non oportuisse confingi, quoniam nullum figmenti genus ueri professoribus conueniret. “cur enim,” inquit, “si rerum caelestium notionem, si habitum nos animarum docere uoluisti, non simplici et absoluta hoc insinuatione curatum est, sed quaesita persona casusque excogitata nouitas, et composita aduocati scaena figmenti, ipsam quaerendi ueri ianuam mendacio polluerunt?”* (I.2.4). On the title of Colotes’ work, Wessely (1965) speculates that it may have been “Περὶ τῶν παρὰ Πλάτωνι μυθικῶς πεπλασμένων oder Πρὸς τοὺς Πλάτωνος μύθους” (12). Macrobius’ testimony, however, is not as well known as Proclus’: Von Arnim (1921) does not mention Macrobius as a source for “Angriffe des K. gegen Platons Republik... auf den eschatologischen Mythos des Armeniers Er im 10. Buche” (1120). Festugière (1970), on the other hand, does compare Proclus with Macrobius (3.48n1). Wiener (2004) is more extensive (53-8). These fragments are only sporadically mentioned in the scholarship on Colotes, such as Waerdt (1989): “Colotes’ other objections led to extensive replies by Porphyry and Proclus as well as Macrobius, and this debate over the proper philosophical uses of myth would well repay study” (233).

<sup>40</sup> “It is not possible to dissolve fear about the most important things if someone does not know the nature of everything, but suspects something of what is in the myths” (οὐκ ἦν τὸ φοβούμενον λύειν ὑπὲρ τῶν κυριωτάτων μὴ κατειδόμενα τίς ἢ τοῦ σύμπαντος φύσις, ἀλλ’ ὑποπτευόμενον τι τῶν κατὰ τοὺς μύθους; *RS XII*). See also *Ep. Hdt.* §81, *Ep. Pyth.* §104, §116, and especially §87; cf. *Ep. Men.* §134. Corti (2014) cites *PHerc.* 1431 as a *comparandum* (92n152).

<sup>41</sup> “Colotes the Epicurean alleges against Plato that he... and that... and third, that...” (ὁ μὲν Ἐπικούρειος Κωλότης ἐγκαλεῖ τῷ Πλάτωνι, ὅτι... καὶ ὅτι... καὶ τὸ τρίτον, ὅτι...; II.105.23-6.9 = Porph. frg. 182 Smith). This is the only of the seventeen essays that takes the form of a lemmatic commentary with an introduction, which begins with characteristically Neoplatonic considerations of “purposed end” or *skopos* of the myth (ἡ τοῦδε τοῦ μύθου πρόθεσις; II.97.1): “Therefore the entire *skopos* starts out from the speeches about justice and here is about the entire cosmic constitution, that order of the heavenly things and the things beneath the sky which Plato revealed in the form of a myth” (ὥστ’ εἶναι τὸν πάντα σκοπὸν ἀπὸ τῶν περὶ δικαιοσύνης ὀρμηθέντα λόγων κἀνταῦθα περὶ πάσης τῆς κοσμικῆς πολιτείας, ἣν ἐν μύθου σχήματι Πλάτων ἐκφαίνει τῶν τε οὐρανίων καὶ τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανὸν τὴν τάξιν; II.98.14-7). On the concept of the Neoplatonic *skopos*, Baltzly (2017), comparing the moderate level of interest in the Anon. *In Tht.* (178), partly explains the predominant importance by the assumptions that “‘x is a good thing to

Plato “removes himself from scientific truth and wastes his time on falsehood when he tells myths like a poet.”<sup>42</sup> The second, related criticism is built on the characteristically Epicurean emphasis on the misery of fearing afterlife punishment. Lucretius, for example, describes the fear of Acheron as “fundamentally disturbing human life from the innermost, filling everything with the black of death and leaving no pleasure clear and pure.”<sup>43</sup> Proclus relates that Colotes criticized Plato for “fighting against himself” by ridiculing the poets for “crafting frightful things about what is in the house of Hades and implanting the fear of death in their hearers,” while still “changing his philosophical muse to tragic myth-telling—for the bellowing mouth there and the fiery executioners of the tyrant and Tartarus and so many things of this sort which, he said, surpass the excess of the tragic poets.”<sup>44</sup> The references are to the punishments in the myth of Er,

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the extent that it is unified,” that Plato’s dialogues are the best, and that therefore the most unified (184); he connects it to the order of education (187-8) and the idea of the “textual community” (189-94). Cf. Proclus’ summary of the myth in the fifteenth essay (II.92.20-5.25). The commentary on the myth of Er is dedicated to Proclus’ friend and eventual biographer (ὦ φίλε Μαρῖνε; II.96.1), and the introductory portion didactically employs second-person appeals: εἴπερ ὄντως ἐθέλοις ἰδεῖν... ἴδε (II.100.3-5); ὅψει... εὐρήσεις... τὸν σκοπὸν τῆς μυθολογίας ταύτης καταδήσει τὸν τελεώτατον (II.100.29-1.4). On the significance of this commentary in Proclus’ corpus, Lamberton (2012) takes the length of the myth of Er commentary to indicate that “the Myth of Er was the portion of the *Republic* that was taught in Athens, and it probably constituted part of the Neoplatonic curriculum” (xv). On the composition, Sheppard (2013) argues, “The concluding lines describe this essay as a ὑπόμνημα. As in his commentaries on other Platonic dialogues, Proclus draws extensively on earlier discussions and uses individual lemmata as starting points for lengthy disquisitions. ... Some of the material reappears in *PT VI 23* where Proclus uses *Rep.* 617b-e as a source for his account of the Fates as gods separated from the world, between the hypercosmic and encosmic gods” (114).

<sup>42</sup> ... ὅτι τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἀφείξαι τὴν ἐπιστημονικὴν περὶ τὸ ψεῦδος διατρίβει μυθολογῶν ὡς ποιητῆς, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἀποδεικνύς ὡς ἐπιστήμων (II.105.23-5). Kechagia (2011) further compares the Epicurean “poetics and the rejection of poetry as a vehicle for conveying philosophical truth” (69, with n79). Corti (2014) argues that Colotes’ objection is rooted in Epicurus’ ideal of ἐνάργεια—“fu senza dubbio la caratteristica precipua della filosofia di Colote” (92).

<sup>43</sup> ... *et metus ille foras praeceps Acheruntis agendus, / funditus humanam qui uitam turbat ab imo omnia suffundens mortis nigrore neque ullam / esse uoluptatem liquidam puramque relinquit* (III.37-40). The misery of fearing underworld punishments is a recurrent theme of this book, and emblematically, when Lucretius sees “the terrors of the mind flee, the walls of the world depart” (*diffugiunt animi terrores, moenia mundi / discedunt*; III.16-7) to reveal the truth, he emphasizes the absence of *Acherusia templa* (III.25). Torquatus in Cic. *Fin.* similarly begins an argument, “just as every condition of quite life is thrown into chaos by the fear of death...” (*ut enim mortis metu omnis quietae uitae status perturbatur*; I.15.49).

<sup>44</sup> καὶ ὅτι πρὸς ἑαυτὸν μαχομένως ἐν μὲν γε προοιμίῳις τῆσδε τῆς πραγματείας ἐλοιδόρησε τοὺς ποιητὰς ὡς περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἄϊδου φρικτὰ πλάσαντας καὶ θανάτου φόβον ἐντεκόντας τοῖς ἀκούουσιν, ἐπὶ τέλει δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς μεθήρμοσεν τὴν φιλόσοφον μούσαν εἰς τραγικὴν τῶν ἐν Ἄϊδου πραγμάτων μυθολογίαν· τὸ γὰρ στόμιον τὸ μυκώμενον ἐκεῖ καὶ οἱ διάπυροι ἄγριοι τοῦ τυράννου δῆμιοι καὶ ὁ Τάρταρος καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα τίνα, φησὶν, τραγωδιοποιῶις ἀπολέλοιπεν ὑπερβολῆν; (II.105.26-6.8).

an image evidently much more liable to interrupt *ataraxia*, for instance, than the traditional punishments of Tantalus, Tityus, and Sisyphus in Homer as well. This aspect of Platonic myth was evidently particularly attractive for Epicurean critique.<sup>45</sup> Finally, Colotes argues that the myths are useless because there is no audience for whom they are appropriate or beneficial: the many are incapable of being improved or benefited by them, and the wise are beyond them; the myths, moreover, are unable to signal “for whom they are written,” rendering “zeal about one’s myth telling empty.”<sup>46</sup>

Proclus records a few more specific criticisms of the myth of Er from Colotes, such as that Er’s body, if the soul were absent, would have rotted by the twelfth day<sup>47</sup>—after all, Lucretius argues that the body begins to decay and reek of death in the same instant that the soul begins to seep out.<sup>48</sup> The crux of the Epicurean polemic against Plato’s form of philosophical myth, however, seems to be the comparison with poetry, the detriment of filling the audience with fears of infernal punishments, and the lack of an audience that would benefit from the form of argumentation. Macrobius and Proclus thus testify to a similar attack upon the form of the

<sup>45</sup> Other Epicureans, and perhaps the master himself, attack the belief in the traditional punishments of the Homeric underworld, for example through Lucretius’ series of rationalizations (III.978-1023). On these, and Plutarch’s response in the conclusion of *De lat. viv.*, see Hilton (2019).

<sup>46</sup> καὶ τὸ τρίτον, ὅτι τοὺς τοιοῦσδε μύθους πολὺ τὸ μάταιον ἔχειν ἀναγκαῖον· τοῖς μὲν γὰρ πολλοῖς οὐδὲ συνεῖναι δυναμένοις αὐτῶν εἰσιν ἀσύμμετροι, τοῖς δὲ σοφοῖς οὐ δεομένοις ἀμείνοσιν ἐκ τῶν τοιῶνδε γίνεσθαι δειμάτων περιττοί· πρὸς τίνας οὖν γράφονται, παρ’ αὐτῶν εἰπεῖν οὐκ ἔχοντες μάταιον ἀποφαίνουσιν τὴν περὶ τὰς μυθολογίας ἑαυτῶν σπουδὴν (II.106.9-14). Cf. Plato’s discussion of the lower part of the soul as the audience of mimetic poetry (*Rep.* X.603d-5d).

<sup>47</sup> “But Colotes asks how the body of Er was not destroyed by rotting in so many days, when the soul is absent...” (ζητοῦντος δὲ τοῦ Κωλώτου, πῶς οὐ διεφθάρη τὸ σῶμα σαπὲν ἐν τοσαύταις ἡμέραις τοῦ Ἡρός, καὶ ταῦτα ψυχῆς μὴ παρουσίας, ...; II.116.19-21). Proclus, however, appeals to Democritus’ *Περὶ τοῦ Ἄιδου γράμματα* for many examples of this sort of thing occurring (II.113.6-9).

<sup>48</sup> This is the beginning of his twelfth proof for the mortality of the soul: “And then, given that the body is unable to endure the separation of the soul unless it decays with a foul odor, how do you doubt that the force of the soul has rises out from the deepest depths, flows out, and scatters like vapor” (*denique cum corpus nequeat perferre animai / discidium quin in taetro tabescat odore, / quid dubitas quin ex imo penitque coorta / emanarit uti fumus diffusa animae vis...*; III.580-3). Cf. Warren (2002) on Democritus and Epicurus on this issue, a point of disagreement which he eventually connects to the frame of the myth of Er (204-6).

myth of Er.<sup>49</sup> Porphyry may have been a mediating source for both of the later Neoplatonists, especially since Proclus cites him rather prominently and proximately to his discussion of Colotes' polemic;<sup>50</sup> many scholars have, moreover, argued that he is a prominent source for Macrobius generally, although there is some contention over the degree to which such a connection can be assumed.<sup>51</sup> In this case, however, the parallel details between Macrobius' and Proclus' accounts renders it very likely that Porphyry was the mediating source for Colotes' polemic against the myth of Er.<sup>52</sup> Even in an early stage of the Neoplatonic treatment of Plato's myths, the Epicurean polemicist looms as a serious opponent, and, as the next section examines,

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<sup>49</sup> Wessely (1965), however, assumes that Porphyry and Proclus are both drawing on an unknown "Platonerkklärer" (12), while Macrobius used "ähnlichen Kommentar," evidently because Proclus includes the third objection that Macrobius does not. Yet, Proclus' first two objections, however, are entirely coherent with Macrobius' translation of Colotes. It should not be surprising that Proclus emphasizes the more metaphysically complex solution required by Colotes' third objection, while Macrobius focuses more on translating Greek literary theory into Latin.

<sup>50</sup> Proclus lists predecessors close to the start of his commentary: "... there are many of the preeminent Platonists touched upon understanding about it—Numenius, Albinus, Gaius, Maximus Nicaeus, Harpocration, and Euclides, but above all, Porphyry, whom I say was the perfect interpreter of all that is hidden in the myth" (... πολλοὶ τῆς περὶ αὐτὸν ἐφήψαντο κατανοήσεως καὶ τῶν Πλατωνικῶν οἱ κορυφαῖοι, Νουμίνιος, Ἀλβίνος, Γάιος, Μάξιμος ὁ Νικαεύς, Ἄρποκρατίων, Εὐκλείδης, καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν Πορφύριος, ὃν ἐγὼ πάντων μάλιστα τῶν ἐν τῷ μύθῳ κεκρυμμένον γενέσθαι φημὶ τέλειον ἐξηγητήν; II.96.10-5). Festugière (1970) discusses the identity of the authors and works mentioned (3.39n3).

<sup>51</sup> Macrobius explicitly cites Porphyry only occasionally, but once in his initial discussion of the myth of Er (I.3.17-8; cf. I.17.70), and later with qualified praise: "Porphyry includes this opinion of the Platonists in the books in which he pours some light at least on the obscurities of the *Timaeus*" (*hanc Platoniorum persuasionem Porphyrius libris inseruit quibus Timaei obscuritatibus non nihil lucis infudit, ...*; II.3.15). There is, however, a contentious argument in the scholarship about the role of Porphyry in Macrobius, since he is the latest cited author. Whittaker (1923) for instance draws attention to the lack of attention to "Iamblichus or his disciples, whose influence so far may have travelled exclusively eastward" (57). The segments that cite Plotinus are particularly contentious: Henry (1934) strenuously contends that Macrobius, even when he used Porphyry's language, "il suffit d'admettre qu'il a en main les deux textes, et qu'il se sert de l'un pour mieux comprendre l'autre" (191); Courcelle (1943), on the other hand, argues that Macrobius typically "révèle que le véritable maître de la pensée de Macrobie est non pas Plotin, mais Porphyre" (22). Stahl (1952) surveys the earlier scholarship further (24-38), and himself points out that "no one has called attention to the similarity between Proclus' chapter on the purpose of myths in his *Commentary*" (38); he also postulates an additional unknown Latin commentary on Cicero (38-39). See further Flamant (1977: 170) and Armisen-Marchetti (2001: LVIII-LIX). The present inquiry, however, is clearer than these contentious cases, e.g.

<sup>52</sup> See Gersh (1986): "This is Porphyry who, although he cannot be identified as a source in as many passages as some modern scholars have maintained, is clearly the unspoken authority on certain occasions. Thus, the refutation of Epicurean objections to Plato's employment of myth can be attributed to this writer on the basis of a parallel discussion in Proclus' *Commentarius in Rempublicam* where he is explicitly cited" (520, with n143). Wilberding (2011) argues that Macrobius' and Proclus' shared source is Porphyry's fragmentary "*On What Is in Our Power*," which he holds is equivalent to the fragments others attribute to a commentary on the *Resp.* (123-4). Cürsgen (2002) also identifies Porphyry as Macrobius' source, but identifies the work as a "*Timaios-Kommentar*" (123n149). Neri (2007), however, detects many sources for Macrobius, such that "emergono elementi enciclopedici notevolmente ampi" (24). He cites Plutarch, *De Is.* 382d, for instance, as one source (26), although he argues that "le principali fonti di Macrobio sono neoplatonische" (30).

he prompted robust defenses of the myth of Er. As I argue in the rest of the chapter, Colotes' polemic prompts Plutarch to defend the ethical function of Platonic myth in education—a model he finds in the *Respublica*—in a rather different way than the late Neoplatonists.

### *The Numenian and the Neoplatonic responses*

Just as Macrobius and Proclus present the only record of Colotes' polemic against the myth of Er, so too do they expound the only direct Neoplatonic responses. There is, however, another Latin commentary on the *Somnium*, attributed to Favonius Eulogius, an orator who apparently studied under Augustine.<sup>53</sup> He argues that Cicero composed a clever and reasonable dream that is unlike Plato's myth of Er, such that only the latter is "mythic" and so liable to Epicurean mockery.<sup>54</sup> Macrobius, however, takes any strike against the myth of Er as a potential blow against the *Somnium* by extension and sets the defense against Colotes' criticism as a preliminary task before discussing Cicero's narrative.<sup>55</sup> Proclus similarly treats the refutation of

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<sup>53</sup> "But in nearly the same time, in which we heard this, it happened that we met the Carthaginian orator Eulogius in Milan, who was my student in this art, when he was handing down the rhetorical books of Cicero to his own students, as he told me after return to Africa, reviewed the reading which he was going to treat on the next day and found a certain obscure passage, and was so bothered by not understanding it that he was barely able to sleep" (*sed eodem ipse ferme tempore, quo id audiuius, id est nobis apud Mediolanum constitutis Carthaginis rhetor Eulogius, qui meus in eadem arte discipulus fuit, sicut mihi ipse, posteaquam in Africam remeauimus, retulit, cum rhetoricos Ciceronis libros discipulis suis traderet, recensens lectionem, quam postridie fuerat traditurus, quendam locum offendit obscurum, quo non intellecto uix potuit dormire sollicitus; cura mort.* 11.13). Perhaps the context, seeing authorities, and earlier fathers, in sleep, indicates Favonius' particular interest in the *Somnium* further. Cf. Rose (2013: 339-40).

<sup>54</sup> "Cicero writes about the republic in imitation of Plato, a treatment of the return into life of Er the Pamphilian, who, as he says, was placed on the pyre and came back to life and described many secrets about the underworld; Cicero devised in comparison not mythic things, as Plato did, but composed by a certain imagination something of a clever and reasonable dream, clearly indicating these things intelligently, what is said about the immortality of the soul and heaven, fictions of dreaming philosophers, not inconceivable myths, which the Epicureans mock, but inferences of the wise" (*imitatione Platonis Cicero de re p(ublica) scribens locum etiam de [r]Eris Pamphili reditu in uitam, qui, ut ait, rogo impositus reuixisset multaque de inferis secreta narrasset, non fabulosa, ut ille, assimulatione commentus est, sed sollertis somnii rationabili quadam imaginatione composuit, uidelicet scite significans haec, quae de animae immortalitate dicerentur caeloque, somniantium philosophorum esse commenta, nec fabulas incredibiles, quas Epicurei derident, sed prudentium coniecturas;* 1.5-24).

<sup>55</sup> "And so, before we turn to the words of the *Somnium*, we must make clear what sort of men Cicero says either mocked the myth of Plato, or that he has no cause to fear at least" (*ac priusquam somnii uerba consulimus,*

Colotes as the initial skirmish before embarking on his commentary on the Platonic myth. They seem to share a common foundation in the comparison between fictionality in myth and symbolism in the mysteries formulated by Porphyry, apparently drawn from Numenius to some unclear degree.<sup>56</sup> They emphasize different defenses in addition to this basic core—Macrobius appeals to the distinction between philosophical and poetic myth, while Proclus argues that the nature of embodied souls makes them suited to the form of myth—but together they reflect a coherent response to Colotes’ assault upon the myth of Er.

Against the contention that fiction is categorically unsuitable for conveying truth, Proclus appeals to Porphyry and the Heraclitean adage “nature loves to hide herself.” Some level of fiction is therefore appropriate to discussing nature.<sup>57</sup> Proclus later discusses the mysteries further, but Macrobius, in even greater detail, appeals again to Numenius—further indication that he played some role in Porphyry’s formulation—and argues that nature wants to hide itself in pious coverings of images and figures.<sup>58</sup> The Latin Neoplatonist even relates an anecdote about Numenius’ personal transgression and recantation, spurred by a warning of divine displeasure:

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*enodandum nobis est a quo genere hominum Tullius memoret uel irrisam Platonism fabulam uel ne sibi idem eueniat non uereri; I.2.1).*

<sup>56</sup> For Numenius’ influence on Porphyry generally, see Zambon (2002: 186-250). See also Lambertson (1992: 123-8).

<sup>57</sup> Against these arguments, not only are we able to meet them by saying as many things as the most philosophical Porphyry laid out: ... And (he argues that) this is fictitious by nature in some way, for which reason nature loves to hide herself according to Heraclitus” (ἡμεῖς δὲ πρὸς τοὺς τοιούσδε λόγους οὐχ ὅσα μόνον ὁ φιλοσοφώτατος κατέτεινεν Πορφύριος ἔχομεν ἂν ἀπαντῶντες λέγειν ... καὶ ὅτι τὸ πλασματῶδες τοῦτο κατὰ φύσιν πῶς ἐστίν, διότι καὶ ἡ φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ καθ’ Ἡράκλειτον [frg. B123 Diels]; *In Remp.* II.106.14-6, 107.5-7). Proclus distinguishes his own arguments from his summary of Porphyry’s (106.14-7.14) with the tag, “It must be added to these...” (προσθετέον δὲ τούτοις...; 107.14), as Festugière (1970) noted (III.49n3). On the meaning of Heraclitus’ phrase, and particularly φιλεῖ with the infinitive, see Tor (2018). Hadot (2006) examines this Heraclitean concept in Numenius and the Neoplatonists more broadly (58-75).

<sup>58</sup> “Thus the very mysteries are covered by the secret devices of images, lest the nature of things of this sort should reveal itself to even those who obtain these them, but only the most eminent of men with wisdom as their guide are cognizant of the secret truth, the rest must be content with the worship removed from baseness with the protection of images” (*sic ipsa mysteria figurarum cuniculis operiuntur ne uel haec adeptis nudam rerum talium natura se praebeat, sed summatibus tantum uiris sapientia interprete ueri arcani consciis, contenti sint reliqui ad uenerationem figuris defendentibus a uilitate secretum; I.2.18*). Cf. Proclus *In Remp.* II.108.17-30. Olympiodorus similarly appeals to mystery religion: “For as in rituals both hieratic operations and mysteries bear screens, lest the unworthy see what happens, thus also myths are coverings of internal ideas, lest they should be naked and accessible

Indeed, dreams revealed to Numenius, marked for curiosity about secrets among the philosophers, his offense against the gods, because he divulged the Eleusinian mysteries with his exposition: appearing to him in harlot's garb, the Eleusinian goddesses seemed to be selling themselves before a conspicuous brothel, and angrily responded to Numenius, who was marveling and asking about the cause of their shame unfitting for divinities, that it was he who dragged them from their sanctuary of modesty by force, as prostitutes for whoever should approach.<sup>59</sup>

Myths are more appropriate for describing the divine, according to this argument, because it is pious to discuss the divine in a certain traditional and allegorical manner. These testimonies are insufficient to show how Numenius himself used this argument and whether he was also directly addressing Epicurean polemic, but Macrobius' and Proclus' arguments—both probably building on Porphyry—seem to take this as a first step and build further, defensive arguments.

In response to the argument that myths neither satisfy philosophers or non-philosophers, Proclus distinguishes two audiences within every embodied human and argues that the two parts of a certain sort of myth, the fictive exterior and the deeply true interior, indeed each find an audience in every embodied soul:

But for souls assuming the *phantastic* intellect and existence, without which they would not be able to remain in this place of generation... for them, there is a fitting means of education through myths of a certain sort: they contain the, mostly hidden, intellectual light of truth, but they project a fictive covering outward, which hides it through likeness as the imagination within us covers the partial intellect with shadow.<sup>60</sup>

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for whoever wants them” (ὅσπερ γὰρ ἐν ἱεροῖς τὰ τε ἱερατικὰ ὄργανα καὶ τὰ μυστήρια παραπετάσματα ἔχει, ἵνα μὴ οἱ ἀνάξιοι ὡς ἔτυχεν θεῶνται, οὕτως καὶ ἐνταῦθα προκαλύμματά εἰσιν οἱ μῦθοι τῶν δογμάτων, ἵνα μὴ γυμνὰ ὧσι καὶ βατὰ τοῖς βουλομένοις; *In Gorg.* 46.6).

<sup>59</sup> *Numenio denique inter philosophos occultiori curiosiori offensam numinum, quod Eleusinia sacra interpretando uulgauerit, somnia prodiderunt, uiso sibi ipsas Eleusiniarum deas habitu meretrico ante apertum lupanar uidere prostantes, admirantique et causas non conuenientis numinibus turpitudinis consulenti respondisse iratas ab ipso se de adyto pudicitiae suae ui abstractas et passim adeuntibus prostituas* (I.2.19).

<sup>60</sup> ταῖς ψυχαῖς νοεραῖς μὲν οὐσαις κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτῶν ὑπαρξιν καὶ λόγων πλήρεσιν ἀσωμάτων καὶ νοερῶν, ἐνδυσσάμεναις [δὲ] τὸν φανταστικὸν νοῦν καὶ ζῆν... ταύταις δ' οὖν, ὡς εἶπομεν, γενομέναις ἀπαθέσι παθητικαῖς, ἀμορφάτοις μορφωτικαῖς, πρέπων ἐστὶν τρόπος διδασκαλίας εἰκότως ὁ διὰ τῶν τοιῶνδε μύθων· οἷς πολὺ μὲν ἐστὶν ἔνδον τὸ νοερὸν τῆς ἀληθείας φέγγος, προβέβληται δὲ τὸ πλασματῶδες, ἀποκρύπτων ἐκεῖνο κατὰ μίμησιν τῆς ἐν ἡμῖν φαντασίας ἐπιλυγαζούσης τὸν μερικὸν νοῦν (II.107.14-26).



The acquisition of *phantasia* in the process of generation explains, for Proclus, the necessity of the fictive exterior of myths.<sup>61</sup> He soon, however, introduces the problem of myths with fictive surfaces that are harmful rather than benign, and claims that Plato distances himself from these: “Plato strips away the representations of poetic myth, because the uninitiated souls are full of vulgar notions.”<sup>62</sup> This sort of myth with the potential to harm is thus distinguished from “Platonic myth” at the end of the lemma, which indicates that Proclus’ idea of myth appropriate for both parts of the soul is a conception of philosophical myth.<sup>63</sup>

Macrobius more extensively explicates a categorization of myth through a series of divisions, culminating with poetic and philosophical myth. He begins by distinguishing myths that “are learned for the sake of acquiring pleasure for the ears,” and those that possess “an exhortation toward virtue also.”<sup>64</sup> The former sort, the solely pleasurable, which Macrobius associates with New Comedy and novels, is strictly forbidden from philosophy, as some profanity that might pollute the pure.<sup>65</sup> The didactic sort, on the other hand, is subdivided again,

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<sup>61</sup> Olympiodorus similarly argues that all myths are fitting for tripartite humans, possessing mind, opinion, and *phantasia* (καὶ νοῦν καὶ δόξαν καὶ φαντασίαν; *In Gorg.* 46.6). Sheppard (1997) argues that the faculty of *phantasia* was at least sometimes considered an organ of inspiration for many Neoplatonists, such as Iamblichus (206-7), while as for Proclus it exclusively refers the lowest faculty of its sort (209-10). Gertz (2011) examines two other approaches to myth in Proclus (183), and two in Damascius (183-4).

<sup>62</sup> διὸ καὶ Πλάτων ἀπεσκευάζετο τὰς τῶν ποιητικῶν μύθων διαθέσεις, ἀναμιμλάσας τὰς ἀτελέστους ψυχὰς ὑπονοιῶν φορτικῶν (Π.108.14-6).

<sup>63</sup> Proclus concludes his discussion of poetic myth with the disclaimer that he has discussed it further in a lost work “on mythic symbols” (περὶ τῶν μυθικῶν συμβόλων), and that the account must therefore progress onto Platonic myth (ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἤδη τὸν Πλατωνικὸν μῦθον χωρεῖν ἀναγκαῖον; Π.108.30-109.2).

<sup>64</sup> *fabulae... aut tantum conciliandae auribus uoluptatis, aut adhortationis quoque in bonam frugem gratia repertae sunt* (I.2.7).

<sup>65</sup> “The method of wisdom carries this entire sort of myths, which professes only the delights of ears, out from its own precinct and into the cradles of nurses” (*hoc totum fabularum genus, quod solas aurium delicias profitetur, e sacrario suo in nutricum cunas sapientiae tractatus eliminat*; I.2.8). Earlier in this section, Macrobius specifies as examples of this sort of myth “Menander and imitators of him” (*Menander eiusque imitatores*) alongside Petronius and Apuleius—which apparently comes to his surprise, given the description “we marvel sometimes that Apuleius plays” (*Apuleium non numquam lusisse miramur*). Stahl (1990) takes this to indicate that “Macrobius must have admired Apuleius’ serious side but could hardly be expected to have any appreciation of the *Golden Ass*” (84n5). Apuleius is invoked with respect in Macrobius’ *Saturnalia*, in a discussion of the Greek concept of a σκῶμμα (VII.3.1-2), Eustathius emphasizes the importance of the topic to Avenius by appealing to the serious treatments of Aristotle, Plutarch, and “your” (*uester*) Apuleius (I.3.24).

between myths that are entirely fictional, such as Aesop's fables, and those founded in truth but clothed in fiction—mythic plots (*narratio fabulosa*), but not themselves myths (*fabula*).<sup>66</sup> The latter category is broad, including theological poets such as Hesiod and Orpheus, but also Pythagorean mysticism. This division is, in turn, subdivided again into a third level of distinctions. There are myths whose “plot” (*narratio*) is scandalous and morally absurd, poetry including such outrageous examples as divine adulteries and familial violence, “of which philosophers prefer to remain ignorant.”<sup>67</sup> Then, there is the “examination of sacred things under the pious cover of fictions, revealed covered in honorable deeds and clothed in names—this is the only sort of fiction that the undertaking of philosophizing about divine affairs allows”<sup>68</sup>—the notorious succession myth looms yet again. Plato and Cicero, Macrobius argues, strictly use this final sort of myth, which is founded in truth and narrated through a pious screen.

In the age of Justinian, Olympiodorus even strives to draw out the educative implications of this distinction in his commentary on the *Gorgias*: poetic myth has a horrifying surface that

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<sup>66</sup> “But from these, which were urged for the understanding of the reader toward each sort of virtues, a second distinction results. For in one of them, the plot is founded in fiction and the very order of the narration is composed through lies, as the myths of Aesop are, distinguished by the beauty of the fiction, but in the other, the plot at least is established on true solidity, but this very truth is advanced through certain contrived and fictive things, and this is indeed called mythic narrative, not myths, as the sacred things of the rituals, as what Hesiod and Orpheus say about the genealogy and acts of the gods, as the mystic thoughts of the Pythagoreans are related” (*ex his autem quae ad quandam uirtutum speciem intellectum legentis hortantur fit secunda discretio. in quibusdam enim et argumentum ex ficto locatur et per mendacia ipse relationis ordo contexitur, ut sunt illae Aesopi fabulae elegantia fictionis illustres, at in aliis argumentum quidem fundatur ueri soliditate sed haec ipsa ueritas per quaedam composita et ficta profertur, et hoc iam uocatur narratio fabulosa, non fabula, ut sunt caerimoniarum sacra, ut Hesiodi et Orphei quae de deorum progenie actuae narrantur, ut mystica Pythagoreorum sensa referuntur*; I.2.9).

<sup>67</sup> “The resulting division is separated again into another distinction: for when truth underlies the plot and only the narrative is mythic, not just one means of relating truth through fiction is discovered. For either the composition of the story is compiled through shameful things, unworthy of the divine and similar to the unnatural, such as adulterous gods, Saturn cutting off the genitals of his father Sky and being forced into chains in turn by his son who received the kingdom, that whole sort of which the philosophers prefer to remain ignorant” (*sequens in aliam rursum discretionem scissa diuiditur: nam cum ueritas argumento subest solaque fit narratio fabulosa, non unus reperitur modus per figmentum uera referendi. aut enim contextio narrationis per turpia et indigna numinibus ac monstro similia componitur ut di adulteri, Saturnus pudenda Caeli patris abscidens et ipse rursus a filio regni potito in uincla coniectus, quod genus totum philosophi nescire*; I.2.10-1).

<sup>68</sup> *aut sacrarum rerum notio sub pio figmentorum uelamine honestis et tecta rebus et uestita nominibus enuntiatur: et hoc est solum figmenti genus quod cautio de diuinis rebus philosophantis admittit* (I.2.11).

“makes us seek a concealed truth,” but can “deceive the ears of the young;”<sup>69</sup> philosophical myth, on the other hand, “bear the detriment that, since their manifest surface does not harm, it often lets us stay on the surface of them and not seek the truth.”<sup>70</sup> Olympiodorus’ innovation, however, is in elucidating the ethical and pedagogical utility of the earlier Neoplatonic distinction between philosophical and poetic myth, presumably as a part of his defense of the value of pagan philosophy and culture in an increasingly Christian world.<sup>71</sup> It seems, however, that this idea was already formulated by Porphyry, who is the common source of Macrobius and Proclus.

Macrobius attests to an additional ontological restriction on this sort of didactically useful, philosophical myth: only certain *encosmic* objects are appropriate to it, such as souls and some divinities and presumably the *daemones* between them.<sup>72</sup> Plato only treats the higher ontological objects, Macrobius argues, with non-mythic discourses:

But yet, when the treatment dares to elevate itself toward the highest and the principal of all the gods—which is called *to agathon*, that which is the *proton aition*, among the Greeks—or toward mind—which the Greeks call *nous*, which comprehends the original forms of things, the so-called ideas, and which is born and perfected by the highest god

<sup>69</sup> οἷον ὁ ποιητικὸς ἔχει πλεονέκτημα ὅτι τοιαῦτα λέγει ὡς καὶ τὸν τυχόντα μὴ πείθεσθαι ἀλλ’ ἔρχεσθαι ἐπὶ κεκρυμμένην ἀλήθειαν. ... ὥστε πλεονεκτεῖ μὲν ὁ ποιητικὸς μῦθος κατὰ τοῦτο, ὅτι τοιαῦτα λέγει ἃ μὴ παραδέχεται μὴδὲ τυχοῦσα ἀκοή, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τὸ κεκρυμμένον ἔρχεται· ἔχει δὲ ἐλάττωμα ὅτι ἀπατᾷ νέαν ἀκοήν (*In Gorg.* 46.4).

<sup>70</sup> ἔχουσι δὲ ἐλάττωμα ὅτι, ἐπειδὴ τὸ φαινόμενον αὐτῶν οὐ βλάπτει, πολλάκις ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀπομένομεν καὶ οὐ ζητοῦμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν (46.6).

<sup>71</sup> Tarrant in Jackson et al. (1998) argues that “Olympiodorus comments on a text with ethical rather than metaphysical relevant before an audience which is itself new to Plato” (3-4), which seems to be part of his smoothing “to a fundamentally Christian Platonism at Alexandria” (10). In light of historical context of the rule of Justinian, Wildberg (2006) characterizes Olympiodorus as “not a pagan of a combative sort” like Simplicius, but rather a purveyor of a “toothless Platonism” (321). Gagné (2013) defines the contexts of Proclus and Plutarch as much more polemical: “both Plutarch and Proclus chose to make the principle of ancestral fault a central concern of their historical, moral, and religious world-views. They defined it as an element of Hellenic identity based on opposition: one gave it shape of a cultural principle in the context of Roman rule; the other cast it as the religious dogma of a unified pagan faith in the context of a triumphant Christianity” (49). On the spirit of Neoplatonic resistance to Christianity generally, cf. Hadot (2006): “The Neoplatonists wanted to protect traditional religion against the invasion of the Christian religion, for they sincerely believed that the cult of the gods was linked to the action of the World Soul, which preserved the universe. Nietzsche said that Christianity was a Platonism for the people. For the Neoplatonists, pagan myths and rituals were also a Platonism for the people, or, even more precisely, a hidden physics” (75).

<sup>72</sup> “Yet it must be known that philosophers do not include mythic things, even permissible ones, into every argument. Rather, they are accustomed to use these things when they discuss the soul or the powers of the air or the aether or the other gods” (*sciendum est tamen non in omnem disputationem philosophos admittere fabulosa uel licita; sed his uti solent cum uel de anima uel de aeriis aetheriisque potestatibus uel de ceteris dis loquuntur*; I.2.13).

and mind; when I speak about that these things that are said about the highest god and mind, nothing intimately mythic reaches them. But if someone should attempt to signify anything about these things, which surpass not only human speech but even understanding, they flee to similarities and examples.<sup>73</sup>

These highest ontological objects, Macrobius argues, would be inappropriate to describe in myths. He further argues that Plato, when he does attempt to approximate the form of the good in the *Respublica*, uses the image of the sun, rather than some sort of mythic narrative.<sup>74</sup> But myths are fitting for these encosmic gods, on the other hand, because they desire to be hidden in pious images, lest they be vulgarized.<sup>75</sup>

This is where Numenius' comparison with the mythic drama of mystery religion enters Macrobius' exposition. Numenius' interpretation of the *Odyssey*, which Porphyry preserves in *De antro nympharum*, indeed abides by this stipulation: the focus of the interpretation is of the embodiment and disembodiment of the soul, represented by Odysseus suffering on his watery

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<sup>73</sup> *ceterum cum ad summum et principem omnium deum, qui apud Graecos τὰγαθόν, qui πρῶτον αἴτιον nuncupatur, tractatus se audet attollere, uel ad mentem, quem Graeci νοῦν appellant, originales rerum species, quae ἰδέαι dictae sunt, continentem, ex summo natam et profectam deo: cum de his inquam loquuntur summo deo et mente, nihil fabulosum penitus attingunt, sed siquid de his adsignare conantur quae non sermonem tantum modo sed cogitationem quoque humanam superant, ad similitudines et exempla confugiunt* (I.2.14).

<sup>74</sup> “Thus when Plato was roused to speak about the good, to say what he dared not, because he knows only this about it, that it is not possible for the sort of thing it is to be known by a man; instead, he discovered only that the sun, of the visible things, is similar to it, and through this similarity he opened the path for his speech to elevate itself to the incomprehensible” (*sic Plato cum de τὰγαθῷ loqui esset animatus, dicere quid sit non ausus est, hoc solum de eo sciens, quod sciri quale sit ab homine non possit, solum uero ei simillimum de uisibilibus solem repperit, et per eius similitudinem uiam sermoni suo attollendi se ad non comprehendenda patefecit*; I.2.15). He goes on to compare the lack of statues of the ancients to the good (§16). Cf. Plotinus I.7.1. Olympiodorus similarly argues, “To start, it is necessary to know that they (sc. the ancients) regarded it right to use myths for two subjects: nature and our souls” (δεῖ τοίνυν εἰδέναι ὅτι εἰς δύο ταῦτα ἀποβλέψαντες μύθοις ἐχρήσαντο, εἷς τε τὴν φύσιν καὶ εἰς τὴν ἡμετέραν ψυχὴν; *In Gorg.* 46.2).

<sup>75</sup> “But about the other gods, as I said, and about the soul, and they do not vainly turn themselves towards the mythic so as to please, but because they know that the open and bare exposition of it is inimicable to nature, which removes itself thus from the common senses of men by its varied protection and covering of things, and thus it wanted for its secrets to be hidden by the wise through mythic things. Thus the very mysteries are covered by the secret devices of images, lest the nature of things of this sort should reveal itself to even those who obtain these them, but only the most eminent of men with wisdom as their guide are cognizant of the secret truth, the rest must be content with the worship removed from baseness with the protection of images” (*de dis autem [ut dixi] ceteris et de anima non frustra se nec ut oblectent ad fabulosa conuertunt, sed quia sciunt inimicam esse naturae apertam nudamque expositionem sui, quae sicut uulgaribus hominum sensibus intellectum sui uario rerum tegmine operimentoque subtrahit, ita a prudentibus arcana sua uoluit per fabulosa tractari. sic ipsa mysteria figurarum cuniculis operiuntur ne uel haec adeptis nudam rerum talium natura se praebeat, sed summatibus tantum uiris sapientia interprete ueri arcani consciis, contenti sint reliqui ad uenerationem figuris defendentibus a uilitate secretum*; I.2.17-8).

journeys and reaching landlocked respite—nothing nearing the highest god and the cosmic intellect.<sup>76</sup> Although written about two centuries earlier, Cicero’s *Somnium* also avoids describing ontologically higher entities than souls, which might perhaps hint at a similar spirit of response to the Epicurean polemic against the Platonic myth of Er.<sup>77</sup> Plutarch, however, manifestly does not accept this extreme of an imposition on philosophical myth: in Sulla’s myth in *De facie*, he incorporates the sun as the divine intellect.<sup>78</sup> He does not, evidently, anticipate this particular requirement of Numenius’ piety, despite Vernière’s argument. As the next section will show, Plutarch does not share this Neoplatonic distinction between poetic and philosophical myth, but rather treats prose myth as a sort of poetry, all of which could convey good ethical lessons despite their fictionality.

### *The ethical ramifications of fiction*

Plutarch’s own response to Colotes is more scattered than the neatly concentrated defenses in Macrobius’ and Proclus’ commentaries, but he responds to each aspect of the Epicurean attack. His approach, moreover, differs vastly from the Neoplatonists examined in the

<sup>76</sup> “For I do not think it is far off the mark from what those around Numenius think, that throughout the *Odyssey*, in Homer’s eyes, Odysseus bears the image of a man proceeding successively through generation, and being returned to those beyond everything that have no knowledge of wave and sea: ‘until you arrive to those men, who do not know the sea and do not eat food mixed with salt.’ The sea and the wave are, according to Plato also, the substance of materiality” (οὐ γὰρ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ οἶμαι καὶ τοῖς περὶ Νουμήνιον ἐδόκει Ὀδυσσεὺς εἰκόνα φέρειν Ὀμήρω κατὰ τὴν Ὀδύσειαν τοῦ διὰ τῆς ἐφεξῆς γενέσεως διερχομένου καὶ οὕτως ἀποκαθισταμένου εἰς τοὺς ἔξω παντὸς κλύδωνος καὶ θαλάσσης ἀπεύρους: “εἰσόκε τοὺς ἀφίκηαι οἱ οὐκ ἴσασι θάλασσαν / ἀνέρες οὐδέ θ’ ἄλεσσι μεμιγμένον εἶδαρ ἔουσι [*Od.* XI.122-3].” πόντος δὲ καὶ θάλασσα καὶ κλύδων καὶ παρὰ Πλάτωνι ἡ ὑλικὴ σύστασις; §34 = Numenius frg. 33 des Places). Porphyry also refers to more specific aspects of Numenius’ interpretation in §10 (= frg. 30), §21 (= frg. 31), and §28 (= frg. 32).

<sup>77</sup> Corti (2014) carefully suggests that Cicero could have known Colotes’ work either through the mediation of Zeno of Sidon—“il quale a sua volta conosceva sicuramente il pensiero di Colote, visto che ne riprese la polemica contro Socrate”—or Philodemus (91).

<sup>78</sup> 944e. See further *infra* pg. 316. The *daemonic* guide in the myth of *De gen.*, however, describes his own restriction: “For us... there is little part in the things above: for the rest belongs to the gods. But the portion of Persephone that we conduct—one of the four portions which the Styx divides—it is possible for you to see this, if you desire” (ἀλλ’ ἡμῖν... τῶν ἄνω μέτεστι μικρόν· ἄλλων γὰρ θεῶν ἐκεῖνα· τὴν δὲ Φερσεφόνης μοῖραν, ἣν ἡμεῖς διέπομεν, τῶν τεττάρων μίαν οὖσαν ὡς ἡ Στυξ ὀρίζει, βουλομένω σοι σκοπεῖν πάρεστιν; 591a). Yet before describing the Styx in greater detail (591c), he sketches the entire cosmos from the monad to the moon (591b).

previous section. The latter, especially through the distinction between philosophical and poetic myth, are much more attentive to the characteristically Platonic concern of sanitizing the ethically reprehensible actions traditionally attributed to the gods—especially the Hesiodic succession myth. Plutarch seems surprisingly unconcerned about this aspect of the same myth in his own narrative in *De facie*, which prominently includes the image of sleeping Cronus chained and guarded by one of the Hesiodic hundred-handers<sup>79</sup>—scandalous elements of an episode that Plato abhorred beyond all others, such that Socrates in the *Respublica* relegates the entire myth, if it ever has to be disclosed at all, to after only the most elaborate and costly sacrifice.<sup>80</sup> The subdued father plays more of a role in Zeus’ reign in Plutarch’s rendition, given that he dreams the thoughts of his son and passes them onto the *daemones* that serve him, but the violence of his overthrow is emphasized by the monstrous guard and the chains. Although Plutarch imitates Plato in many respects in *De facie*, as the next chapter examines, this need for separating the divine from familial violence in mythic narratives is absent.

Although Plutarch never discusses Colotes’ attack on the myth of Er directly, his broader polemic against Epicurus’ beloved student, as well as the teacher himself, make it likely that his criticism against the myth of Er forms the background against which Plutarch composes his own philosophical myths in the style of Plato.<sup>81</sup> He thus attacks the individual assumptions that

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<sup>79</sup> Plutarch emphasizes figure of the defeated, chained Cronus (*De def. or.* 419e-20a, *De fac.* 941f-2a), as well as Zeus’ role in devising the punishment in the latter (τὸν γὰρ ὕπνον αὐτῷ μεμηχανῆσθαι δεσμὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ Διός; 941f). Cf. Olympiodorus: “He indeed says that Zeus, Poseidon, and Pluton divided up the kingdom from Cronus. And since Plato is making a philosophical myth, rather than a poetic one, he does not say, as the poets do, that by force...” (λέγει τοίνυν ὅτι ἀπὸ τοῦ Κρόνου διενείμαντο τὴν βασιλείαν ὁ Ζεὺς καὶ ὁ Ποσειδῶν καὶ ὁ Πλούτων. καὶ ἐπειδὴ ὁ Πλάτων ποιητικὸν οὐ πλάττει μῦθον ἀλλὰ φιλόσοφον, οὐκ εἶπεν, ὡς οἱ ποιηταί, ὅτι βία...; *In Gorg.* 47.4).

<sup>80</sup> *Resp.* II.377e-8a. See further *supra* pg. 22.

<sup>81</sup> Flacelière (1959), Hershbell (1992), and Berner (2000) adduce examples of Plutarch’s general hostility toward Epicurus and his thought. Opsomer (2017) even contrasts his unrelenting attitude toward Epicureans with his relatively softer attitude toward Stoics, whom he expects could become Platonists. See also Boulogne (2003: 19). Warren (2011) emphasizes a key tendency in this polemic: “Plutarch takes up Platonic arms against Epicureans in response to their original attacks on Plato” (283). Boulogne’s treatment is more complex, and takes seriously the “problème des motivations de la polémique de Plutarque contre les Épicuriens” (19), which he ultimately answers

underlie the Epicurean arguments—namely, the criticism that inspiring fear in afterlife punishments is harmful and that fictions of a mythic or a poetic sort have the potential to mislead. Plutarch’s positions on fear of eschatological punishment, the next section will show, form a consistent approach. Properly understood as a consequence of providential care in a just universe, it is beneficial to fear, although amoral or arbitrary punishment must be understood as a harmful delusion. This approach is rather different from the late Neoplatonists, just as Plutarch’s approach to the Epicurean criticisms of poetry and fictionality more generally are also different, as this section shows. His treatise on poetry and his depictions of characters interpreting the myth of Er reflect a coherent approach to mythic fiction. He argues that there are details that are extrinsic and contribute to the pleurability of the narrative, although they should not be taken too seriously or literally.<sup>82</sup> Both in poetry and prose, he distinguishes the essential core of the story from extrinsic details.<sup>83</sup> It must be sought in mythic narratives so that it can stand scrutiny,

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through reference to Plutarch’s role as “un professeur de philosophie” (36); “Parce qu’il enseignait la philosophie, celui-ci se devait de connaître sérieusement les théories du Jardin. Par suite, ses écrits anti-épicuriens répondent à une exigence naturelle de la vie de son École. ... La réfutation d’Épicure lui était imposée par une double nécessité: répliquer aux attaques dont les idées auxquelles il adhérait étaient la cible de la part des Épicuriens anciens et contemporains, et prouver, afin de mieux les propager, la supériorité de ses propres positions sur l’homme et le monde” (37-38). See also Roskam (2011a) on latent anti-Epicureanism in *De amor. prol.*

<sup>82</sup> There is a substantial body of scholarship on Plutarch’s treatise on poetry, including a few general treatments: Barrow (1967: 79-82), Lamberton (2001: 46-51), Zadorojnyi (2002), Konstan (2004), Heath (2013: 104-11), Bowie (2014: 183-4), Lather (2017: 323-34), and especially Hunter & Russell (2011). Schenkeveld (1982) discusses the structure of the treatise and summarizes earlier scholarship (especially 61-3). Less is said about Plutarch’s apparent commentary on the Hesiodic *Op.*, but cf. Bowie (2014: 188) and Hunter (2014: 167-226). On Plutarch’s approach to poetry and “literature” more broadly, see van der Stockt (1992). There is an abundance of scholarship on Plutarch’s quotation of poetry, particularly on the issue of whether his source is first-hand knowledge of the texts or some kind of sub-literary collection: cf. de Wet (1988), Lather (2017: 323n1). Shorey (1935) plausibly characterizes the treatise as a response to Plato’s challenge for “lovers of poetry” (φιλοποιηται), but not poets, to defend her in *Respublica* X.607d (467nd), but scholars also appeal to later Hellenistic schools: Lamberton (2001), for instance, emphasizes the role of Stoics, especially given the praise of Chryssipus in 34b. Hunter & Russell (2011) argue for three bodies of engagement: “Plato, the detailed critical and interpretive analysis of Homer, itself importantly indebted to Aristotle and the Peripatetics, ... and finally the Stoics” (2-3); “the result is that Plutarch “therefore replaces Plato’s rejection of poetry with a controlled régime which puts the responsibility for correct interpretation upon the pupil and the teacher” (8). Cf. 4n15.

<sup>83</sup> Heath (2013) compares Plutarch’s summary of the Isis and Osiris story, which purports to have had “everything excessively unprofitable and superfluous removed” (... τῶν ἀχρήστων σφόδρα καὶ περιττῶν ἀφαιρεθέντων; 355d).

which might result in letting some of the details fall away.<sup>84</sup> These defenses of Platonic myth indicate how Plutarch's own narratives, especially in *De sera*, are set up to be understood.

The treatise entitled *Quomodo adulescens poetas audire debeat* concerns the ways in which not just poetry, but any sort of literary work, starts to become irresistibly appealing for the young once they reach a certain age: "For they are enthusiastic not just when they go through Aesop's little fables and poetic plays, but also Heracleides' *Abaris* and Ariston's *Lycon* and ideas about souls mixed pleasurably with mythology."<sup>85</sup> The last category seems to hint at Platonic myth, which suggests some common ground between Plutarch's advice for reading poetry and also his own myths.<sup>86</sup> The treatise is composed as a guide for Marcus Sedatus, whose son is, like one of Plutarch's at the time, just coming to the age where poetry becomes inescapably appealing.<sup>87</sup> He rejects the idea of excluding his child from poetry entirely as potentially harmful, as Epicurus would suggest, and offers a sort of middle-ground alternative:

Well then, are we to plug up the ears of young men with some harsh and unsoftened wax, forcing ourselves upon an Epicurean skiff and praying to flee and row past poetry? Or is it better to be present and to bind them with some steady reasoning, to guide and watch their judgement closely, so that they are not brought to harm by pleasure?<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> This sort of procedure stands in stark contrast to how e.g. Bernstein (1993) attempts to construct a Platonic underworld that is coherent in all topographic details: "As stated in the *Phaedrus*, souls that are repeatedly demoted eventually receive retribution beneath the earth. Thus a full knowledge of the earth's interior is necessary to understand future punishment" (54); the topography of the *Phaedo* myth is then discussed in detail (54-6).

<sup>85</sup> οὐ γὰρ μόνον τὰ Αἰσώπεια μυθάρια καὶ τὰς ποιητικὰς ὑποθέσεις ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν Ἄβαριν τὸν Ἡρακλείδου καὶ τὸν Λύκωνα τὸν Ἀρίστωνος διερχόμενοι καὶ τὰ περὶ τῶν ψυχῶν δόγματα μεμιγμένα μυθολογία μεθ' ἡδονῆς ἐνθουσιῶσι (14e). He uses Socrates' versification of Aesop in the *Phaedo* as an example of poetry with relatively little falsehood (16c), before listing Empedocles, Parmenides, Nicander, and Theognis.

<sup>86</sup> On the relationship between Plutarch's poetic and prose exegesis, see Bréchet (2010).

<sup>87</sup> 14d-e, 15a-b. Plutarch's emphasis is on poetry as a preliminary to philosophy (e.g. 37b). Zadorojnyi (2002) is skeptical about the addressee, but argues, based on the son's name ("Cleandros"), that he is Greek (305); more practically, Schenkeveld (1982) emphasizes the direct role that the recipient is understood to take in his son's education (71).

<sup>88</sup> πότερον οὖν τῶν νέων ὥσπερ τῶν Ἰθακησίων σκληρῶ τι τὰ ὄτα καὶ ἀτέγκτω κηρῶ καταπλάττοντες ἀναγκάζομεν αὐτοὺς τὸ Ἐπικούρειον ἀκάτιον ἀραμένους ποιητικὴν φεύγειν καὶ παρεξελαύνειν, ἢ μᾶλλον ὀρθῶ τι λογισμῶ παριστάντες καὶ καταδέοντες, τὴν κρίσιν, ὅπως μὴ παραφέρηται τῷ τέρποντι πρὸς τὸ βλάπτον, ἀπευθύνωμεν καὶ παραφυλάττωμεν; (15d). The nautical metaphor recurs in 37b. Heath (2013) views this image as an allusion to Epicurus (*Ep. Pyth.*, *apud* Diog. Laert. X.6.7), and argues that Plutarch's position on poetry is, despite his hostility to Epicurus, rather similar to his (112-4).



This play on the Homeric image exhorts Sedatus to put his son in the position of Odysseus, ears unimpeded to enjoy the Sirens' song but fastened safely to the mast. Sound judgment—and particularly, ethical judgement<sup>89</sup>—is the rope, it seems, that keep the youth from harm while they experience the aesthetic pleasure of poetry.<sup>90</sup> Plutarch's first lesson is to distrust poetry by emphasizing that “the poets tell many lies.”<sup>91</sup> Fiction has the potential to mislead, but Plutarch advises the teacher to avoid this danger by carefully instructing the student how to grapple with it, rather than to somehow endeavoring to flee it entirely.<sup>92</sup> Yet Sedatus must beware one type of fictionality in particular. Plutarch distinguishes two sorts: those fictions that are not themselves dangerous, apparently including the fantastical geographical details about underworld topography;<sup>93</sup> and those are ethically troubling ones that could lead to despondency in the reader. A central example of the latter is Elpenor, who laments when he meets Odysseus in the

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<sup>89</sup> This ethical emphasis is often met with dismissal in the scholarship, as if Plutarch is missing the point of poetry. Zadorojnyi (2002), for instance, complains of “moralizing waffle” (297) and “a certain triviality of moral advice” (298), but ultimately concludes that Plutarch's educational project is faithful to Plato's idea of “pre-philosophical” education in the *Republic* and *Laws* (especially 302-5). See also Westaway (1922: 205-6, 185-6) and, more neutrally, Gallo (2003: 198). Russell (1972), however, deems Plutarch “the great traditionalist and educator,” and argues that his conception of education had a particularly “moral” emphasis (43-4). Cf. van der Stockt (1992: 13-4).  
<sup>90</sup> Lather (2017) compares the discussion of aesthetic pleasure in *Non posse* (344-38). Lather (2017) ultimately argues that Plutarch's own practice, in turn, is to mix poetry into his philosophy, so as to yield “philosophy that is a pastime both ‘sweet’ and ‘serious’” (325). More generally, Warren (2011) traces the conception of pleasure in this dialogue to Plato's *Resp.*, such as IX.585a-6b (281-2). Van der Stockt (1992) emphasizes Plutarch's subordination of pleasure to ethical utility (128-31).

<sup>91</sup> “First of all, then, it is necessary to lead the young man to poems bearing nothing as carefully and presently in mind as the old line ‘many are the lies the poets tell,’ some willingly and some unwillingly” (πρῶτον μὲν οὖν εἰσάγειν εἰς τὰ ποιήματα δεῖ τὸν νέον μηδὲν οὕτω μεμελετημένον ἔχοντα καὶ πρόχειρον ὡς τὸ “πολλὰ ψεύδονται ἄοιδοὶ” τὰ μὲν ἐκόντες τὰ δ’ ἄκοντες; 16a). In *Per.*, for instance, Plutarch criticizes the poets for contradicting themselves (ἀλίσκονται τοῖς αὐτῶν μυθεύμασι) by depicting the heavens as divinely calm, while imputing disturbing passions such as hatred (δυσμενείας) and wrath (ὀργῆς) to the gods (XXXIX.3).

<sup>92</sup> Pleasant poetry, he argues, is usually “falsehood mixed with plausibility” (μεμιγμένον πιθανότητι ψεῦδος), like visual arts use certain effects; hence, they are less satisfying when lacking myth and fiction (ἀμύθου καὶ ἀπλάστου; 16b-c). Cf. Plutarch in *Quaest. conv.* VII.8.713b-d. The dangers and potential benefit of pleasure is a major question also in Plutarch's treatise on listening to philosophical lectures, *De aud.*: e.g. “The style of speaking possesses a certain deception, whenever it rather pleasurably applies itself to affairs with grandeur and artistry” (ἔχει δέ τι καὶ ἡ λέξις ἀπατηλόν, ὅταν ἡδεῖα καὶ πολλῆ καὶ μετ’ ὄγκου τινὸς καὶ κατασκευῆς ἐπιφέρηται τοῖς πράγμασιν; 41c). He allows that a young man (νέος) should nevertheless find pleasure as long as it is not the end in and of itself (τέλος), and that the speaker should not disregard pleasure “entirely” (παντάπασιν; 42d). Refusing to hear a lecture because it is not in pure Attic would be like refusing medicine because the cup is not the real Attic stuff (κωλιάδος; 42d).

<sup>93</sup> “Neither Homer nor Pindar nor Sophocles have been persuaded that they think things are this way” (καὶ οὐθ’ Ὅμηρος οὔτε Πίνδαρος οὔτε Σοφοκλῆς πεπεισμένοι ταῦτ’ ἔχειν οὕτως ἔγραψαν; 17c).

underworld that he is miserable because he is unburied.<sup>94</sup> Plutarch does not specify why this sort of suffering is particularly dangerous for the young to see depicted, but perhaps it is because Elpenor's burial after death is outside of his control, and so he suffers pitifully not because he deserves it, but because his former companions did not notice that he fell off Circe's roof and died. This sort of suffering does not reflect Plutarch's view of the providential justice of the world.<sup>95</sup> He later assures the reader that Homer himself even hints that it is his custom is to call stupid and senseless men "wretched" and "pitiable"—because they suffer due to their intellectual and, consequentially, ethical failings.<sup>96</sup> Yet in the face of sorrow like Elpenor's, Plutarch advises students to see how much trouble this sort of problem creates for philosophers and not listen to mere poets.<sup>97</sup> Although his lack of an answer is perhaps frustrating, it befits his sense of pious

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<sup>94</sup> "And to be sure, so many cry out and dread and lament their death as pitiable or their lack of burial as horrendous: 'do not go back and leave me unwept, unburied'... These are the words of men who have been persuaded and convinced beforehand by opinion and error. They touch us and trouble us more because we are filled with the suffering and the weakness from these they are said" (ὄσοι μέντοι τὸν θάνατον ὡς οἰκτρὸν ἢ τὴν ἀταφίαν ὡς δεινὸν ὀλοφυρόμενοι καὶ δεδιότες φωνὰς ἐξενηνόχασι "μή μ' ἄκλαυτον ἄθαιπτον ἰὼν ὄπιθεν καταλείπειν" [Hom. *Od.* XI.72]... αὐταὶ πεπονθότων εἰσὶ καὶ προεαλωκότων ὑπὸ δόξης καὶ ἀπάτης. διὸ μᾶλλον ἄπτονται καὶ διαταράττουσιν ἡμᾶς, ἀναπιπλαμένους τοῦ πάθους καὶ τῆς ἀσθενείας ἀφ' ἧς λέγονται; 17c-d).

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Roskam (2007: 168-72). In *Cons. ad Ap.* 107d-8e, for instance, Plutarch heartily approves Socrates' claim in the *Apologia* that a good man has nothing to fear in death, whatever might happen: "But you, good judges, must be hopeful about death. It is not possible for anything bad to happen to a good man, whether alive or dead: he is not neglected by the gods" (ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑμᾶς χρῆ, ὃ ἄνδρες δικασταί, εὐέλπιδας εἶναι πρὸς τὸν θάνατον, καὶ ἐν τι τοῦτο διανοεῖσθαι ἀληθές, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνδρὶ ἀγαθῷ κακὸν οὐδὲν οὔτε ζῶντι οὔτε τελευτήσαντι, οὐδὲ ἀμελεῖται ὑπὸ θεῶν τὰ τούτου πράγματα; 41c-d). Hani (1972) surveys the long and contentious issue of the authenticity of the *Cons.* (27-43), but ultimately finds himself "résolument favorable à l'hypothèse de l'authenticité" (40). Boulet (2010) imputes a similar belief to that of the *Ap.* to Plutarch generally (64) but argues reduces the idea of divine punishment—and characteristic of myths generally—to "superstition," which he argues is only used "rhetorically" (59-63).

<sup>96</sup> After citing Hom. *Od.* IV.197-8 and XXIV.526-7, he concludes: "for he does not simply say that painful life is assigned by the gods to all men, but rather to senseless and stupid ones, whom he is accustomed to call 'wretched' and 'woeful' because they are vile and base through wickedness" (οὐ γὰρ ἀπλῶς εἶπε καὶ πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις ὑπὸ θεῶν ἐπικεκλῶσθαι λυπηρὸν βίον, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἄφροσι καὶ ἀνοήτοις, οὓς δειλαίους καὶ οἰκτροὺς διὰ μοχθηρίαν ὄντας εἶθε "δειλοῦς" καὶ "οἰζυροῦς" προσαγορεύειν; 22c). Plutarch, an intense moralist in the interpretation of poetry as well as philosophy more broadly, takes Homer at his best to reflect good sensibilities, such that he recommends paying attention to what this poet praises and blames (35a). Heath (2013) compares *Leg.* II.658d (110).

<sup>97</sup> These sorts of issues, he argues, are very hard to comprehend (δυσθήρατός ἐστι καὶ δύσληπτος) such that students see even philosophers become dizzy when dealing with them (ἐν οἷς τοὺς φιλοσόφους ἰλιγγιῶντας ὀρῶσιν); who could care what a poet says in these circumstances (17e-f)? Plutarch's retreat into pious skepticism on these sorts of points is not entirely satisfying, but it is characteristic of his thought. Cf. Brenk's (1994: 17-8) interpretation of *Romulus* XXVIII.7-8. Cf. *Adv. Col.* 1123a.

skepticism to distance himself from credulity on particularly disturbing aspects of traditional thought, such as the implicit Homeric conception of burial.<sup>98</sup>

This sort of depiction of troublesome suffering, perhaps violating Plutarch's sense of piety, might bring the unprepared student to despair of the goodness and justice in the world, which might do them real harm unless properly guided.<sup>99</sup> This eternal suffering, as what the incurable tyrants ostensibly suffer in Plato's myths, is the kind of fate that Epicureans like Colotes attempt to polemically exploit. Plutarch's treatment of the incurables in his own myth in *De sera*, accordingly, is rather different than the display of tortured tyrants in the myth of Er and the *Gorgias*, as the next section argues further. The poetic representation of manifestly fantastical nature of the features of the underworld, on the other hand, do not seem to Plutarch to present any ethical peril.

While in *Quomodo adulescens* Plutarch emphasizes the potential harmful ethical ideas in poetry, the depiction in the *Quaestiones convivales* of Lamprias' interpretation of the myth of Er, the direct target of Colotes' criticism, emphasizes the positive that can be sought in prose myth. Lamprias nevertheless also shares a similar dichotomy to the treatise on poetry: there are clearly fabulous parts that may playfully signify something but might not, and there is a philosophical position—especially an ethical one—that is the core of the myth.<sup>100</sup> This particular interpretation

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<sup>98</sup> Plutarch in the first of the *Quaest. Plat.* assumes that Plato would not have had Socrates “certainly would not use the name of the god in jest or irony” in the *Theaetetus* (οὐ γὰρ εἰρωνευόμενός γε καὶ παίζων προσεχρήσατ' ἂν τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ ὀνόματι; 999c). Roskam (2011: 421-5) and especially Opsomer (1998: 127-50) analyze this *Quaestio* in detail.

<sup>99</sup> See *supra* pg. 77.

<sup>100</sup> Plutarch's interpretations have not attracted much scholarly interest, even where it might be expected—such as in Bréchet's (2010) study of Plutarch as an exegete of both poetry and Plato—but Cürsger (2002) mentions them briefly (128). Teodorsson (1996), however, takes the Ajax episode to be entirely farcical: “The initial episode, with Hylas acting in a manner similar to that of the frustrated and sullen ghost of Ajax in Hades, is a typical literary artifice used for the sake of entertainment. This passage, if any, makes the impression of fiction... the question is a nonsense problem, posed merely as a pastime. Ajax' choice of the shape of a lion was the best possible, once he wanted to be reborn as an animal” (324-5; cf. 330). On the potential difficulties of distinguishing Plutarch's own thought from that of his characters. see Brenk (2009).

takes place in the conversation about why Ajax’s soul specifically received the twentieth lot in the myth of Er. The vignette begins when an orator notices that one of the literary scholars is downcast while the rest of the party is laughing joyfully, and attempts to lighten his mood by comparing him to the image of Ajax downcast in the Homeric underworld.<sup>101</sup> This attempt backfires, and even worsens the scholar’s mood because he thinks everyone is mocking him, which prompts him to awkwardly lament that poor Ajax got the twentieth lot in the myth of Er.<sup>102</sup> Plutarch’s brother, Lamprias, a philosopher with a keen but often eristic sense of humor, takes the opportunity to ridicule literary pedantry, and thus concocts a silly interpretation through another quotation of the scene in Homer, jabbing that the question is meaningless.<sup>103</sup> Most of the

<sup>101</sup> “These things made everyone else have a better time, but the orator Sospis saw that the literary scholar Hylas alone was silent and melancholy—this was because he did not fare very well in the exhibitions. Sospis spoke out, ‘and the soul of Ajax, son of Telamon, alone,’ addressing the rest to him and reciting, ‘come back here, lord, so that you might hear our word and speech, master your might and your unyielding heart’” (ταῦτα τοὺς ἄλλους ἅπαντας ἡδίους ἐποίησεν, μόνον δὲ τὸν γραμματικὸν Ὑλαν ὁ ρήτωρ Σῶσις ὁρῶν ἀποσιωπῶντα καὶ βαρυθυμούμενον (οὐ πάνυ γὰρ εὐημέρησεν ἐν ταῖς ἐπιδείξεσιν) ἀνεφώνησεν, “οἷη δ’ Αἴαντος ψυχὴ Τελαμωνιάδαο [Hom. *Od.* XI.543]’ τὰ <δὲ> λοιπὰ μείζον [ἢ] φθηγόμενος ἤδη πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ἐπέβαινε ‘ἀλλ’ ἴθι δεῦρο, ἄναξ, ἴν’ ἔπος καὶ μῦθον ἀκούσης / ἡμέτερον· δάμασον δὲ μένος καὶ ἀτειρέα θυμόν [Hom. *Od.* XI.561];” IX.5.739e).

<sup>102</sup> “But Hylas, still off-kilter from anger, responded awkwardly: he said that the soul of Ajax got the twentieth lot and changed his nature for a lion’s in Hades, according to Plato, and often the words of the old man from comedy are applicable to him: ‘it is better to become a work mule than to see worse men living more famously than yourself.’ And Sospis laughed, saying ‘but as long as we are about to put on the mule-skin, teach us: if it was some concern to Plato, by what account has he made this soul of the son of Telamon go twentieth to the choosing?’ While Hylas cursed him (because he thought he was being mocked for his bad luck), ...” (ἔτι δ’ ἀνόμαλος ὢν ὑπ’ ὀργῆς ὁ Ὑλας ἀπεκρίνατο σκαιῶς: τὴν μὲν Αἴαντος ἔφη ψυχὴν εἰκοστὴν λαχοῦσαν ἐν Ἄιδου διαμειψασθαι κατὰ τὸν Πλάτωνα [*Resp.* X.620b] φύσιν λέοντος, αὐτῷ δὲ πολλάκις παρίστασθαι καὶ τὰ τοῦ κωμικοῦ γέροντος “ὄνον γενέσθαι κρεῖττον ἢ τοὺς χείρονας / ὁρῶν ἑαυτοῦ ζῶντας ἐπιφανέστερον [Menand. *frag.* 223];” καὶ ὁ Σῶσις γελάσας “ἀλλ’ ἔως μέλλομεν ἐνδύεσθαι τὸ κανθήλιον, εἴ τι κήδει Πλάτωνος, δίδαξον ἡμᾶς, ᾧτινι λόγῳ τὴν τοῦ Τελαμωνίου ψυχὴν πεποίηκεν ἀπὸ κλήρου βαδίζουσαν εἰκοστὴν ἐπὶ τὴν αἴρεσιν.” ἀποσκορακίσαντος <δὲ> τοῦ Ὑλα (χλευάζεσθαι γὰρ ᾤετο δυσημερῶν)...; 739f).

<sup>103</sup> “Does Ajax not always carry off the second prize of beauty and magnitude and manliness ‘after the blameless son of Peleus’: the second ten is twenty, and ten is the mightiest among numbers, just as Achilles is among the Achaeans?” (ὅτι οὖν... οὐ δευτερεῖα μὲν ὁ Αἴας κάλλους καὶ μεγέθους καὶ ἀνδρείας ἀεὶ φέρεται ‘μετ’ ἀμύμονα Πηλείωνα’ [Hom. *Od.* XI.551], τὰ δ’ εἴκοσι δευτέρα δεκάς, ἢ δὲ δεκάς ἐν τοῖς ἀριθμοῖς κράτιστος, ὡς ἐν τοῖς Ἀχαιοῖς ὁ Ἀχιλλεύς;” 740a). Plutarch tends to depict Lamprias as arrogant but humorous, describing him in another vignette as ὑβριστῆς δ’ ὢν καὶ φιλόγελως φύσει ὁ ἀδελφὸς ἡμῶν Λαμπρίας... (*Quaest. conviv.* VIII.6.726d-e). There, he goes onto mock the preceding etymologizing of the names of Greek meals (726b-d) by etymologizing Latin names through Greek concepts (e.g. κῆνα [*cena*] and κοινωνία): “either we must hear these things being said without laughter, or we must not allow encroachments from names, as if they knock out parts of our wall until they destroy it entirely” (ἢ καὶ τούτων οὖν ἀκουστέον ἀγελαστί λεγομένων ἢ μηδ’ ἐκεῖνοις εὐκόπους οὕτως διὰ τῶν ὀνομάτων ὥσπερ τριγχιῶν τὰ μὲν ἐκκόπτουσι μέρη τὰ δὲ καθαροῦσιν παραδύσεις διδῶμεν; 727a). Minar in Minar et al. (1961) understands Lamprias’ joke, but falls prey to the same scholarly impulse under mockery: “Actually,

audience laughs, but Ammonius steps in to defuse the increasing hostility and restore symposiastic harmony by forcing Lamprias to address the question seriously.<sup>104</sup> He begins by allowing that Plato conveys some serious ideas playfully through wordplay—the name Er refers to the place in the air (*aer*) where disembodied souls are collected, and the name of his father Harmonius hints at the order (*harmonia*) that is instilled in souls—and gives a dichotomy of what the detail twenty might mean:<sup>105</sup>

What indeed hinders the “twentieth” (*eikoston*) from being said not with an eye toward the truth, but toward the likely (*eikos*) and the fictive part of the account, or toward the lot as being “perchance (*eikê*) and according to fortune? For he always touches on three causes, because he was the first, or at least the most prominent, to realize how it happens that the destined is mixed with what happens by chance, and in turn what is in each of our power is mixed and weaved together with both?<sup>106</sup>

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while many pairs are cognates, the Latin are not derived from the Greek, with the possible exceptions...” (165nc). In an earlier vignette, Lamprias is depicted as simply brash, “speaking loudly, as he was accustomed to do” (καθάπερ εἰώθει μέγα φθεγγόμενος; I.2.617e-f). Cf. Russell (1972): “a shrewd, bluff, humorous fellow” (4); Demulder (2016): “smart though notoriously scoffing” (207). Teodorsson (1996) describes Lamprias’ character as “playful,” but argues that Ammonius in *De E* (386a) “mildly intimates that he suspects Lamprias to indulge in Pythagorean number speculations of his own” (326).

<sup>104</sup> “We laughed, and Ammonius said, ‘Lamprias, let these things said in mockery of Hylas be ordained for you: do not play with us, but, since you willingly took up the argument, speak about the cause with seriousness’” (γελασάντων δ’ ἡμῶν “ταῦτα μὲν” ὁ Ἀμμώνιος εἶπεν, “ὦ Λαμπρία, κείσθω σοι πεπαιγμένα πρὸς Ὑλαν· ἡμῖν δὲ μὴ παίζων ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ σπουδῆς, ἐπεὶ τὸν λόγον ἐκὼν ἐξεδέξω, δίελθε περὶ τῆς αἰτίας;” 740a-b). In an earlier book of the *Quaestiones convivales*, Crato describes a balance of seriousness and play as ideal for a symposium but errs on the side of seriousness (ἀσστηρίων; 620d). In the programmatic first *Quaestio*, the character of Plutarch relatedly warns philosophers against arguing with “sticky and difficultly comprehended matters” (ἐν πράγμασι γλίσχροις καὶ δυσθεωρήτοις), lest they distress the other guests (παραινυγάνοντας ἀνιῶσιν; 614e). See also 615a-b. Plutarch praises the pleasant acceptance of harmless jokes (σκῶμμα... ἀνύβριστον) also in *De aud.* 46b.

<sup>105</sup> “So Lamprias was bewildered, then he waited for a short time and said that Plato plays with us through names in many places: but where he mixes some myth with an account about the soul, he uses the meaning most of all. He calls the noetic nature of the heavens ‘a winged chariot’ because of harmonious revolution of the world; and here, he names the one carrying his own message of the things in Hades *Er*, of the father *Harmonius*, Pamphylian in race, hinting that souls are engendered through *harmonia* and are harmonized together with bodies, and when they are released they are collected from all sides into the *aer* and are turned from there in turn to their next births” (θορυβηθεὶς οὖν ὁ Λαμπρίας, εἶτα χρόνον οὐ πολὺν ἐπισχὼν ἔφη πολλαχοῦ μὲν ἡμῖν τὸν Πλάτωνα προσπαίζειν διὰ τῶν ὀνομάτων· ὅπου δὲ μῦθόν τινα τῷ περὶ ψυχῆς λόγῳ μίγνυσι, χρῆσθαι μάλιστα τῷ νῶ. τοῦ τε γὰρ οὐρανοῦ τὴν νοητὴν φύσιν ἄρμα καλεῖν πτηγόν [Phdr. 246e] <διά> τὴν ἑναρμόνιον τοῦ κόσμου περιφορὰν, ἐνταῦθά τε τὸν αὐτάγγελον τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου Πάμφυλον γένος Ἀρμονίου πατρὸς Ἴηρα δ’ αὐτὸν ὀνομάζειν [Resp. 614b], αἰνιττόμενον ὅτι γεννῶνται μὲν αἰ ψυχὰι καθ’ ἁρμονίαν καὶ συναρμόττονται τοῖς σώμασιν, ἀπαλλαγεῖσαι δὲ συμφέρονται πανταχόθεν εἰς τὸν ἀέρα κάκειθεν αὐθις ἐπὶ τὰς δευτέρας γενέσεις τρέπονται; 740b-c).

<sup>106</sup> τί δὴ κωλύει καὶ τὸ ‘εἰκοστὸν’ εἰρησθαι πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἀληθὲς ἀλλ’ ‘εἰκὸς’ τοῦ λόγου καὶ πλαττόμενον, ἢ πρὸς τὸν κληρὸν ὡς ‘εἰκῆ’ καὶ κατὰ τύχην γινόμενον; αἰ μὲν γὰρ ἅπτεται τῶν τριῶν αἰτιῶν, ἅτε δὴ πρῶτος ἢ μάλιστα συνιδῶν, ὅπῃ τὸ καθ’ εἰμαρμένην τῷ κατὰ τύχην αὐθις τε τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἑκατέρω καὶ συναμφοτέροις ἐπιμίγνυσθαι καὶ συμπλέκεσθαι ἐφέυκε; 740c).

The twentieth choice could be another hint towards what Lamprias seems to take as the manifest meaning of the setup of this part of the myth, the distinction of things in our power, mindless chance, and the providential connection between good decisions and good outcomes. The lots represent chance, hence Ajax's random draw. Lamprias seems to believe this is the moral core of the narrative. The myth of Er is especially fitting for a discussion of causation: before the souls draw lots, the herald ends his instructions with the proclamation, "the responsibility is the choser's: god bears no responsibility."<sup>107</sup> The Latin *Expositio* similarly summarizes the myth of Er as being, besides a representation of a place where evil souls are punished and good ones honored, an exposition of the distinction between things done "by fate and necessity" and the "something in our power."<sup>108</sup> Yet Lamprias' distinction between causes seems to represent Plutarch's own ideas, although some quibble at the plausibility of attributing this tripartite distinction to Plato.<sup>109</sup> Lamprias takes this detail of Ajax's lot to provide further indication of this

<sup>107</sup> αἰτία ἐλομένων· θεὸς ἀναίτιος (*Resp.* X.617e). This phrase seems to become a symbol of Platonism. According to Adam (1902), "A bust of Plato found at Tibur and dating from the first century B.C. bears the inscription αἰτία ἐλομένων (*sic*). θεὸς ἀθάνατος, together with ψυχή πᾶσα ἀθάνατος" (2.455). Plotinus appeals to this phrase in his own discussion of providence (III.2.15-20).

<sup>108</sup> "And he also writes about the underworld, he relates it as such, bearing substance, where the souls of the wicked are punished and those of the good are held in honor. Then he grants that some things come about by fate and necessity, but there is in turn something in our power, which is supported by good or bad reasoning about how to live" (*de inferis quoque, tamquam et sint et substantiam <habeant> et malorum animae puniuntur, bonorum autem in honore sint, exponit. denique concedit fieri aliqua fato et necessitate, rursus esse aliquid in nobis quod sustineatur bona ratione uiuendi uel mala*; §8.16-20).

<sup>109</sup> E.g. Boys-Stones (2007): "We know for sure only that Plutarch wrote a two-volume work *On Fate* (*Lamprias* 58), and further treatises against both Epicureans and Stoics on the matter of human autonomy (*to eph' hēmin: Lamprias* 133 and 154). But it seems fair to suppose that he agrees with a claim that he puts into Lamprias' mouth, that *to eph' hēmin* and fate complement each other in a complete account of the cosmos" (433n8). Hankinson (1998) simply attributes it to Plutarch, without context or justification (348). Teodorsson (1996), however, simply claims the attribution to Plato was made "anachronistically" (324). See further 328-9 and Minar, Sandbach, & Helmbold (1961): "A clear exaggeration. This way of formulating a tripartition of causes (*cf.* Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, 133) belongs to an age later than Plato, but a very similar division, in which 'nature' replaces 'fate,' is assumed by Protagoras in the dialogue that bears his name, 323 D, and criticized at *Laws*, 888 E, not so much as being false in itself, but because the generality take a false view of 'nature'" (245ne); Dillon (1977) more plausibly suggests Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 1112a as Lamprias' source for the formulation of the tripartite division (209). Dillon's final appraisal of Plutarch's conception of providence is disappointment that he never clarifies what place is left "for individual freedom of choice" in his broader system, but qualified: "This, I fear, we will find to be the case generally with Middle Platonic efforts to deal with Fate and Free Will. Only Plotinus, in *Enneads* III 2-3, comes seriously to grips with the problem, and he only succeeds ultimately in demonstrating its insolubility" (211). See also Hankinson

central core of the myth, but he presumably would have come to the same conclusion without it.<sup>110</sup> The detail could, in fact, have an entirely different significance, and call attention to the epistemic status of the myth, as merely likely (εἰκός). Rather than indicating anything deeper, the twentieth lot might just call attention to the fictionality of the narrative and thus the possibility that some details do not matter in the same way as the ethical core of the narrative. Ammonius, in another vignette, similarly concludes his interpretation of the Sirens in the myth of Er—how the beings that harmoniously sing on the cosmic spheres could possibly relate to the monsters from Homer—by declaring a principle of only seeking out what is likely:<sup>111</sup> the teacher “concludes these statements with the verse of Xenophanes, as was his custom: ‘let these things be thought similar to the truth.’”<sup>112</sup>

The resolution of the Ajax vignette, however, comes when another literary scholar realizes that Ajax is the twentieth shade Odysseus sees in the Homeric *nekylia* as well, which

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(1998: 350). On the interpretation of the *Expositio*, Stover (2016) compares Cic. *Fat.* frg. 1 *apud* Gell. VII.2.15 (149).

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Vernière (1977): “Lamprias s’attache à expliquer de façon allégoriques un détail oïseux (la vingtième place occupée par Ajax dans la file des candidats à une nouvelle vie), et le fait sur un ton sérieux, comme s’il s’agissait d’une sorte de *hieros logos*” (288).

<sup>111</sup> In IX.14, entitled “various conversations about the number of the muses” (περὶ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τῶν Μουσῶν ὅσα λέγεται μὴ κοινῶς; 743c), Ammonius turns the conversation to the Sirens in the segment on Necessity in the myth of Er. While Homer’s Sirens frighten us, in Plato their song has the potential to fill “departing souls, as it seems, with a passionate desire for heavenly and divine things and with a forgetting of mortal things,” although “the ears of most souls are smeared and plastered over by fleshy barriers and passions and not wax” (αἶ γε μὲν δὴ Ὀμήρου Σειρήνες οὐ κατὰ λόγον ἡμᾶς τῷ μύθῳ φοβοῦσιν, ἀλλὰ κάκεῖνος ὀρθῶς ἠνίξατο τὴν τῆς μουσικῆς αὐτῶν δύναμιν οὐκ ἀπάνθρωπον οὐδ’ ὀλέθριον οὐσαν ἀλλὰ ταῖς ἐντεῦθεν ἀπιούσαις ἐκεῖ ψυχαῖς, ὡς ἔοικε, καὶ πλανωμέναις μετὰ τὴν τελευτήν ἔρωτα πρὸς τὰ οὐράνια καὶ θεῖα λήθην δὲ τῶν θνητῶν ἐμποιοῦσαν κατέχειν καὶ κατὰ δειν... <τὰ δ’ ὅτα τῶν> μὲν πλείστων περιαλήλιπται καὶ καταπέπλασται σαρκίνοις ἐμφράγμασι καὶ πάθεσιν, οὐ κηρίνοις; 745d-e). Ammonius thus situates the detail of the myth within Plato’s broader psychology. The justification for Ammonius’ speech in the context of the *Quaestio* is the identification of Plato’s Sirens with the Muses, which Plutarch also assumes in *De an. proc.* 1029d. For Lamberton (1986), this transformation of the Homeric figures into “the benevolent Sirens of the Pythagoreanizing myth of Er” illustrates “the central position of the dialogues of Plato in the establishment both of the canonical versions of ‘Pythagorean’ myths and of the connections between those myths and Homer” (37). Teodorsson (1996) similarly detects a “largely Pythagorean” conception of “astral immortality” (363-4). Soury (1949), citing Montaigne, sees Ammonius’ speech as a sort of emblem for Plutarch’s philosophy more broadly (326-7). On the position of Ammonius in the *quaestio*, Klotz (2014) compares the structure of Plato’s *Symposium* (216-7).

<sup>112</sup> τοῦτοις ἐπιφωνήσαντος τοῦ Ἀμμωνίου τὰ τοῦ Ξενοφάνους (frg. B35 Diels) ὥσπερ εἰώθει· “ταῦτα δεδοξάσθω μὲν εὐκότα τοῖς ἐτύμοισι” (746b).

makes Plato's detail a colorful and pleasurable addition to the myth.<sup>113</sup> This makes sense with the symposiastic frame: a literary scholar was assaulted by a philosopher, but another successfully comes to his defense and so dissolves the eristic tension into erudite levity once more.<sup>114</sup> Lamprias' approaches to the detail—either tying it to the broader ethical point of the narrative, or deeming it self-consciously superfluous—are nevertheless a good example of Plutarch's idea of how to seriously approach these sorts of details. This sort of ethical interpretation seems to reflect how Plutarch expected his myths to be understood, as his *Quomodo* suggests. While the Neoplatonists distinguish philosophical myth from poetic or import an idea of pious occlusion like the mysteries, Plutarch is motivated both by the pleasure of audience as well as the potential for mythic details to emphasize the fictionality of these philosophical narratives. Macrobius similarly hints at this sort of idea with his etymology of *fabula*, his translation for μῦθος: “myths, the name of which proclaims a declaration of the fictive.”<sup>115</sup> But while Macrobius does not pursue this sort of idea further, Plutarch more seriously proposes that the details in the myth call attention to its epistemic status as a “likely account,” while the reader is meant to analyze the core philosophical ideas that are clearly conveyed by the narrative.

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<sup>113</sup> In *Quomodo adul.*, Plutarch similarly compares the fictive in myths to color in visual arts: both are used to bring pleasure to the audience (16b-c).

<sup>114</sup> Ammonius thus fulfills the role of an ideal symposiarch, as defined by Theon in an earlier episode of the *Quaestiones convivales* (I.4): games should be pleasant and humorous but “free from offense” (ἀνόβριστον), offense being what brings most *symposia* to shipwreck (ἐν οἷς τὰ πλεῖστα ναυαγεῖ συμπόσια μὴ τυχόντα παιδαγωγίας ὀρθῆς; 622b); a symposiast, when potentially offended by a cruel joke like Agamestor the Academic, should be able to turn the joke around rather than let the night fall into offense (621e-2a); and the symposiarch should see to it that things be suitable and possible for each symposiast to show off what he is best at (τὰ οἰκεῖα καὶ δυνατὰ καὶ κοσμοῦντα τὸν δρῶντα προστάσσοντας), and so for singers to sing, orators to declaim, philosophers to solve problems (φιλοσόφοις λῦσαι τι τῶν ἀπορουμένων), and so on (622a). Ruffi (2011) analyzes these propositions, as well as Crato's earlier in the episode, through the lens of medicine (144-51). Klotz (2014) connects symposiastic healing to the image of Helen in *Od.* IV (212-4). Cf. Halliwell (2008) on social tension and resolution in Xen. *Symp.* (139-54).

<sup>115</sup> *fabulae, quarum nomen indicat falsi professionem...* (I.2.7). Regali (1983: 218) and Neri (2007: 579) both cite Varro *Ling.* VI.55.



*Providential care and curative punishment*

The criticism that myth of Er is harmful because it includes terrifying underworld punishments is relatively prevalent in subsequent discussions of Plato.<sup>116</sup> Diogenes Laertius, for instance, mentions this only as the only reason that “Plato seemed too myth-obsessed (μυθικώτερος) for some writers.”<sup>117</sup> Perhaps to preempt this criticism, Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis*, although in many ways reminiscent of Plato’s myth of Er, does away with its gruesome punishments, instead dedicating central parts of the narrative to grand praises of the rewards for good statesmen.<sup>118</sup> The Neoplatonist Proclus is rather direct in responding to critique of this aspect of Plato’s eschatological myths, not just in the commentary on the myth of Er, the sixteenth essay of *In Rempublicam*, but also in the sixth essay, his most elaborate treatment of Homer and poetry.<sup>119</sup> In the tenth section, he treats Plato’s depictions of the underworld in parallel with that of traditional poetry, hence the title, “a common defense of the Homeric and

<sup>116</sup> In the 1827 *Dialogo di Plotino e di Porfirio*, Giacomo Leopardi has the suicidal Porphyry criticize Plato for filling life with the fear of tortures after death: “Perciocchè per opera tua, laddove tutti gli altri animali muoiono senza timore alcuno, la quiete e la sicurtà dell’animo sono escluse in perpetuo dall’ultima ora dell’uomo. Questo mancava, O Platone, a tanta infelicità della specie umana” (1982: 448).

<sup>117</sup> “And in the dialogues, he held up justice as the law of god as a more certain way of turning men toward acting justly, so they they would not suffer punishments after death as malefactors” (ἐν δὲ τοῖς διαλόγοις καὶ τὴν δικαιοσύνην θεοῦ νόμον ὑπελάμβανεν ὡς ἰσχυροτέραν προτρέψαι τὰ δίκαια πράττειν, ἵνα μὴ καὶ μετὰ θάνατον δίκας ὑπόσχοιεν ὡς κακοῦργοι; III.79). Diogenes Laertius evidently took this to be a positive aim, concluding Plato “thus turned them away from unjust deeds” (οὕτως ἀπέχωνται τῶν ἀδικημάτων; §80). The doxographer’s explanation is simple: Plato wanted to deter men from wicked deeds.

<sup>118</sup> “But thus, Scipio, as your grandfather here, as I who begot you, cultivate justice and piety, which is great among your parents and your neighbors, and moreover the greatest in the fatherland. This life is the way to the sky and to the company of these men, who once lived, were loosened from the body, and dwell in this place, which you see... ” (*sed sic, Scipio, ut avus hic tuus, ut ego, qui te genui, iustitiam cole et pietatem, quae cum magna in parentibus et propinquis, tum in patria maxima est; ea uita uia est in caelum et in hunc coetum eorum, qui iam vixerunt et corpore laxati illum incolunt locum, quem uides...*; *Resp.* VI.15). See further VI.25. The punishment of the absolute worst, who are carried away by pleasures and violate the laws of gods and men, is mentioned only very briefly at the end of the myth: “the souls of these men fall out of their bodies and are rotated around the very earth; they do not return to this place, unless after they are driven around for many generations” (*eorum animi... corporibus elapsi circum terram ipsam uolutantur nec hunc in locum nisi multis exagitati saeculis reuertuntur*; VI.29). The punishment seems to be a sort of reversal of the fate of those in Pl. *Phd.* who have done something heinous but are still curable—condemned to be tossed in the Tartarus for year-long periods until whomever they wronged decides to forgive and pardon them from punishment (I13e-4b)—but Cicero’s description is much shorter and less detailed.

<sup>119</sup> The sixth essay—and the tripartite distinction Proclus makes in it between mimetic, didactic, and symbolic poetry—attracts a relatively vast degree of scholarly attention: e.g. Coulter (1976: 32-72), Sheppard (1980), Lamberton (1986: 162-232), Kuisma (1996), Struck (2004: 193-213), Chlup (2012: 185-200), Lamberton (2012).

Platonic myths, in which they speak about the places of punishment and the different allotments in them, which souls departing from bodies bear according to the particulars of their embodied life.”<sup>120</sup> Proclus thus treats two of the Epicurean objections—that mythic fiction is potentially deceptive and that fear of afterlife punishments is harmful—as elements of a single criticism.<sup>121</sup>

Plutarch’s approach to this criticism is extensive and at times vehement. His responses are more sporadic than those of Proclus, but they are all bounded by a consistent sense of moral probability. Hence Lamprias’ interpretation of the myth of Er connects “destiny” and “providence” with the reward of good choices and punishment of evil.<sup>122</sup> Punishment, if it exists, is not arbitrary, but based on actions and character, and it is carried out for the good of the punished, so as to cure or purify them. Contrary to developmentalist arguments surrounding *De superstitione*, there is nothing to fear because the morally arbitrary punishments dreaded by the superstitious are delusions.<sup>123</sup> The exposition in *De sera* is presented as a response to Epicurean

<sup>120</sup> κοινή ἀπολογία ὑπὲρ τε τῶν Ὀμηρικῶν μύθων καὶ τῶν Πλατωνικῶν, ἐν οἷς περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἄιδου λέγουσι δικαιωτηρίων καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς λήξεων τῶν τῶν διαφορῶν, ὡς ἔχουσιν αἱ ἐξεληθοῦσαι τῶν σωματῶν ψυχαὶ κατὰ τὰ ἰδιώματα τῆς ἐν σώματι ζωῆς (I.117.23-6). Proclus attempts to reconcile Plato’s eschatological myths in the *Phaedo* and *Republic* (I.118.17-9.2) with Homer, and both with Plato’s concerns in *Republic* III—as Lambertson (2012) usefully details (151n181)—such as that the guardians should not fear death (ἡμεῖς δὲ ὑπὲρ τῶν φυλάκων δευδισσόμεθα, μὴ ἐκ τούτων τῶν δειμάτων (τὸν θάνατον) ἠγήσωνται φοβερὸν; I.118.15-7, accepting Lambertson’s textual reconstruction). See also I.122.15-20.

<sup>121</sup> Epicurean polemic looms over this section, which includes the exhortation “let us say then in either case, whether some Epicurean should attempt to cast aspersion on myths of this sort or even someone else...” (λέγωμεν τοίνυν ἐπ’ ἀμφοτέρων, εἴτε τῶν Ἐπικουρείων τις ἐγκαλεῖν ἐπιχειροῖ τοῖς τοιοῦτοις μύθοις εἴτε καὶ ἄλλος τις...; I.119.2-4). Proclus’ list of terrors in the myth of Er here, moreover, is similar to his summary of Colotes’ disparagement.

<sup>122</sup> “Now he has marvellously hinted at that power which each bears in our affairs: he assigns the choice of lives to what is in our power (‘for virtue and vice have no master’), but he binds to necessity of destiny that those who choose rightly live well and those who choose the opposite live badly; the lots are scattered chaotically, and the ways they follow introduce chance to both our upbringings and our politics...” (νῦν δὲ θαυμαστῶς, ἣν ἔχει δύναμιν <ἐν> τοῖς ἡμετέροις πράγμασιν ἕκαστον, ὑποδεδήλωκεν, τὴν μὲν αἴρεσιν τῶν βίων τῶ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἀποδιδούς (“ἀρετὴ γὰρ ἀδέσποτον καὶ κακία [Resp. X.617e]”), τὸ δ’ εὖ βιοῦν τοῦ ὀρθῶς ἐλομένους καὶ τάναντία τοὺς κακῶς εἰμαρμένης ἀνάγκῃ συνάπτων· αἱ δὲ τῶν κλήρων ἀτάκτως διασπειρομένων ἐπιπτώσεις γῆν τύχην παρεισάγουσιν καὶ τροφαῖς καὶ πολιτείαις...; 740c-d). In the last line of the passage, he treats ‘destiny’ and ‘providence’ interchangeably (ἐκ τίνος εἰμαρμένης καὶ προνοίας). Cf. [Plut.] *De fato* 574b-d; Hankinson (1998): “God’s providence is distinct from, and may on occasion override, fate by interfering in the natural order of things (this interference may be permanent, as it is in the case of some of the heavenly bodies, notably the earthy moon...)” (349). Eliasson (2013) finds a similar conception of “τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν” in Alcinoüs: “contrary to what is usually thought to be the case, the theory does not defend that our choices alone are undetermined by Fate and that their consequences are determined by Fate...” (60). He argues that the impetus is, similarly to Plutarch, the myth of Er.

<sup>123</sup> See *supra* pg. 70.

objections about the depiction of afterlife punishments, like the arguments in his treatise on poetry were aimed against the Epicurean critique of poetic fiction. The defense against the critique of the tyrant’s torture fittingly emphasizes the curative role of punishment. In the next section, I argue that the mythic portion of the dialogue serves a parallel argumentative function, depicting this salutary purpose in its portrayal of the machinery of cosmic justice.

Plutarch’s final speeches in *De sera* are grounded in the relationship between providence and curative or purificatory punishment. As Plutarch presents various solutions to the questions and objections, Olympichus eventually interrupts, and reorients the discussion:<sup>124</sup>

“You seem to suppose a substantial assumption for this account: the permanence of the soul.”

“But you at least,” I said, “concede this—or rather, have conceded it. For the account proceeded from the beginning until now under the assumption that god metes what is proper for us.”<sup>125</sup>

Up to this point in the dialogue, punishments and rewards in life have been the focus, but Plutarch shifts to immortal souls, because both sorts of punishments under discussion are assumed to be determined by moral character and action. The divine, Plutarch continues, would be silly (κενόσπουδος) to spend so much attention on human souls through providential care if they were truly ephemeral like gardens of Adonis, rather than something that persists.<sup>126</sup> For

<sup>124</sup> Much of the scholarship simply summarizes the pre-mythic part of the dialogue—e.g. Krasovec (1993: 23-8)—but there are more substantial treatments of the argumentation, such as Saunders (1993), Helmig (2005), Gagné (2013), van den Berg (2014), and Opsomer (2016). For the general topic in earlier literature, see also Sewell-Rutter (2007).

<sup>125</sup> “ἔοικας... τῷ λόγῳ μεγάλην ὑπόθεσιν ὑποτίθεσθαι, τὴν ἐπιμονὴν τῆς ψυχῆς.” “καὶ ὑμῶν γ’” εἶπον ἐγὼ “διδόντων μᾶλλον δὲ δεδωκότων· ὡς γὰρ τοῦ θεοῦ τὸ κατ’ ἀξίαν νέμοντος ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος ἐξ ἀρχῆς δεῦρο προελήλυθε” (560a-b). This phrase “what is proper” (κατ’ ἀξίαν) emphasizes the moral judgment that determines the fates of souls, and it has resonances throughout the passage: for instance, a soul has boons or punishments (χάριτας ἢ τίσεις) after death according to its ethical state (καθ’ ἑαυτήν; 561a). Saunders (1993), however, appeals to the concept of “double-determination” to argue that Plutarch is “just as much concerned with the justifications and purposes of human punishments, legal or otherwise, as Plato was” in the *Leg.* (73-74). Cf. Helmig (2005: 326n13, 327n15).

<sup>126</sup> “But is the divine so small and so zealous about frivolity thus, such that... it makes so great an account, but sow transient souls in delicate flesh, as if women nursing and caring for gardens of Adonis upon some earthen vessels” (ἀλλὰ μικρὸς οὕτω καὶ κενόσπουδος ὁ θεός ἐστιν, ὥστε... ποιῆσθαι λόγον τοσοῦτον, ὥσπερ αἱ τοὺς Ἀδόνιδος κήπους ἐπ’ ὀστράκοις τισὶ τιθηνούμεναι καὶ θεραπεύουσαι γυναῖκες ἐφημέρους <σπεύρων> ψυχὰς ἐν σαρκί

further evidence, he invokes the authority of the Delphic oracle, which, he argues, would not enjoin the creation of hero cults if human souls simply dissipated upon death.<sup>127</sup> On this basis, Plutarch further emphasizes the link between providence, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of punishment and reward after death:

“There is, therefore, a single account (*logos*),” I said, “confirming both the providence of god and the persistence of the human soul: it is not possible to destroy the one, and to leave the other intact. It is yet more likely that rewards and punishments are rendered to the soul after its death, for it contends in life like an athlete, but it is only when it has contended that it obtains what is fitting.”<sup>128</sup>

Plutarch’s insistence on connection between providence and punishment, however, faces some difficult counterexamples from broader Greek thought on divine vengeance. Much of *De sera* is concerned with punishment that appears to be delayed until later in a criminal’s life, but what about the case of inherited guilt, where punishment is delayed until subsequent generations?<sup>129</sup>

Traditional Greek ideas about divine retribution pose difficulties for the interlocutors. The distinction between punishments in life and those in death provides Plutarch with one solution:<sup>130</sup>

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τροφερᾷ...; 560c). The image of the gardens of Adonis is drawn from *Phdr.* 276b. This seems like a circular argument for the immortality of the soul, given that it assumes what the dialogue sets out to defend, but perhaps it is fitting for a dialogue that is more of an exhortation to believing but shaken Platonists than an attempt to convince any Epicureans. It is also reminiscent of Socrates’ initial argument for the immortality of the soul in *Resp.* X (608c-d).

<sup>127</sup> “And as long many things are prophesied in even our day, such as the sort they say was announced to Korax of Naxos, it is not pious to pronounce death upon the soul” (ἀρχὴ <δὲ> τοῦ πολλὰ τοιαῦτα προθεσπίζεσθαι καὶ καθ’ ἡμᾶς, οἷα καὶ Κόρακι τῷ Ναξίῳ χρησθῆναι λέγουσιν, οὐχ ὅσιον ἐστὶ τῆς ψυχῆς καταγνῶναι θάνατον; 560d). This appeal to Delphi has led some to label *De sera* as a “Pythian dialogue,” as described in *De E* 384e, such as Frazier (2010a). See also Ziegler (1949: 190-2).

<sup>128</sup> “εἷς οὖν ἐστὶ λόγος,” ἔφην, “ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν πρόνοιαν ἅμα καὶ τὴν διαμονὴν τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ψυχῆς βεβαιῶν, καὶ θάτερον οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπολιπεῖν ἀναιροῦντα θάτερον. οὕση δὲ τῇ ψυχῇ μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν μᾶλλον εἰκὸς ἐστὶ καὶ τιμὰς ἀποδίδοσθαι καὶ τιμωρίας. ἀγωνίζεται γὰρ ὡσπερ ἀθλητὴς τὸν βίον, ὅταν δὲ διαγωνίσῃται, τότε τυγχάνει τῶν προσηκόντων” (560f-1a). Plutarch’s Theon uses the same athletic metaphor in *Non posse* (1105c). Sallustius’ Neoplatonic handbook, after discussing why punishments in life are delayed—to allow for displays of virtue (*De deis et mund.* XIX.1)—similarly appeals to punishments after death: “they are punished when they leave the body, some wandering here, others going into some hot or cold places of the earth, and others will thrown into disorder by *daemones*—they endure everything along with their irrational part, with which they did wrong” (κολάζονται δὲ τοῦ σώματος ἐξελθοῦσαι· αἱ μὲν ἐνταῦθα πλανώμεναι, αἱ δὲ εἰς τινὰς τόπους τῆς γῆς θερμούς ἢ ψυχρούς, αἱ δὲ ὑπὸ δαιμόνων ταραττόμεναι· πάντα δὲ μετὰ τῆς ἀλόγου ὑπομένουσι, μεθ’ ἧσπερ καὶ ἡμάρτον; §2). Cf. Vernière (1974) on Sall. *De diis et mund.* IX (105).

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Cotta in Cic. *Nat. D.* III.38.90. On the structure of the arguments, see Saunders (1993: 72).

<sup>130</sup> In *Non posse*, Theon uses the same metaphor more expansively (1105c-d).

“but the punishments or rewards which the soul has for itself when it is there, these are nothing to us as we live—they even elicit disbelief or go unnoticed; but the punishments that come through children and famous lineages to progeny deter and draw away many of the wicked.”<sup>131</sup>

There is nothing worse than causing one’s children to suffer, he continues, and so there is no greater disincentive from wickedness than ancestral guilt. This appeal to the deterrent effect of punishment is rather austere, but Plutarch also more palatably argues that punishment for the crimes of ancestors could serve the descendant’s own good, as an early correction for the seeds of evil.

The speech that Plutarch explicitly marks off as the *logos* before the *mythos* is centered around a medical discussion: “Bion says that god punishing the children of the wicked is even more laughable than a doctor curing an offspring or a child for the sickness of its father and grandfather, but these things are in a sense befitting (ἐουκότα) and similar.”<sup>132</sup> Plutarch expands Plato’s motif of curative punishment from a metaphor into a parallel phenomenon, arguing that moral proclivities are passed down just like physical dispositions.<sup>133</sup> Apparently physical

<sup>131</sup> ἀλλ’ ἄς μὲν ἐκεῖ καθ’ ἑαυτὴν οὐσα κομίζεται τῶν προβεβιωμένων χάριτας ἢ τίσεις, οὐθέν εἰσι πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς ζῶντας, ἀλλ’ ἀπιστοῦνται καὶ λανθάνουσιν· αἱ δὲ διὰ τῶν παίδων ἰοῦσαι καὶ διὰ γένους ἐμφανεῖς τοῖς δεῦρο γενόμεναι πολλοὺς ἀποτρέπουσι καὶ συστέλλουσι τῶν πονηρῶν (561a).

<sup>132</sup> ὁ γὰρ Βίων τὸν θεὸν κολάζοντα τοὺς παῖδας τῶν πονηρῶν γελοιώτερον εἶναι φησιν ἰατροῦ διὰ νόσον πάππου καὶ πατρὸς ἔκγονον ἢ παῖδα φαρμακεύοντος ἔστι δὲ πῆ μὲν ἀνόμοια τὰ πράγματα πῆ δ’ ἐουκότα καὶ ὅμοια (561c = frg. 27 Kindstrand). Plutarch’s initial discussion, however, addresses the dissimilarity of medicine and punishment: “One person being treated for an illness does not free another from it, nor would someone suffering from eye disease or fever fare better by seeing another getting treated by anointment or poultice; but punishments of the wicked are shown to all for this reason, that the work of justice, conducted according to reason, is to restrain some men through the punishment of others” (νόσου μὲν γὰρ ἄλλος ἄλλον οὐ παύει θεραπευόμενος, οὐδὲ βέλτιόν τις ἔσχε τῶν ὀφθαλμιῶντων ἢ πυρεττόντων ἰδὼν ἄλλον ὑπαλειφόμενον ἢ καταπλαττόμενον· αἱ δὲ τιμωρίαι τῶν πονηρῶν διὰ τοῦτο δεῖκνυνται πᾶσιν, ὅτι δίκης κατὰ λόγον περαινομένης ἔργον ἐστὶν ἐτέρους δι’ ἐτέρων κολαζομένων ἐπισχεῖν; 561c). Kindstrand (1976) deems “comparisons and pictures from the field of medicine” to be “very popular both with Bion and with the Cynics in general,” comparing Philo *De prov.* II.2 and Cic. *Nat. D.* III.38.90 (228, cf. 62). His general assessment is, despite the tradition that connects Bion to the Academy and the Cyrenaics as well, that “the Cynic school was of overwhelming significance” over his thought (77).

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Xenophontos (2016): “Plutarch consistently rates environment higher than heredity and emphasizes the need for proper training in human life... It is true that there are some scattered instances in his work where the importance of inherited traits is attested. ... However, Plutarch does not systematically reflect on this” (27). She cites parts of *De sera*, but not Plutarch’s most extensive treatment of ancestral punishment, his argument against Bion.

remedies, as Plutarch understands them, can help root out inherited ailments before they worsen into serious conditions:

Bion does not understand how his *comparandum* is actually similar to what he sought. Consider when a man begins to fall into a dreadful sickness that is not yet incurable, and then gives his body over to suffering by some incontinence or softness and is destroyed: the son does not seem to be sick, but only has a propensity for the same sickness; a doctor or a relative or a healer or a good master notices it and hurls him into a stern lifestyle. He takes away his meats and cakes and drinks and women; continuously applying drugs and working them with exercises, he turns the small seed away from great suffering and prevents it from progressing into disaster.<sup>134</sup>

Plutarch goes on to provide additional arguments and examples of inherited physical characteristics, preempting counter-examples by suggesting that wicked characters can skip generations.<sup>135</sup> Moral punishments similarly prevent bad dispositions from worsening into wickedness: “it is for the sake of doctoring that the god often punishes the inclination to adultery or greed or injustice, removing the evil before it can overtake entirely, like epilepsy.”<sup>136</sup> Although he also discusses the preventative force of this sort of punishment, Plutarch’s elucidation of the curative effect is far more extensive and emphatic. Jan Opsomer, however, objects to the idea that punishment of someone innocent of any wicked action could be justified on the basis of

<sup>134</sup> ἢ δὲ προσέεικε τῷ ζητούμενῳ τὸ παραβαλλόμενον [ὑπὸ τοῦ Βίωνος], ἔλαθεν αὐτόν· ἤδη γὰρ ἄνδρὸς εἰς νόσημα μοχθηρὸν οὐ μὴν ἀνίατον ἐμπεσόντος, εἴτ’ ἀκρασία καὶ μαλακία προεμένου τῷ πάθει τὸ σῶμα καὶ διαφθαρέντος υἱὸν οὐ δοκοῦντα νοσεῖν ἀλλὰ μόνον ἐπιτηδείως ἔχοντα πρὸς τὴν αὐτὴν νόσον ἰατρὸς ἢ οἰκεῖος ἢ ἀλείπτῃς καταμαθὼν ἢ δεσπότης χρηστὸς ἐμβαλὼν εἰς δίαιταν αὐστηρὰν καὶ ἀφελῶν ὄψα καὶ πέμματα καὶ πότους καὶ γύναια, φαρμακείαις δὲ χρησάμενος ἐνδελεχέσει καὶ διαπονήσας γυμνασίοις ἐσκέδασε καὶ ἀπέπεμψε μεγάλου πάθους σπέρμα μικρὸν, οὐκ ἔασας εἰς μέγεθος προελθεῖν (561c). On Plutarch’s knowledge of medicine. See Durling (1995). Plutarch quotes Bion on nine occasions, according to Kindstrand (1976: 304), including on another religious topic in *De superst.* (168d-e).

<sup>135</sup> Plutarch gives examples that prove “good men come from bad ones” (ἐκ κακῶν μὲν γὰρ ἀγαθοὶ δ’ ἦσαν; 563a) and argues that certain bodily attributes, such as black skin or a birthmark shaped like a spearhead, can lay dormant but reappear several generations later (563a-b).

<sup>136</sup> ... [ὁ θεός] ἰατρείας ἕνεκα τὸν μοιχικὸν τὸν καὶ τὸν πλεονεκτικὸν καὶ ἀδικητικὸν κολόζει πολλάκις, ὥσπερ ἐπιληψίαν τὴν κακίαν πρὶν ἢ καταλαβεῖν ἀναιρῶν (562d). Russell (1972) finds in 562b-d “the essentials of Plutarch’s convictions about the nature of man and his capacity for improvement,” which he takes to be a “somber but not despairing creed” (86-7). Opsomer (2016) is less positive: “Descendants are *always* punished for their own shortcomings. If we take him at his word, this would mean that in fact there is no punishment of descendants for the crimes of ancestors. Nice as this solution would be – it would dispense with the unfortunate idea of punishment of innocents – it is not warranted by the preceding arguments” (54; cf. 47-8).

disposition or propensity.<sup>137</sup> Yet Plotinus also defends punishment based on disposition as a part of the providential governance of the world.<sup>138</sup> There is nothing incoherent in the idea of curing anyone disposed to become wicked with a milder punishment than what would come later if they fell into depravity. This schema of punishment for ancestral guilt as the cure for the descendant is, of course, only likely, but its likelihood is grounded in Plutarch's attitude of pious skepticism about the divine governance of the world.<sup>139</sup>

This account of ancestral guilt befits the broader argument of the dialogue, where the curative role of punishment is consistently, but not exclusively, emphasized. Early on, Plutarch grounds the subsequent discussion with pious skepticism by a comparison between divine punishment and medicine:

It cannot be that it is difficult for a layman to understand the reasoning of a doctor (why he did not cut earlier but does later, why he did not burn yesterday but does today), but

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<sup>137</sup> 2016: “Yet before he made the claim about the hereafter, he had already admitted that innocents are punished instead of the actual criminals. He retracts the claim at the end of the dialogical section, but only half-heartedly. Some of the arguments he made before and some of the elements in the myth contradict that retraction. Fate can be cruel” (56). Plutarch’s argument about genetic wickedness does not seem half-hearted, partly because of his concern to qualify it with the possibility of exceptions, but especially because it relates to the broader problem of moral luck: as Plato describes in the myth of Er, it is easier to be a just person, at least in a non-philosophical way, in a prosperous city (X.619c-d)—which can lead to bad results that do not seem to be the due to the fault of such a person. It is, presumably, also easier to become just with just parents (e.g. *Crat.* 393e-4a), although there are famous exceptions (e.g. *Pr.t.* 319d-20a, *Alc. I* 118d-e); the added shame of good ancestors seeing a bad descendant, moreover, is emphasized in the *De Sera* myth (565b). Cf. Sall. *De diis et mund.* XX.2. Vernière (1974) deems “les considérations médicales” to be “entachées de bizarres superstitions” (107), suggesting that the persistence of older, “primitive” ideas, such as “atavisme physiologique” (107-9), to explain them. On the intellectual context of modern repugnance at the idea of ancestral guilt, see also Gagné (2013: 123-4). Cf. Froidefond (1987: 186 with n6).

<sup>138</sup> After describing how souls might begin to deviate from the proper path, Plotinus argues: “punishment surely follows: and it is not unjust for a man becoming such a person to suffer what is attendant to his disposition; nor must it be demanded that these people be happy, the sort whose deeds are not worthy of happiness. Only the good are happy” (ἐπεταί γε μὴν δίκη· καὶ οὐκ ἄδικον τοιόνδε γενόμενον ἀκόλουθα πάσχειν τῇ διαθέσει, οὐδ’ ἀπαιτητέον τοῦτοις τὸ εὐδαιμονεῖν ὑπάρχειν, οἷς μὴ εἴργασται εὐδαιμονίας ἄξια. οἱ δ’ ἀγαθοὶ μόνοι εὐδαιμόνες; III.2.4.44-8).

<sup>139</sup> We are ignorant of which people might become wicked, “but the god is surely not ignorant of the disposition and nature of each, since by nature he perceives more of soul than body” (ἀλλ’ ὁ θεὸς οὐτ’ ἀγνοεῖ δήπου τὴν ἐκάστου διάθεσιν καὶ φύσιν ἅτε δὴ ψυχῆς μᾶλλον ἢ σώματος αἰσθάνεσθαι πεφυκώς; 562c-d); “therefore, let me use the likely alone... Allow me to deliver the likely over to the *logos*: we will later, if it seems best, shake out the *mythos*, if it is indeed a *mythos* at least” (μόνον οὖν χρῶμαι τῷ εἰκότι... ἐάσατ’... ἀποδοῦναί με τῷ λόγῳ τὸ εἶκος· ὕστερον δὲ τὸν μῦθον, ἐὰν δόξῃ, κινήσομεν, εἴ γε δὴ μῦθός ἐστιν; 561b); “this is no longer within Hesiod’s authority, nor the work of human wisdom, but of your—the overseeing and distinguishing between those with harmonious passions and those that are otherwise, before their fall into great disharmonies through their passions” (ἐκεῖνο δ’ οὐκέτι καθ’ Ἡσίοδον οὐδ’ ἀνθρωπίνης ἔργον σοφίας ἀλλὰ θεοῦ, τὸ διορᾶν καὶ διαισθάνεσθαι τὰς ὁμοιοπαθείας καὶ τὰς διαφοράς, πρὶν εἰς μεγάλα τοῖς πάθεσιν ἐμπεσοῦσας ἀδικήματα γενέσθαι καταφανεῖς; 562a-b).

for a mortal to easily or confidently say anything about the divine, other than that it knows the right time for curing wickedness and applies the punishment to each as a drug, one with no common measure of intensity nor for the same interval for everyone.<sup>140</sup>

He carries the comparison further, and formally defines “judgement and announcing justice, the greatest of all the arts” as “the doctoring of the soul.”<sup>141</sup> From these and other passages, Robert van den Berg concludes that “the idea of punishment as beneficial therapy is central to his entire treatise.”<sup>142</sup> Some scholars, however, find tensions or even direct contradictions in the argumentation of the dialogue.<sup>143</sup> There are, admittedly, a few parts of the dialogue where the corrective or curative role of punishment seems conspicuously lacking, such as the collective punishment of cities, which Hesiod attests as a part of Zeus’ justice.<sup>144</sup> Yet this curative role recurs throughout the dialogue and coheres with Plutarch’s broader thought about the goodness of the providential care of the world, such as in the explicitly anti-Epicurean dialogues. In the

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<sup>140</sup> οὐ γὰρ ἰατροῦ μὲν ἰδιώτην ὄντα συμβαλεῖν λογισμὸν, ὡς πρότερον οὐ ἔτεμεν ἀλλ’ ὕστερον οὐδ’ ἐχθὲς ἔκαυσε ἀλλὰ σήμερον, ἔργον ἐστὶ, περὶ θεῶν δὲ θνητὸν ῥάδιον ἢ βέβαιον εἰπεῖν ἄλλο πλὴν ὅτι τὸν καιρὸν εἰδὼς ἄριστα τῆς περὶ τὴν κακίαν ἰατρείας ὡς φάρμακον ἐκάστω προσφέρει τὴν κόλασιν, οὔτε μεγέθους μέτρον κοινὸν οὔτε χρόνον ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ πάντων ἔχουσαν (549f-50a).

<sup>141</sup> ὅτι γὰρ ἡ περὶ ψυχὴν ἰατρεία, δίκη δὲ καὶ δικαιοσύνη προσαγορευομένη, πασῶν ἐστὶ τεχνῶν μεγίστη... (550a).

<sup>142</sup> 2014: 247. He characterizes this position as “a truly Platonic perspective on punishment” (246), unlike Proclus’. See also Vera Muñoz (1994: 199) and Frazier (2010: 196-7). Van den Berg, however, also detects a serious philosophical issue: “From a Platonic point of view it may seem problematic to assume that physical procreation determines one’s self. A Platonist does after all identify one’s true self with one’s soul, which already existed before the physical body was created out of the father” (244, comparing *Ti.* 86c-d). Cf. Opsomer (2016): “Plutarch tends towards emphasising the corrective and preventive functions of punishment, possibly because he feels that they offer a better legitimation. Yet he does not get rid of the concept of punishment as retribution” (55); Brenk (1997): “On the surface, Plutarch in the *Divine Vengeance* follows the corrective penology of Plato. ... However, the theme of *The Divine Vengeance* is not, strictly speaking, penology or conversion, but rather divine retribution” (109-10); Griffiths (1991): “The hand of a retaliatory providence is given pride of space and emphasis; and there is a resulting lack of cohesion and consistency, as often in Plutarch’s work. A quite different view assigns an overriding importance to the spiritual emphasis” (83), before discussing the medical analogy for punishment (84-5).

<sup>143</sup> Helmig (2005) suggests that the intended audience is non-philosophical, which he takes to explain both the “*ad hominem*” arguments against Epicurean arguments and the discussion of “popular views on theodicy” (330), such as divine wrath (328). He holds that the structure, however, is coherent, and even rhetorically effective for this audience. Cf. Opsomer (2016): “Charitable readers may want to save Plutarch’s face by claiming that any infelicities of the arguments are attributable to ‘Plutarch’ alone, not to our author. However, we should not let Plutarch get away with it that easily. ‘Plutarch’ is all too obviously a spokesman for Plutarch” (55).

<sup>144</sup> 558e-9a. Cf. Hes. *Op.*: “often even an entire city suffers because of an evil man, who transgresses and devises wicked deeds” (πολλάκι καὶ ξύμπασα πόλις κακοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀπηύρα, / ὅστις ἀλιτραίνει καὶ ἀτάσθαλα μηχανάται; 240-1).



*Non posse*, Theon argues that it is not just acceptable for the wicked to fear justified

punishments, but even beneficial.<sup>145</sup> Fear, he argues, deters them from committing crimes:

The unjust and wicked, to start, dread punishments and vengeance and so fear to do anything bad, and for this reason they have more leisure while living more pleasurably (ἡδίων) and with less anxiety (ἀταρακτότερον), since Epicurus thinks that there is no other reason to avoid wrong-doing than fear of punishments. Therefore, there is a need to fill their minds with superstition and to force upon them the fears and terrors and chasms and fears and suspicions from the heavens and the earth if they are about to be shocked by them and to thus become more suitable and mild. For it is to their advantage to fear the things after death, lest they be unjust or, if they are unjust, to carry on their life precariously in dread.<sup>146</sup>

Theon's assumption seems to be that only the wicked reasonably fear punishments after death, which indicates that he understands them as penalties for wickedness.<sup>147</sup> The many, who are neither too good nor too bad, do not tend to fear this sort of punishment, he argues, but have hopes of seeing their loved ones again, while the good can even derive pleasure from anticipating

<sup>145</sup> Proclus' commentary on the myth of Er, on the other hand, defends the appropriateness of horrifying threats of punishment, at least when they are held out only towards the most wicked: "Plato does not distance himself from every mythology, but that which advances through shameful and lawless fictions, the sort of mythology both Homer all Hesiod wrote, Plato does not similarly set bare these fears in the underworld, inspiring fear in souls and rendering them fearful in the face of death, but holding these things out toward the unjust, he renders his hearers as cautious against injustice, all but contriving the conclusion, 'if it is preferable for you to do injustice, the most fearsome things of the prisons are preferable for you: flee these things too with all your power. For justice must also be fled by you'" (Πλάτων οὐ πᾶσαν ἐκποδὸν ἐποίησεν μυθολογίαν, ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ τῶν αἰσχυρῶν καὶ ἀθέσμων πλασμάτων χωροῦσαν, οἷαν Ὅμηρός τε καὶ Ἡσίοδος ἐγραψάτην, καὶ οὐδὲ τὰ δειμάτα ταῦτα <τὰ> ἐν Ἄιδου γυμνὰ τέθεικεν, τὰς ψυχὰς δεδιττόμενος καὶ πρὸς θάνατον περιφόρους ἀποτελῶν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀδίκοις αὐτὰ προτείνων πρὸς τὴν ἀδικίαν ἀπεργάζεται τοὺς ἀκούοντας εὐλαβεῖς, μονονουχὶ συνημμένον πλέκων 'εἰ τὸ ἀδικεῖν ὑμῖν αἰρετόν, τὰ φρικωδέστατα τῶν κολαστηρίων ὑμῖν ἐστιν αἰρετά· ταῦτα δὲ φεύγετε παντὶ σθένει· φευκτέον ἄρα ὑμῖν καὶ τὴν ἀδικίαν'; *In Remp.* II.106.23-7.5).

<sup>146</sup> οἱ μὲν οὖν ἄδικοι καὶ πονηροὶ τὰς καθ' Ἄιδου δίκας καὶ τιμωρίας δεδιότες καὶ φοβούμενοι κακουργεῖν καὶ διὰ τοῦτο μᾶλλον ἡσυχίαν ἄγοντες ἡδίων βιώσονται καὶ ἀταρακτότερον. οὐ γὰρ Ἐπίκουρος ἄλλω τινὶ τῆς ἀδικίας οἶεται δεῖν ἀπείργειν ἢ φόβῳ κολάσεων. ὥστε καὶ προσεμορητέον ἐκείνοις τῆς δεισιδαιμονίας καὶ κινητέον ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἅμα τὰ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς δειμάτα καὶ χάσματα καὶ φόβους καὶ ὑπονοίας εἰ μέλλουσιν ἐκπλαγέντες ὑπὸ τούτων ἐπιεικέστερον ἔχειν καὶ πραότερον. λυσιτελεῖ γὰρ αὐτοῖς τὰ μετὰ τὸν θάνατον φοβούμενοις μὴ ἀδικεῖν ἢ ἀδικούσιν ἐπισημῶς ἐν τῷ βίῳ διάγειν καὶ περιφόβως (1104a-b). Theon argues, in line with the broader dialogue, that the Epicurean position makes life less happy according to Epicurean metrics—pleasure and freedom from anxiety.

<sup>147</sup> Cf. Moellering (1962): "Why help people toward or confirm them in depraved stupidity? Here Plutarch would make a distinction between fear and reverence as well as between those who for their moral good are in need of a thorough fright and those who for the maintenance of their human dignity need to be rescued from their quivering dread. ... Plutarch recognizes that fear results from an acceptance of the horrors of hell and impels to rites and purgations which will assure a happy lot in the afterlife" (151).

the potential of afterlife rewards.<sup>148</sup> Whether or not the fear Theon attributes to the wicked is in fact accurate, he argues that it is certainly beneficial because it deters them from wickedness, which allows them to live not only a life that is more just and good, but also more pleasant and less anxious. According to both Platonic and Epicurean conceptions of happiness, fear of the proper sort of punishment, based on the ultimate moral fairness of the world, can only be good.

Plutarch's formulation and depiction of afterlife punishment thus reflects a thorough response to Colotes' critique of the depiction of eschatological punishments in the myth of Er: the depiction of curative punishments is not cruel and pointless, but rather can function as an ethical exhortation. The next section argues that Plutarch's own myth in *De sera* in fact models such an exhortation through its depiction of the painful cures that Thespesius' soul sees in the journey from its body, and in his subsequent turn towards a better life. Together, the dialectical argumentation and the mythic narrative, the *logos* and the *mythos* of Plutarch's final speeches in *De sera*, form a coherent and complementary defense against the Epicurean assault.

### *Cures for Plato's incurable tyrants*

While some older scholarship on the myth of *De sera* assumed that Plutarch was drawing either mostly or entirely on post-Platonic sources—which was still Wolfgang Beck's assumption in the early nineteen-fifties—much of the scholarship emphasizes the influence of the myth of Er.<sup>149</sup> Some even argue that the entire structure of *De sera* as a whole is an imitation of the *Respublica*: Thrasymachus flees the discussion of the latter, and Epicurus flees the former, for

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<sup>148</sup> “But for the majority, there is a hope without fear of what is in Hades beyond the stuff of myth” (τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς καὶ ἄνευ φόβου περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἅιδου παρὰ τὸ μυθῶδες ἢ τῆς αἰδιότητος ἐλπίς...; 1104b-c); “what do we think, then, of the pleasures of the good and those who lived piously and justly, and who offered in addition the most beautiful and pious of things?” (τί δῆτα τῶν ἀγαθῶν οἴομεθα καὶ βεβιωκότων ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως, οἱ κακὸν μὲν οὐθὲν ἐκεῖ, τὰ δὲ κάλλιστα καὶ θεϊότατα προσδοκᾶσι; 1104c-d).

<sup>149</sup> Hirzel (1895), however, provides an early example of extensive inquiry into the relationship between the myth and Plato (215n1).

example.<sup>150</sup> Recent studies have found the influence of other Platonic dialogues other than the *Respublica*, such as Frederick Brenk's analysis of ideas from the *Timaeus* and the *Leges* in the depiction of Nero towards the end of the myth.<sup>151</sup> Further influences are still increasingly detected, such as by Matteo Tauffer's extensive introduction to the myth that details the broad and varied Platonic influence, as well as that of later writers. Renaud Gagné even argues that the *De sera* myth is "une refonte de toutes les catabases précédentes."<sup>152</sup> Claudia Wiener, however, explains a few of Plutarch's deviations from the myth of Er—particularly making the details more local and less exotic, as well as decreasing the amount of time the protagonist's soul was outside of the body to a less incredible three days—as a response to Colotes' polemic against Plato.<sup>153</sup>

Although the myth of *De sera* clearly draws on many previous texts—various Platonic dialogues, as well as the literary philosophy of the early Peripatetics as Gagné and others argue—its narrative is nevertheless strikingly grounded in the myth of Er through the similarity in their framing stories. These similarities, however, should draw even more attention to the

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<sup>150</sup> See especially Helmig (2005: 324n6).

<sup>151</sup> 1987: 135-41. Brenk's (1977) general assessment of the myth is that "the major constituent elements of the myth reveal a great lack of originality and an exceptionally heavy dependence upon Plato" (137). According to Jones (1916) describes comparisons between Platonic myths and the *De sera* narrative in Ettig's 1891 dissertation (43n126).

<sup>152</sup> Tauffer (1999, 2010) and Gagné (2015: 319). Tauffer (2010), similarly to Gagné, but less extensively, detected influence of "catabasi" in literature (49-50).

<sup>153</sup> 2004: "Angesichts dieser Diskussionen kann man verstehen, weshalb Plutarch bei seiner Quellenangabe und Rahmenerzählung der Jenseitsfahrt äußerste Sorgfalt walten läßt. Jede Unwahrscheinlichkeit in der Rahmenhandlung und jeder Hauch von Exotismus ist vermieden, die Gewährsleute sind vertrauenerweckend und gehören zu Plutarchs Bekanntenkreis (mor. 563d). Der Held von Plutarchs Jenseitsbericht, Ardiaios bzw. Thespesios aus Soloi, ist verwandt mit Protogenes von Tarsos, einem Gastfreund von Plutarchs Eltern in Thespiai, der Plutarchs Gesprächspartnern und seinen Lesern aus dem Erotikos bekannt ist. Dieser Protogenes hat den Jenseitsbericht in einem vertraulichen Gespräch unter Freunden von Thespesios selbst erfahren. Das Erlebnis, das in diesem Mann einen auffällig positiven moralischen Wandel bewirkt hat, besteht äußerlich in einem Unfall: einem Sturz von der Leiter und einem Schädeltrauma, das ein dreitägiges Koma verursacht. Das ist wesentlich glaubwürdiger als eine fast zweiwöchige Bewußtlosigkeit des Pamphyliers Er. Drei Tage entsprechen dem Trauerritus, der eine Beisetzung am dritten Tag vorsah, so daß also keine Vorgeschichte, wie der Tod auf dem Schlachtfeld, als Erklärung für die zeitliche Verzögerung der Beisetzung konstruiert werden mußte" (60). Wiener focuses, however, on the anti-Epicurean elements in the myth itself, with little reference to such polemic throughout the broader dialogue.

underlying differences. Weiner's approach is therefore particularly promising, especially because of the broader orientation of the dialogue against the Epicureans and the prominence of the myth of Er in Colotes' anti-Platonic polemic. One particularly significant deviation from the Platonic model, which seems motivated by Colotes' criticisms, seems to have gone unnoticed. Scholars have long noted the similarity between the name of Plutarch's protagonist—Aridaeus—and the foremost of the incurable tyrants in Plato's myth of Er—Ardiaeus—but less attention has been paid to the actual significance of the comparison. The Platonic figure is displayed before approaching souls suffering gruesome—and perhaps eternal—tortures, not because they could ever benefit him, but so as to serve as a warning to the audience.<sup>154</sup> The Plutarcean protagonist, on the other hand, witnesses a variety of worse but corrective punishments while he himself is cured of his nascent descent into depravity by the vision. The depiction of painful punishments has shifted from the conspicuous incurables in Plato towards a variety of curables in Plutarch.

In this section, I argue that Plutarch diminishes and occludes Plato's category of incurables in the *Gorgias* and the *Respublica* so as to present punishment as fundamentally curative. Although all three of Plutarch's extended myths describe divine punishments in the course of their narratives, the descriptions of purifications before further ascent in *De facie* and *De genio* are relatively short.<sup>155</sup> In *De sera*, on the other hand, punishment is the predominant theme and Plutarch's adaptation of the myth of Er forms a response to Colotes' criticism of the torments of the tyrant Ardiaeus. Plato's harsh display and torture of incurables left the myth of Er open to criticism and rejection, which led some later Neoplatonists to similarly attempt to

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<sup>154</sup> In the myth of Er, it seems that the tortured tyrants are marked so as to show the passers-by "why they are there, and that they were thrown into Tartarus" (ὧν ἕνεκά τε καὶ ὅτι εἰς τὸν τάρταρον ἐμπροσθέντων ἄγοντο; X.616a); there does not seem to be any indication of a cessation to torture in the *Grg.* myth either.

<sup>155</sup> *De fac.* 943c and *De gen.* 591c.

dismantle the category:<sup>156</sup> Olympiodorus resorts to a philological argument, for instance, to explain the idea away, lest it contradict the cyclical argument in the *Phaedo*, among other motivations.<sup>157</sup> These are serious concerns, so, by diminishing the presence of incurables, Plutarch reinforces the arguments in the rest of the dialogue, which the last section examined, for punishment as essentially curative—corrections carried out for the good of the punished.

The myth, however, is certainly a complex work of literature, brimming with imagistic, varied, and arresting details: Ardiaeus' soul “was lifted a bit and the whole seemed to breathe and see in every direction, because the one eye of the soul was opened,” although he recognized nothing at first but the stars;<sup>158</sup> then he sees souls making fiery bubbles, which burst and leave a light and ethereal material that seems to act as a sort of chariot for the immaterial souls;<sup>159</sup> there

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<sup>156</sup> Bernstein (1993) notes, “Significantly, there is no further mention of the incurable in oblivion” (78). He does not, however, draw any conclusions from this observation. Krasovec (1993), on the other hand, emphasizes the incurables in the myth (25), based on the metaphorical use of incurable (τῶν ἀναιτίων) in the discussion of cities (556e), and compares the theme in *De sera* with divine retribution in the “Hebrew Bible” (28). Betz et al. (1975) similarly compare the “paraenetic” purpose of the myth as a whole with the scenes of incurables in the Platonic myths. Cf. Jones (1916): Plutarch “seems to have interpreted the traditional punishment of the soul of the incurably wicked, as taught in Plato’s *Phaedo*, *Gorgias* and *Republic*, but occurring [in] Plutarch’s myths only in *de sera vindicta* (564Fff.), as virtual annihilation. It is hard to see, however, how, even in this form, it could have had a place in his thought, and in view of the fact that it does not appear in the other greater myths, I should hesitate about affirming that it formed any real part of his belief” (67). Vera Muñoz (1994) addresses the phenomenon of “Lo incurable,” but only really in the context of 551d-e, on which much of the discussion is philological (202-3). Many scholars do not even address the treatment of incurables: Vernière (1974), for instance, identifies the only “deux nouveautés” as, first, the image of naked souls as “scolopendres” and the descendants berating their guilty ancestor, and, second, the use of forging implements and imagery (118). Cf. Brenk (1994: 16).

<sup>157</sup> He argues in a lemma on *Phd.* 72b that “if he means that everything living comes from the dead and the reverse, then you have a corollary that Plato does not mean that there is eternal punishment, but that punished souls go back again to life. If he elsewhere says, ‘the eternal punishment,’ he therefore calls an *aeon* some period and return back” (εἰ βούλεται τὰ ζῶντα πάντα ἐκ τῶν τεθνεώτων καὶ ἀνάπαλιν, πόρισμα ἔχεις ἐντεῦθεν ὅτι οὐ βούλεται ὁ Πλάτων εἶναι αἰδιον κόλασιν, ἀλλὰ πάλιν ἔρχεσθαι εἰς βίον τὰς ἀκολάστους ψυχάς. εἰ δὲ καὶ ἀλλαχοῦ λέγει “αἰώνιον τὴν κόλασιν [*Grg.* 525c, e],” ἀλλ’ οὖν αἰῶνα καλεῖ περιόδον τινα καὶ ἀποκατάστασιν; 10.14). Olympiodorus goes onto reject belief in an eternal ascent, which Damascius, attributing it to Iamblichus, also connects with eternal punishment (*In Phd.* I.492, ad 107e). See further §547-8. Proclus approaches the problem less directly: commenting on the myth of Er, he argues that Ardiaeus and the other souls are only punished “as long as they need punishment” (ἕως ἂν δέωνται κόλασεως), supplying details from the myth in the *Phd.* (II.179.9-24).

<sup>158</sup> εἶτα μικρὸν ἐξαρθεῖς ἔδοξεν ἀναπνεῖν ὅλος καὶ περιορᾶν πανταχόθεν, ὥσπερ ἐνὸς ὀμματος ἀνοιχθείσης τῆς ψυχῆς (563e).

<sup>159</sup> “Leaving aside most of the sights, he said that the souls of the dead go up from below and make fiery bubbles as the air is displaced, and then the bubble calmly breaks and souls depart bearing an impression like a human but compact in mass, and moving not similarly...” (τὰ δὲ πλεῖστα τῶν θεαμάτων παραλιπὼν ἔφη τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν τελευτώντων κάτωθεν ἀνιούσας πομφόλυγα φλογοειδῆ ποεῖν ἐξισταμένου τοῦ ἀέρος, εἶτα ῥήγνυμένης ἀτρέμα τῆς

is a place “similar to Bacchic glades,” called Lethe, where the souls of the inhabitants are so filled with desire for pleasure that they return back to earth (*gê*)—back into *génération*;<sup>160</sup> there are strange oracles and the protagonist hears prophecies, including the time of his own death.<sup>161</sup> It is also a terrifying narrative that ends when the protagonist, abandoned by his guide, sees “a woman taking hold of him, marvelous in form and immensity, who said ‘come now, so that you might remember these last things more,’ brandishing some fiery rod, like a painter”—before “he is pulled back as if by a cord” and returns to his body upon the grave.<sup>162</sup> It might, therefore, risk reductionism to emphasize one argumentative thread such as the curative role of punishment in such a rich mythic narrative.<sup>163</sup> Yet Lamprias, as discussed above, interpreted the myth of Er by identifying an essential ethical core to the myth and by leaving the imagistic details as bolstering or reinforcing at best. The core of the *mythos* in *De sera* seems to be that afterlife punishment must have a curative function, which reinforces the ideas about ancestral guilt analyzed in the *logos*, especially through the medical analogy. Even the most pitiable of the punished, those who

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πομόλυγος ἐκβαίνειν τύπον ἐχούσας ἀνθρωποειδῆ τὸν δ’ ὄγκον εὐσταλεῖς, κινουμένας δ’ οὐχ ὁμοίως...; 563f-4a). See further 564d. He then describes the chaos of bad souls, and the reaction of good souls to both sorts (564a-b). Jones (1916) argues that the “ὄχημα” is not what bursts (47n137), but, if this is the operative concept, the “cause of the soul’s taking this form” (47-8). Wiener (2004) analyzes this aspect of Plutarch’s myth as filling an “Informationslücke” in the myth of Er (60): this at least gives an account of how souls can recognize one another, for instance (61-2).

<sup>160</sup> ... ὀφθῆναι τοῖς βακχικοῖς ἄντροις... (565f); “and the place is called Lēthē. ... the yearning for the memory and desire drag the heavy soul back into generation, which is named thus because it is an inclination (*neusis*) towards earth (*gē*) by through its pliancy (καλεῖσθαι δὲ Λήθης τὸν τόπον. ... ἐκ δὲ τῆς μνήμης ἕμερον καὶ πόθον ἔλκοντα πρὸς γένεσιν, ἣν οὕτως ὠνομάσθαι, νεῦσιν ἐπὶ γῆν οὖσαν ὑγρότητι βαρνομένης τῆς ψυχῆς; 566a). Jones (1916) compares this place to the plain of Lēthē in the myth of Er (44-6), suggesting that Plutarch’s adaptation is perhaps a “symbolic account of the fall of the soul from a higher state, to be put along side of *Amatorius* 766B...” (45).

<sup>161</sup> ... ἀλλ’ ἤκουε παριῶν φωνὴν ὀξεῖαν γυναικὸς ἐν μέτρῳ φράζουσας ἄλλα τινα καὶ χρόνον, ὡς ἔοικε, τῆς ἐκείνου τελευτῆς. ἔλεγε δ’ ὁ δαίμων τὴν φωνὴν εἶναι Σιβύλλης... (566d).

<sup>162</sup> γυναῖκα γὰρ αὐτοῦ λαβομένην θαυμαστὴν τὸ εἶδος καὶ τὸ μέγεθος, “δεῦρο δὴ,” εἶπεῖν, “οὗτος, ὅπως ἕκαστα μᾶλλον μνημονεύσης,” καὶ τι ῥαβδίον, ὥσπερ οἱ ζωγράφοι, διάπυρον προσάγειν· ἑτέραν δὲ κωλύειν, αὐτὸν δ’ ὥσπερ ὑπ’ ἕγγος ἐξαιφνης σπασθέντα πνεύματι νεανικῷ σφόδρα καὶ βιαίῳ τῷ σώματι προσπείειν καὶ ἀναβλέψαι σχεδὸν ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ τοῦ μνήματος (568a). Brenk (1997) deems this “a deconstructionist note” (112).

<sup>163</sup> E.g. compared to Frazier’s (2010) identification of two dimensions: “Dans le mythos comme dans le logos apparaît ainsi une double dimension, que je dirais volontiers éthique *et* pythique, dans la mesure où Delphes est un des lieux privilégiés de ce qui reste la question essentielle pour Plutarque, quel que soit l’angle sous lequel il l’aborde, justice de la Providence ou mantique : la relation entre hommes et dieu” (209).

think they are through but require still further punishment, are all in the category of the curably wicked, which is radically expanded in Plutarch's treatment.<sup>164</sup> The *mythos* is certainly a rich, fantastically imagistic piece of literature, but some of the scholarship is so swept away by the details that these central ethical ideas are utterly lost; they are even less often contextualized within the broader dialogue.<sup>165</sup> The vision, moreover, serves the role as an ethical exhortation that is especially effective upon the myth's protagonist, who is particularly vulnerable to many elements he encounters in the vision. When he first perceives the ostensible pleasures of the glades of Lehe, for instance, he rushes to join:

The guide did not allow Thespesius to spend time here (although he wanted to), but dragged him away by force while teaching and proclaiming that the rational part is melted away and liquified by pleasure but the irrational and corporeal part, since it is watery and corporeal, implants the memory of the body.<sup>166</sup>

In corporeal life, the young rake's appetite for pleasure leads him to increasing acts of depravity, while in death, Plutarch illustrates how the same proclivity can lead souls to entrap themselves in the cycle of reincarnation.

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<sup>164</sup> "He said that the most pitiable of all were those that seemed to have discharged their sentence, but were apprehended again" (πάντων δὲ πάσχειν ἔλεγεν οἰκτρότατα τὰς ἤδη δοκούσας ἀφείσθαι τῆς δίκης, εἴτ' αὐθις συλλαμβανομένης; 567d). These are the sort whose progeny may inherit punishment: they are described as haraunging their guilty ancestor when they arrive, further adding painful shame to the punishment (567d-e). Similarly, 565d: "But up until this point when these things are still present, some relapses of the passions occur and bear pulsations and throbbings: for some they are dim and quickly quenched, but for others they strain on stubbornly. Of these, there are those who are punished again and again..." (μέχρι δ' οὗ ταῦτ' ἔνεστι, γίνονται τινες ὑποτροπαὶ τῶν παθῶν σφυγμοὺς ἔχουσαι καὶ πήδησιν, ἐνίαις μὲν ἀμυδρὰν καὶ ταχὺ κατασβεννυμένην ἐνίαις δὲ νεανικῶς ἐντείνουσαν. ὧν αἱ μὲν πάλιν καὶ πάλιν κολασθεῖσαι...).

<sup>165</sup> Aguilar (1996), for example, focuses almost exclusively on the traditional understanding of the names of mythic figures (286-90). Regarding Erinys, she emphasizes that there is just one rather than the traditional three, but does not even mention that she punishes incurables' only "quien persigue a los culpables que intentan escapar" (287). Santamaría Álvarez (2007) has a similar approach in a sense, in seeking verbal echoes from early authors such as Homer (879-82), but also, more briefly and speculatively, Heraclides of Pontus and Clearchus of Soli (884). Surprisingly, he argues that Plutarch bases the protagonist on Virgil's Palinurus in *Aen.* VI, as well as the Homeric model Elpenor in *Od.* XI (885-6).

<sup>166</sup> ὅθεν οὐδὲ διατρίβειν βουλόμενον εἶα τὸν Θεσπέσιον, ἀλλ' ἀφείλκε βία, διδάσκων ἅμα καὶ λέγων ὡς ἐκτίκεται καὶ ἀνυγραίνεται τὸ φρονοῦν ὑπὸ τῆς ἡδονῆς, τὸ δ' ἄλογον καὶ σωματοειδὲς ἀρδόμενον καὶ σαρκούμενον ἐμποιεῖ τοῦ σώματος μνήμην (566a). Brenk (2017) takes this aspect of the scene to be general, reflecting a "lack of conscious choice" and an "almost natural drift downward," faced by every soul (58), but it is a particular circumstance of the protagonist's character that he is inclined towards it, not a feature shared by every soul.

Plato's Er and Plutarch's Aridaeus share the basic experience of their visions, a near-death experience leading to the soul's journey outside the body, but their circumstances differ greatly. The narrator of Plato's myth seems rather neutral and generic—hence his unusually short name (Ἡρ), more reminiscent of a noun-ending than a distinctive appellation—and his origin from the generalized “Everytribe” (τὸ γένος Παμφύλου)—unless his temporary status as one of the war dead elevates him to some extent.<sup>167</sup> Aridaeus, on the other hand, is given a detailed and moralizing narrative background. He is a previously wealthy young man who squandered his fortune with extravagance and, after it was gone, became increasingly willing to do anything to regain the pleasures he previously enjoyed.<sup>168</sup> This specific moral fault, knavery in the pursuit of profligacy and pleasure-seeking greed, runs through Plutarch's narrative. Before the blow on the neck that led to the vision, for instance, the protagonist sends for an oracle: “But what threw him most into infamy was a prophecy brought back from Amphilocheus. For he had sent to ask the god how it seemed, if he would live the rest of his life better. He received that he will do better,

<sup>167</sup> Earlier in the *Resp.*, Socrates cites Hesiod's description of the blessed golden race's fate after death—“they are called blessed daemones upon the earth, good, warders of evils, guardians of mortal humans” (τοὶ μὲν δαίμονες ἄγνοὶ ἐπιχθόνιοι καλέονται / ἐσθλοὶ, ἀλεξίκακοι, φύλακες θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων; *Op.* 121-2)—to argue for a daimonic fate for the war dead: “and so then, would we say that one of those who dying on campaign that dies esteemed is not only one of the golden race? ... but should we not be persuaded by Hesiod that whenever some of that race...” (τῶν δὲ δὴ ἀποθανόντων ἐπὶ στρατιᾶς ὃς ἂν εὐδοκίμησας τελευτήσῃ ἄρ' οὐ πρῶτον μὲν φήσομεν τοῦ χρυσοῦ γένους εἶναι; ... ἀλλ' οὐ πεισόμεθα Ἡσιόδῳ, ἐπειδὴν τινες τοῦ τοιοῦτου γένους τελευτήσωσιν...; V.468e). Cf. *Cra.* 398b. Er's near-death among this special group elaborates the exoticism of the mythic vision he relates next to the public pyres. On this category in Athenian religion, see Parker (1996: 136n53).

<sup>168</sup> “I said, then, that Thespesius of Soli—who once was with us here, a neighbor and relative of Protogenes—lived in great dissolutionment at first but quickly destroyed his fortune already in a short while and became a pauper by necessity. He pursued wealth due to a change in mind and suffered the same misfortune as other dissolute men, like those who have wives but do not keep them, yet, once they let them go, unjustly attempt to be with them once they are married to others. Then he withheld from no shame as long as it leads to pleasure or profit, and, while he did not amass much profit, he earned the greatest reputation for knavery in a short time” (οὕτως οὖν ἔφην ὅτι ὁ Σολεὺς Θεσπέσιος, ἀνὴρ ἐκεῖνου τοῦ γενομένου μεθ' ἡμῶν ἐνταῦθα Πρωτογένους οἰκείος καὶ φίλος, ἐν πολλῇ βιώσας ἀκολασίᾳ τὸν πρῶτον χρόνον εἶτα ταχὺ τὴν οὐσία πονηρὸς καὶ τὸν πλοῦτον ἐκ μετανοίας διώκων ταυτὸ τοῖς ἀκολάστοις ἔπασχε πάθος, οἱ τὰς γυναῖκας ἔχοντες μὲν οὐ φυλάττουσι, προέμενοι δὲ πειρῶσιν αὐτῆς ἀδίκως ἐτέροις συνούσας [διαφεύρειν]. οὐδενὸς οὖν ἀπεχόμενος αἰσχροῦ φέροντος εἰς ἀπόλαυσιν ἢ κέρδος οὐσίαν μὲν οὐ πολλὴν δόξαν δὲ πονηρίας ἐν ὀλίγῳ πλείστην συνήγαγε; 563b-c). Gagné (2015) detects a reference to an earlier writer in Plutarch's toponym: “Sa ville d'origine, Soloi, est bien sûr un clin d'oeil à Cléarque de Soloi, l'auteur du grand récit catabatique contenu dans le Περὶ ὕπνου, que l'on connaît à travers Proclus” (317).



when he died.”<sup>169</sup> The response plays on the irony between his materialistic intention and the moral meaning behind the oracle: he surely thought it meant “do better” as returning to wealth and prosperity, but it turns out that comes to act in a morally better way after he “dies.”<sup>170</sup>

Throughout the rest of the vision, there are a few depictions of punishment for his exact moral failing, willingness to do evil in pursuit of greed.<sup>171</sup> In the course of the imagistic descriptions of punishments where *daemones* transfer the wicked between molten pools of gold, silver, and lead, for instance, only applies apparently to “the souls that are wicked through avarice and greed.”<sup>172</sup> Family, fittingly given the focus on ancestral guilt in the *logos*, is a key element, providing the most arresting avenue for this vice to reemerge in the narrative. Eventually, Thespesius learns both his father’s crimes and his fate:

Then Thespesius happened upon friends and relatives and neighbors he was not expecting to see punished, and they lamented and called out to him as they endured terrible sufferings and unseemly punishments and pains, but in the end he saw his own father coming to the top of some pit, full of marks and scars. He stretches his hands towards Thespesius and is not allowed to stay silent, but through retributions at the hands of those who are stationed upon him he is forced to confess that he became stained by poisoning visitors for the gold they carried, and that he managed to elude everyone there, but here was put to shame, suffering these things and already being lead away to suffer yet more.

<sup>169</sup> μάλιστα δ’ αὐτὸν διέβαλεν ἀνενεχθεῖσά τις ἐξ Ἀμφιλόχου μαντεία. πέμψας γὰρ ὡς ἔοικεν ἠρώρτα τὸν θεόν, εἰ βέλτιον βιώσεται τὸν ἐπίλοιπον βίον· ὁ δ’ ἀνεῖλεν ὅτι πράξει βέλτιον, ὅταν ἀποθάνῃ (563c-d). He continues, “and not long after, this happened to him in a certain sense” (καὶ δὴ τρόπον τινὰ τοῦτο μετ’ οὐ πολλὸν χρόνον αὐτῷ συνέπεσε; 563d). On the Amphilocheus oracle, cf. Wiener (2004: 60n28).

<sup>170</sup> In Simmias’ myth in *De gen.*, there a similar sort of darkly comedic prophecy about the death of the protagonist. After the voice refers to infernal punishments, he breaks off: “‘but these things you will know,’ he said, ‘more clearly, young man, in three months—now go’” (“ταῦτα δὲ εἴση,” φάναι, “σαφέστερον, ὃ νεανία τρίτῳ μηνί· νῦν δ’ ἄπιθι;” 592e). This better knowledge, as the reader might well expect, comes when the boy dies shortly after (592e-f). This myth bears another similarity with that of *De sera*: Timarchus descended to the oracle of Trophonius and “remained there below for two nights and one day, and when many were giving him up as hopeless and his relatives were lamenting, he emerged extremely radiant at dawn” (ἐμμεῖνας δὲ δύο νύκτας κάτω καὶ μίαν ἡμέραν, τῶν πολλῶν ἀπεγνωκότων αὐτὸν ἤδη καὶ τῶν οἰκειῶν ὀδυρομένων, πρῶι μάλα φαιδρὸς ἀνήλθε; 590a-b).

<sup>171</sup> Brenk (1994), however, emphasizes more positive aspects of the specifics of the myth, such as the “theophanic name” name he receives and role of the “religious shrine” in the narrative, as opposed to Er—“Plato’s is more socio-political in tone, Plutarch’s more theological” (11). He ignores, however, the moral differences between Er and Aridaeus. See also Brenk’s (1997: 113) and Boulet (2010): “The myth tells two stories: as a simple myth, it foretells of the horrible punishments awaiting wrongdoers in the afterlife; as an allegory, it points to the happy ascension of the philosophical soul in the philosopher’s earthly life. While the superstitious reading of the myth is eerie and full of gruesome details, the allegorical reading is wonderful and uplifting” (63-4).

<sup>172</sup> ... τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν δι’ ἀπληστίαν καὶ πλεονεξίαν πονηρῶν (567c). On the “lakes” (λίμνας) of molten metals and the “*daemones* like bronzesmiths” (δαίμονας ὡσπερ οἱ χαλκεῖς): 567b-d.

Thespesius did not dare to either supplicate or beseech on behalf of his father because of terror and fear, rather he wanted to turn away and flee, but he no longer saw the gentle and familiar guide...<sup>173</sup>

Thespesius does not attempt to argue that his father's punishment is undeserved, due to this mechanism of compelled confession—his fears turn to himself. The father's worst crime, killing guests for gold, seems to explain the growing evil in Aridaeus: evidently, the son inherited this disposition to pursue money at any cost, no matter how shameful or wicked, from his murderously greedy father. The punishment of the father is primarily aimed at ridding himself of these greater evils, not his son, but the painful sight also works to cure the son of the still growing seed of evil that he inherited from the father, as if this shame is a punishment upon Aridaeus as well.<sup>174</sup> In *De sera*, Plutarch thus depicts how the fear of afterlife punishments can cure even Plato's worst example of depravity, before he reduces himself into incurable evil.

The myth treats the categorization of curables and incurables more systematically than the others in Plutarch, but in a manner more similar to Plato's *Phaedo*.<sup>175</sup> In its treatment of the incurables, however, it is substantially divergent from *De sera*'s most obvious Platonic model, the myth of Er, as well as Socrates' final speech in the *Gorgias*, which is another prominent

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<sup>173</sup> ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ φίλοις καὶ οἰκειοῖς καὶ συνήθεσιν ὁ Θεσπέσιος οὐκ ἂν προσδοκήσας κολαζομένοις ἐνετύγχανε, καὶ δεινὰ παθήματα καὶ τιμωρίας ἀσχήμονας καὶ ἀλγεινὰς ὑπομένοντες ᾤκτιζοντο πρὸς ἐκείνον καὶ ἀνεκλαίοντο, τέλος δὲ τὸν πατέρα τὸν ἑαυτοῦ κατεῖδεν ἕκ τινος βαράθρου στιγμάτων καὶ οὐλῶν μεστὸν ἀναδυόμενον, ὀρέγοντα τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῷ καὶ σιωπᾶν οὐκ ἐώμενον ἀλλ' ὁμολογεῖν ἀναγκαζόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν ἐφεστώτων ταῖς τιμωρίας, ὅτι περὶ ξένους τινὰς μιὰρὸς γενόμενος χρυσίον ἔχοντας φαρμάκοις διαφθείρας καὶ ἐκεῖ διαλαθὼν ἅπαντας ἐνταῦθ' ἐξελεγχθεὶς τὰ μὲν ἤδη πέπονθε τὰ δ' ἄγεται πεισόμενος, ἰκετεύειν μὲν ἢ παραιτεῖσθαι περὶ τοῦ πατρὸς οὐκ ἐτόλμα δι' ἔκπληξιν καὶ δέος, ὑποστρέψαι δὲ καὶ φυγεῖν βουλόμενος οὐκέτι τὸν πρᾶον ἐκείνον ἑώρα καὶ οἰκεῖον ξεναγόν... (566e-7a).

<sup>174</sup> The shame of having one's wickedness revealed to family is a prominent theme in the myth. Dike shows the curably wicked "first to his good parents, if there are any, as despised by and unworthy of his progenitors. But if they are worthless, he sees them being punished and he is seen being punished for a long time, purified of each of his passions by pains and toils, which excel punishments of the flesh in magnitude and vehemence by such an extent, as much as waking vision is more palpable than a dream" (πρῶτον ἀγαθοῖς γονεῦσιν, ἄνπερ ὧσι, καὶ προγόνοις αὐτοῦ πρόσπτυστον ὄντα καὶ ἀνάξιον· ἐὰν δὲ φαῦλοι, κολαζομένους ἐπιδὼν ἐκείνους καὶ ὀφθεῖς δικαιοῦται πολὺν χρόνον ἐξαιρούμενος ἕκαστον τῶν παθῶν ἀλγηδόσι καὶ πόνοις, οἱ τοσοῦτο μεγέθει καὶ σφοδρότητι τοὺς διὰ σαρκὸς ὑπερβάλλουσιν, ὅσον τὸ ὕπαρ ἂν εἴη τοῦ ὄνειρατος ἐναργέστερον; 565b).

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Griffiths (1991): "the Myth [of *De sera*] is clearly indebted to the Myths of Plato in the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*" (80; cf. 76-7).

inspiration. In the latter, Zeus is faced with the problem of the powerful but wicked being rewarded upon their deaths, which he corrects by imposing new judges to scrutinize the souls when they are stripped of their bodies through death.<sup>176</sup> Only then is it possible for the judge to see whether souls are pure, or whether, as often happens with potentates and tyrants, “he sees nothing healthy upon the soul, rather it has been scourged thoroughly and left full of scars from perjuries and injustices—scars which each act imprinted upon his soul.”<sup>177</sup> The *De sera* myth elaborates this motif further. When Aridaeus initially sees the souls gathering, he distinguishes them by the presence or absence of wounds and scars:

But there are those that go with one soft and entirely continuous color, as if the purest light of the full moon, but there are others that run through with some scales and slender bruises, and others entirely spotted and strange in appearance, like vipers branded with black spots, and some others still bear dim lacerations.<sup>178</sup>

The first description of afterlife punishment—Dike’s doctoring (ιατρεία) of evil—elaborates the image of the scars and bruises of the impure souls, with chromatic details. After describing how Dike parades the stripped soul, Thespesius’ guiding relative exhorts:<sup>179</sup>

But look at the various colors of every sort upon the souls! The rusty brown, the varnish or stinginess and greed; the fiery blood-red of cruelty and bitterness; where you see the

<sup>176</sup> “Next, they must be judged when they are stripped of all these things—for it is necessary that they be judged when they are dead. And the judge must be stripped too...” (ἔπειτα γυμνοὺς κριτέον ἀπάντων τούτων· τεθνεώτας γὰρ δεῖ κρίνεσθαι; 523e).

<sup>177</sup> κατεῖδεν οὐδὲν ὑγιᾶς ὄν τῆς ψυχῆς, ἀλλὰ διαμεμαστιγωμένην καὶ οὐλῶν μεστήν ὑπὸ ἐπιorkιῶν καὶ ἀδικίας, ἃ ἐκάστη ἢ πράξις αὐτοῦ ἐξωμόρξατο εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν (525a).

<sup>178</sup> ἀλλὰ τοὺς μὲν, ὥσπερ ἢ καθαρωτάτη πανσέληνος, ἐν χρῶμα λεῖον καὶ συνεχὲς ὁμαλῶς ἰέντας, ἐτέρων δὲ φολίδας τινὰς διατρεχούσας ἢ μάλωπας ἀραιούς, ἄλλους δὲ κομιδῆ ποκίλους καὶ ἀτόπους τὴν ὄψιν, ὥσπερ οἱ ἔχεις μελάσμασι κατεστιγμένους, ἄλλους δὲ τινὰς ἀμβελίας ἀμυχὰς ἔχοντας (564d).

<sup>179</sup> “But he who arrives from there unpunished and impure, him Dike distinguishes manifest in his soul, naked, bearing nothing to sink into or to hide or cover his depravity; rather, she displayed him, looked upon from every side by everyone...” (ὅς δ’ ἂν ἐκεῖθεν ἀκόλαστος ἐνταῦθα καὶ ἀκάθρτος ἐξίκεται, τοῦτον ἢ Δίκη διαλαβοῦσα τῇ ψυχῇ καταφανῆ, γυμνόν, εἰς οὐδὲν ἔχοντα καταδύναι καὶ ἀποκρύψασθαι καὶ περιστεῖλαι τὴν μοχθηρίαν ἀλλὰ πανταχόθεν καὶ ὑπὸ πάντων καὶ πάντα καθορώμενον ἔδειξε...; 565a-b). This idea of the naked soul is further emphasized later, when he describes the punishment of “all those who cast a screen and a reputation of virtue upon themselves, and live out their lives with their evil eluding notice (ὅσοι δὲ πρόσχημα καὶ δόξαν ἀρετῆς περιβαλόμενοι διεβίωσαν κακίᾳ λανθανούση): “and there are others assigned to others, forcing them to painfully and lamentably turn what is inside of their souls to the exterior, writhing unnaturally and turning themselves inside out, like see millepedes turning themselves inside out when they swallow a hook” (τούτους ἐπιπόνως καὶ ὀδυνηρῶς ἠνάγκαζον ἕτεροι περιεστῶτες ἐκτρέπεσθαι τὰ ἐντὸς ἔξω τῆς ψυχῆς, ἰλυσπωμένους παρὰ φύσιν καὶ ἀνακαμπτομένους, ὥσπερ αἱ θαλάττιαι σκολόπενδρα καταπιούσαι τὸ ἄγκιστρον ἐκτρέπουσιν ἑαυτάς; 567a-b)

blue-gray, some weakness for pleasure has scarcely been rubbed out; the presence of malice, with envy, spews something green and festering, like cuttlefish do their black. For on earth, the evil of the soul, being turned by passions and turning the body in turn, imparts these colors, and here the end of purification and punishment is for the soul, when all of these have been smoothed out, to become luminous and monochromatic.<sup>180</sup>

Plutarch takes this idea of wickedness as scars upon the naked soul from the *Gorgias* and vividly associates different sorts of vice with different colors, rather than undifferentiated viciousness with undifferentiated scarification.<sup>181</sup> He even connects psychic color with purity and thus health, which further illustrates one way in which punishment acts as if a medical cure upon the soul—the prominent argument throughout the *logos* and here too in the *mythos*.

Yet in their treatment of the incurables, Thespesius' vision is rather different than the myth of the *Gorgias*. In the latter, the categorization between curable and incurable is central to the system of judgement and punishment: the process begins when the judge Rhadamanthus views the stripped soul of a wicked man and “sends it into Tartarus, marking it, if it seems to be curable or incurable.”<sup>182</sup> The former are eventually cured by suffering the pains of punishment, but the latter “suffer the most painful and terrifying torments for all time because of their crimes, as examples austerely fastened upon the wall of the underworld prison, spectacles and lessons for

<sup>180</sup> ὅρα δ' τὰ ποικίλα ταῦτα καὶ παντοδαπὰ χρώματα τῶν ψυχῶν· τὸ μὲν ὄρφνιον καὶ ῥυπαρόν, ἀνελευθερίας ἀλοιφήν καὶ πλεονεξίας, τὸ δ' αἱματοπὸν καὶ διάπυρον, ὀμότητος καὶ πικρίας· ὅπου δὲ τὸ γλαύκινόν ἐστιν, ἐντεῦθεν ἀκρασία τις περὶ ἡδονᾶς ἐκτέτριπται μάλιστα· κακόνοια δ' ἐνοῦσα μετὰ φθόνου τουτὶ τὸ ἰῶδες καὶ ὕπουλον, ὥσπερ αἱ σηπίαι τὸ μέλαν, ἀφήσιν. ἐκεῖ γὰρ ἡ [τε] κακία τῆς ψυχῆς τρεπομένης ὑπὸ τῶν παθῶν καὶ τρεπούσης τὸ σῶμα τὰς χροᾶς ἀναδίδωσι, ἐνταῦθα δὲ καθαρμοῦ καὶ κολάσεως πέρασ ἐστὶ τούτων ἐκλεανθέντων παντάπασι τὴν ψυχὴν ἀγχοειδῆ καὶ σύγχρουν γίνεσθαι (565c-d). On the detail of cuttlefish spewing apparently defensive ink clouds, see *De soll. anim.* 976a. The imagery of staining also recalls an earlier phrase in the dialectical portion of the treatise: “... with the result that either to plaster over and flee the inborn stain of evil...” (... ὥστ' ἢ παντάπασι ἐξάλειψαι καὶ διαφυγεῖν ἐγγενῆ κηλῖδα τῆς κακίας, ...; 562b).

<sup>181</sup> The list of sorts of vices and corresponding colors is not exhaustive, but has thematic relevance with the rest of the myth: Thespesius' greatest failing is greed to feed his pleasures, and his father, who even killed for wealth (more below) could well be imagined to have partaken in greed, hatred, and envy. Cf. Jackson et al. (1998): “Despite its length and the power of its argument, the *Gorgias* was not especially influential with Plutarch of Chaeroneia or Alcinous, although it was well enough known to them” (21).

<sup>182</sup> καὶ τοῦτο κατιδὼν ἀπέμψεν εἰς Τάρταρον, ἐπισημνήμενος, ἐάν τε ἰάσιμος ἐάν τε ἀνίατος δοκῆ εἶναι (526b).

any of the unjust who enter.”<sup>183</sup> In the myth of Er, the incurables are similarly—but with greater and more brutal detail—tortured beside the road of souls coming from their lives. In both cases, tyrants are held to be the majority of the incurables, and their tortures are manifest to all. The treatment of incurables in these specific dialogues is significant, since both the *Gorgias* and *Respublica* include a hostile interlocutor who, it seems, would choose to seize power as tyrants to serve their security and pleasures if they had the means and opportunity.<sup>184</sup>

The incurables are much less prominent in the *De sera* myth, on the other hand. They are only briefly mentioned in the discussion of the broadest structure of punishments. Adrasteia, daughter of Zeus and necessity, is in charge of the punishment of the wicked—“of malefactors, there is none so great nor so small that they could either escape her and flee, or force her hand”<sup>185</sup>—but she has three subordinates with names from traditional myths, each of whom handles a certain kind of wicked, and each of whom has a different manner of punishment:

Another punishment belongs to each of the three guardians and workers. For there are those whom Poine handles straightaway, still in their bodies and through their bodies, by a softer way and leaving aside many things that need purification. Of these, the greatest task is the doctoring of evil, those that the *daemon* gives over to Dike after their death. And there are the entirely incurable ones, whom Dike repels: the third and most savage of the servants of Adrasteia, Erinys, pursues souls pitifully and harshly—all wandering and fleeing, some one way and others another—and conceals them, sinking them down into the unspeakable and the unseen.<sup>186</sup>

<sup>183</sup> ὀρώντες διὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ὀδυνηρότατα καὶ φοβερώτατα πάθη πάσχοντας τὸν αἰεὶ χρόνον, ἀτεχνῶς παραδείγματα ἀνηρητημένους ἐκεῖ ἐν Ἄιδου ἐν τῷ δεσμοτηρίῳ, τοῖς αἰεὶ τῶν ἀδίκων ἀφικνουμένοις θεάματα καὶ νοουθετήματα (525c).

<sup>184</sup> That is, Callicles in the *Grg.* and Thrasymachus in *Resp.* I. See Edmonds (2012): “Callicles’ refusal to take his medicine, however, marks him as one of the incurables Socrates describes in the myth, who cannot benefit from the treatment they get in the afterlife judgement, but can only serve as an example to others” (178). Socrates also mentions Polus’ exemplary tyrant Archelaus (525d) and the wicked kings in Homer (525d-e). In the *Alc. I*, Socrates thematizes the man who “can do whatever he wants” (δύναται πράττειν ὅτι ἂν βούληται; 104b) even further: he alleges Alcibiades wants to have not only the greatest possible power (μέγιστον δυνήσεσθαι) in the city of Athens, but all Greece, and even all of Asia as well (105a-e). Cf. 134c-5b.

<sup>185</sup> ... Ἀρδάστεια μὲν, Ἀνάγκης καὶ Διὸς θυγάτηρ, ἐπὶ πᾶσι τιμωρὸς ἀνωτάτω τέτακται ἀδικήμασι. καὶ τῶν πονηρῶν οὔτε μέγας <οὔτως> οὔδεις οὔτε μικρὸς γέγονεν ὥστ’ ἢ λαθῶν διαφυεῖν ἢ βιασάμενος (564e).

<sup>186</sup> ἄλλη δ’ ἄλλη τιμωρία τριῶν οὐσῶν φύλακι καὶ χειρουργῷ προσήκει· τοὺς μὲν γὰρ εὐθὺς ἐν σώμασι καὶ διὰ σωμάτων κολαζομένους μεταχειρίζεται Ποινή ταχεῖα, πρῶτον τινὲν τρόπον καὶ παραλείποντι πολλὰ τῶν καθαρμοῦ δεομένων· ὧν δὲ μεῖζόν ἐστιν ἔργον ἢ περὶ τὴν κακίαν ἰατρεία, τούτους Δίκη μετὰ τὴν τελευταίαν ὁ δαίμων

The figure that punishes the incurable here, most savage (ἀγριωτάτη) Erinys, shares a detail with the punishers of Plato’s myth of Er, who are described as men “fiery to look upon” and “savage” (ἄγριοι).<sup>187</sup> Yet her punishment is entirely unlike theirs: while they perform horrific tortures when the mouth bellows to terrify the approaching souls and deter them from evil, a conspicuous and public punishment, she pursues and hides the incurables forever, in such a way that no one can ever hear or see them again.<sup>188</sup> Plutarch’s hidden incurables stand in marked opposition to the spectacle of tortured tyrants of the *Gorgias* and the *Respublica*. They are, moreover, much less prominent in *De sera* than in the Platonic models: the text resumes with the phrase “but of the others,” meaning the categories of punished that are not the incurables (which is where the passage on the color of souls occurs), and the incurables are indeed not seen or heard again throughout the myth.<sup>189</sup> This treatment is more reminiscent of the incurables in the *Phaedo*, however, than Plato’s other eschatological myths. There, the incurables are simply occluded:

But those who seem to be incurable because of the magnitudes of their crimes—who did either many great sacrileges or unjust murders and many lawless things, or howsoever many things that happen to be of this sort—fate properly throws them into the Tartarus, whence they never return.<sup>190</sup>

These souls, we are left to infer, are similarly unseen and unheard as they are tossed in the infernal river.

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παραδίδωσι· τοὺς δὲ πάμπαν ἀνιάτους ἀπωσαμένης τῆς Δίκης ἢ τρίτη καὶ ἀγριωτάτη τῶν Ἀδραστείας ὑπουργῶν Ἐρινύς, μεταθέουσα πλανωμένους καὶ περιφεύγοντας ἄλλον ἄλλως οἰκτρῶς δὲ καὶ χαλεπῶς ἅπαντας ἠφάνισε καὶ κατέδυσεν εἰς τὸ ἄρρητον καὶ ἀόρατον (564e-f). The verb ἀφανίζειν can commonly mean kill or destroy, but from the context it seems to literally mean “make unseen” or “hide” in the unspeakable and unseen. See also *De lat. viv.* 1129f-30a. Cf. Alt (2002): “Wenn solche bösen Seelen sich aber als unheilbar erweisen, so werden sie nicht nur gequält, sondern schließlich vernichtet” (279).

<sup>187</sup> X.615e-6a.

<sup>188</sup> In Plutarch’s *Non posse*, Theon considers the latter sort of fate—or worse, the true annihilation of the soul—as superlatively awful (1105a-b).

<sup>189</sup> τῶν δ’ ἄλλων” ἔφη “δικαιώσεων...” (565a).

<sup>190</sup> οἱ δ’ ἂν δόξωσιν ἀνιάτους ἔχειν διὰ τὰ μεγέθη τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων, ἢ ἱεροσυλίας πολλὰς καὶ μεγάλας ἢ φόνους ἀδίκους καὶ παρανόμους πολλοὺς ἐξειργασμένοι, ἢ ἄλλα ὅσα τοιαῦτα τυγχάνει ὄντα, τούτους δὲ ἢ προσήκουσα μοῖρα ρίπτει εἰς τὸν Τάρταρον, ὅθεν οὐποτε ἐκβαίνουσιν (113e).

This occlusion of the incurables is thus a substantial part, I argue, of Plutarch’s response to the Epicurean argument that depictions of underworld punishments are harmful and a substantial departure from the depiction of punishment in the eschatological myths of the *Gorgias* and the *Respublica*. Yet one more episode seems to further contribute to the modification in the role of incurables in this myth: the closest analogue to Plato’s tortured tyrants would seem to be the emperor Nero towards the end. Unlike the former, however, who are removed from the cycle of reincarnation entirely, the Roman emperor suffers a comic and shameful change of bodies:<sup>191</sup>

... the soul of Nero appeared here already in a sorry state, pierced with incandescent bolts. And when the workmen were producing a form of Nicander’s viper upon it too, in which it was conceived and eats through the mother so that it might live again, he said that a great light immediately brightened and a voice came from the light appointing that he be transferred into another, softer species—they devised some musical animal, native to marshes and swamps. For he gave recompense for these things he did unjustly, but he is benefitted for some good service by him from the gods, that of all his subjects, he freed [Greece], the best and most pious race.<sup>192</sup>

<sup>191</sup> The place of reincarnation is the last that Thespesius describes: “At the extremities, he saw the souls twisted into their next births, curved by force into all sorts of animals, altered in shape by the workers of such things. With certain instruments and blows, they fasten and drive together some parts, tear apart others, smooth out and obscure some entirely so that they might fit together with other lives and dispositions” (τρεπομένας ψυχὰς εἰς τε ζῶα παντοδαπὰ καμπτομένας βία καὶ μετασχηματιζομένας ὑπὸ τῶν ταῦτα δημιουργούντων, ὄργανοις τισὶ καὶ πληγαῖς τὰ μὲν κολλώντων μέρη καὶ συνελανόντων, τὰ δ’ ἀποστρεφόντων, ἓνια δ’ ἐκλειανόντων καὶ ἀφανίζόντων παντάπασι, ὅπως ἐφαρμόσειεν ἑτέροις ἦθεσι καὶ βίοις; 567d-e). Before describing the physical process of reincarnation, Plutarch describes the impetus that leads certain souls into animal bodies: “For one through the weakness of reason and the roughness of thought sinks towards generation by the practical part, while another is bound by the lack of discipline in the organ and desires to sow their desires together with their pleasures and to partake of them through a body—for here there is nothing beyond some ineffectual shadow and a dream of pleasure which is unable to bear gratification” (ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀσθενεῖα λόγου καὶ δι’ ἀργίαν τοῦ θεωρεῖν ἔρρηψε τῷ πρακτικῷ πρὸς γένεσιν, ἡ δ’ ὄργανου τῷ ἀκολάστῳ δεομένη ποθεῖ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας συρράψαι ταῖς ἀπολαύσεσι καὶ συνεπαυρέσθαι διὰ σώματος· ἐνταῦθα γὰρ οὐδὲν ἢ σκία τις ἀτελής καὶ ὄναρ ἡδονῆς πλήρωσιν οὐκ ἐχούσης πάρεστι; 565d-e).

<sup>192</sup> ἐν ταύταις φανῆναι τὴν Νέρωνος, τὰ τ’ ἄλλα κακῶς ἔχουσιν ἤδη καὶ διαπεπαρμένην ἡλίοις διαπύροις. προκεχειρισμένων δὲ καὶ ταύτη τῶν δημιουργῶν Νικανδρικήσ ἐχίδνης εἶδος, ἐν ᾧ κηθεῖσαν καὶ διαφαγοῦσαν τὴν μητέρα βιώσεσθαι, φῶς ἔφασκεν ἐξαιφνης διαλάμψαι μέγα καὶ φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ φωτὸς γενέσθαι προστάττουσαν εἰς ἄλλο γένος ἡμερώτερον μεταβαλεῖν, ὄδικόν τι μηχανησαμένουσ περὶ ἔλη καὶ λίμνας ζῶων· ὧν μὲν γὰρ ἡδίκησε δεδωκέναι δίκας, ὀφείλεσθαι δὲ τι καὶ χρηστὸν αὐτῷ παρὰ θεῶν, ὅτι τῶν ὑπηκόων τὸ βέλτιστον καὶ θεοφιλέστατον γένος ἡλευθέρωσε [τὴν Ἑλλάδα] (567e-8a). The Nero episode attracts much scholarly attention: e.g. Frazer (1971), Zadorojnyi (1997), and especially Brenk (1987); it is the only aspect of the myth discussed in the section ostensibly dedicated to it by Segal (2004: 245-7). Santamaría Álvarez (2007) interprets the choice of the frog as an allusion to the “catábasis literaria” in Ar. *Ran.* (883-4).

The initial choice of a snake boring through its mother seems to be a strike against one of Nero's most infamous crimes, murdering his mother. Shedding familial blood is, after all, a depravity characteristic of tyrants, such as the horror to which the first soul to choose a life in Plato's myth of Er commits himself, to one day devour his own children, because he chose the tyrannical life out of greed rather than thorough examination.<sup>193</sup>

As with the preceding dialectical argumentation, the myth depicts punishment as deterrent, but primarily curative: the worst punishments of Plato are transformed into treatments for the curably wicked and not just deterrents for other souls. This vision of punishments is enough to cure Aridaeus and so turn him into Thespesius, especially when he sees his father's wickedness fully manifest and the painful cures that could await him in turn, if he continues down the path of greed. This myth is unsettling for many, but it provides a good sketch for how morally troubling cases like this function in a just world: these progenies, like young Aridaeus, may well need to be cured by punishment themselves. While still troubling, this solution is much more palatable than Plato's tortured tyrants, whose punishment cannot possibly benefit them, but only serve the good of their spectators. Plutarch's *mythos* defends against the arguments that form Colotes' assault on the myth of Er while complementing the arguments of the *logos* against Epicurus' assaults on providence.

### Conclusion

This chapter argues that Plutarch's myth in *De sera* was composed against the context of Epicurean criticism of the myth of Er, which it signals with the strong invocation of the Platonic

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<sup>193</sup> ... τὸν πρῶτον λαχόντα ἔφη εὐθὺς ἐπιόντα τὴν μεγίστην τυραννίδα ἐλέσθαι, καὶ ὑπὸ ἀφροσύνης τε καὶ λαιμαργίας οὐ πάντα ἰκανῶς ἀνσκεψάμενον ἐλέσθαι, ἀλλ' αὐτὸν λαθεῖν ἐνοῦσαν εἰμαρμένην παίδων αὐτοῦ βρώσει καὶ ἄλλα κακά (*Resp.* X.619b-c).



myth. Plutarch broadly responds to each of Colotes' criticisms, in rather different ways than the Numenian and Neoplatonic responses. The myth in the dialogue does not, contrary to much of the scholarship, transcend the dialectic, but rather reinforces the key argument that providential punishment is essentially curative. Plutarch meets Colotes' argument that fiction in the manner of poets cannot convey truth by arguing that key ethical ideas are interpreted in a different and more serious manner than manifestly fictive elements such as the details of underworld geography; he moreover depicts how the fear of afterlife punishment might not only be merely acceptable, but in fact beneficial, if it is understood as moral correction.

Plutarch also, through the characters of the dialogue, meets Colotes' third criticism, that neither "the wise" nor "the many" are a proper audience for philosophical myth. *De sera* depicts the curative effect of the vision on the protagonist, but Plutarch's interlocutors in the dialogue represent another sort that is particularly fitting for philosophical fiction:<sup>194</sup> students or fellow-learners who are inclined to accept certain fundamental principles, but are unsettled and uncertain in the face of difficult objections, not unlike Glaucon, Adeimantus, and the other interlocutors in Plato's *Respublica*.<sup>195</sup> After Epicurus leaves in the beginning of Plutarch's dialogue, the remaining speakers are all friendly and congenial—literally, as Patrocleas is his son-in-law and Timon his brother<sup>196</sup>—and all are evidently united in the same task—to "cast out

<sup>194</sup> Ferrari (2009) similarly considers Glaucon as the targeted audience of the myth of Er within the *Respublica*.

<sup>195</sup> Plutarch asks, "What then most disturbed you of the things he said?" (τί οὖν... μάλιστα κεκίνηκεν ὑμᾶς τῶν εἰρημένων;), and Patrocleas describes how the discussion of the slowness of divine punishment made him feel "as if fresh and new again in my opinion" that he felt long ago, when he was "aggravated" (ἠγανάκτουσιν) by a line of Euripides (548c-d). He gives various examples of what frustrates and annoys him, including a quip from Bias (τὸ τοῦ Βίαντος ἐνοχλεῖ...; 548e).

<sup>196</sup> Plutarch describes Patrocleas as ὁ γαμβρὸς in *Quaest. conv.* II.9.642c; Timon appears as a character in two symposiastic vignettes (I.2.615c-d, 616c-f; II.5.639b-d). In *De frat. amor.*, Plutarch remarks, "for no one whatsoever who knows us is ignorant that, out of all the things worthy of gratitude that fortune has brought about for me, the love of my brother Timon has been and remains beyond absolutely all others" (ἐμοὶ μὲν γὰρ ὅτι πολλῶν ἀξίων χάριτος παρὰ τῆς τύχης γεγονότων, ἢ Τίμωνος εὖνοια τὰδελφοῦ πρὸς ἅπαντα τᾶλλα γέγονε καὶ ἔστιν, οὐδεὶς ἀγνοεῖ τῶν ὀπωσοῦν ἐντετυχηκότων ἡμῖν...; 487d-e). Olympiochus, however, does not appear elsewhere in the corpus.

the opinion before it becomes lodged,” as Timon puts it.<sup>197</sup> They all seem to share the basic assumption that there is providential care over the world, which Olympichus emphasizes when he presents the problem of delays of punishment in that they “destroy the belief in providence” (προνοίας), which explains why Plutarch can later base his argument for the immortality of the soul on the presumption of divine providence, as discussed above.<sup>198</sup> Yet they are still, evidently, grappling with the ramifications of and objections to this assumption.

Bernard Boulet argues that Plutarch addresses categorically different audiences with categorically different interests: “in different dialogues, he seems to be aiming more specifically at different readers, sometimes more intent on comforting good moral souls, sometimes more bent on putting fundamental questions to philosophical minds.”<sup>199</sup> *De sera*, he argues, is addressed either to the former sort, or an even less intellectual audience: “The dialogue is meant for youthful ears: the students are challenging their master to prove that justice wins over injustice... Plutarch offers his young listeners what they need to hear for the moment, and withholds his deepest thoughts on whether or not Apollo lags.<sup>200</sup>” Yet Plutarch may not have had a more definitive answer than the solutions he suggests in *De sera*, because of the difficulty of certainty on this issue, which he pointedly emphasizes by invoking the epistemic caution (εὐλαβείας) of the Academy in his initial speech. Plutarch’s interlocutors, moreover, are not

<sup>197</sup> ἀρκεῖ δὲ αὐτοῖς πρὶν ἄψασθαι τὴν δόξαν ἂν ἐκβάλωμεν (549c).

<sup>198</sup> “And there is this, Patrocleas, the delay and postponement of the divine bring such an immense absurdity, that the slowness removes belief in providence, ...” (ἐκεῖνο δέ... ὃ Πατροκλέα, πλήκρον αἰ περὶ ταῦτα τοῦ θεοῦ διατριβαὶ καὶ μελλήσεις ἄτοπον ἔχουσιν, ὅτι τὴν πίστιν ἢ βραδυτὴς ἀφαιρεῖ τῆς προνοίας, ...; 549b).

<sup>199</sup> 2008: 164: “In his different countenances, Apollo, too, offers moral speeches to good souls and rational debates to philosophical minds. The moral readers, preferring *De Sera*, will see Apollo as the god of oracles who lends a hand in punishing the wicked. The more philosophical minds will prefer the *De E* where Apollo is a rational god not to be associated with the wild myths that are told and sung even in Delphi. Plutarch seems to be following the principle that different souls need different nourishment, and this art of writing leads to inconsistencies.”

<sup>200</sup> 2008: 161. Leaving aside the prosopographical question of the ages of the interlocutors, it is strange that Boulet sees Plutarch as demarcating ethics from metaphysics so strongly (cf. 168-169), especially in the context of *De sera*, where Plutarch makes such a strong statement in the corpus that humans become virtuous through the imitation (ἐξομοίωσιν; μιμήσει) of god insofar as possible—a way of subordinating ethics to metaphysics that is characteristic of Middle Platonism. See *supra* pg. 94.

children—or “the many,” in Colotes’ terms—and must have some philosophical attainment to follow Plutarch’s arguments and to share the presumption of the providential care for the world.<sup>201</sup> The character of Boethius at the beginning of book IV of the *Consolatio* provides an apt comparison. By this point, Philosophy has successfully convinced or reminded Boethius that “there is a good ruler of the world” that “knows all, is all-powerful, and always wills only the good,” and yet, his earlier grief reemerges at the thought that, given the divine governance of the world, “evil can exist at all or pass by unpunished.”<sup>202</sup> Boethius, at this point, is grounded once again in cosmology and metaphysics, but this gives greater urgency to the disturbing ethical problem of theodicy.

Plutarch’s interlocutors, I argue, seem to be in a similar situation. Given the weight of the problems at stake and the difficulties raised by the Epicurean assault, there is every reason to reinforce dialectical arguments with a myth.<sup>203</sup> It does not transcend the dialectical portion of *De sera*—or act as a pious screen to hide deeper mysteries—but it provides an ethical exhortation by sketching out a plausible account of how the machinery of divine punishment could operate. Plutarch gives philosophical myth a certain role for the students of Platonism; Heinrich Dörrie’s conclusion that *De sera* has a “paränetisch-pädagogische Gesichtspunkt” seems valid to some extent, although this does not mean the myth is directed at a childish or non-philosophical

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<sup>201</sup> *De aud.*, on the other hand, is addressed to a Nicander, who has just come of age (τὸ ἀνδρεῖον ἀνεληφὸς ἰμάτιον; 37c). The advice is solidly focused on practical ethics, and not at all to issues like providence. Cf. 43a-c.

<sup>202</sup> *sed ea ipsa est uel maxima nostri causa maeroris, quod, cum rerum bonus rector existat, uel esse omnino mala possint uel impunita praetereant; ... quae fieri in regno scientis omnia, potentis omnia sed bona tantummodo uolentis dei nemo satis potest nec admirari nec conqueri* (IV.1.9-12, 17-9). That Boethius is now grappling with the general problem, in contrast to his long lament of the particular circumstances of his situation in I.4, is a manifest sign of philosophical progress.

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Plutarch’s sketch of the multiplicity of paths philosophical progress may take in *Quomodo quis* 78e-f.

audience, as Boulet has it.<sup>204</sup> Rather, it bolsters the dialectic attempts to grapple with a notoriously difficult and distressing set of ethical problems that result from Platonic metaphysics.

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<sup>204</sup> 1977: “Denn Plutarch hat sich in bewegten und farbigen Jenseitsschilderungen zum Sprecher der Überzeugung gemacht, daß jede Tat ihre Vergeltung findet. Einerseits muß erklärt werden, warum die Gottheit Untaten nicht bereits in diesem Leben bestraft. Dafür hat Plutarch mehrere Erklärungen bereit; diese laufen auf das Argument hinaus, daß die *πρόνοια* kraft ihrer Weisheit und Gerechtigkeit für jeden Verbrecher die angemessene Strafe zum angemessenen Zeitpunkt festlege. Hierzu ist festzustellen, daß dieser Satz mit seiner durch viele Beispiele bekräftigten Anwendung durch kein philosophisches Argument bewiesen wird” (77). Cf. Helmig (2005: 330-1).

## *Chapter four. Myth as teleological account: cosmology and anthropology in De facie*

Plutarch's *De facie in orbe lunae* may seem to be an odd dialogue. For roughly the first two-thirds of the dialogue, Lamprias narrates earlier discussions of the face that appears in the moon and the more fundamental physical problem of the composition of the moon—is it just fire and air, as the Stoics say, or is it earthy, as Lamprias and Lucius hold?<sup>1</sup> The discussion strikes even modern readers as thoroughly scientific, comprised of arguments that use evidence ranging from physical science and mathematics to optics. Yet it concludes with an imagistic myth that describes a thoroughly otherworldly journey from the far north, beyond the shores of farthest Britain to an island, under which Cronus is chained dreaming the thoughts of Zeus; the traveler then describes the wondrous journeys of the soul after death, weaving an account of how each element of the world relates to each part of the human being. This contrast between dry scientific discourse and imagistic myth might seem disjointed, but I argue that the myth fulfills the vital function of providing a teleological account, without which the physics of the first portion would be worthless. That is to say, the myth serves as an account that presents an illustration not just of how the world functions, but also of why it functions in this way.<sup>2</sup> The result is a thoroughly Platonic system, modelled on the myths of the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*, which provides a sketch of the hypothetical purpose of cosmic objects such as the moon.

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<sup>1</sup> Opsomer (2017b) usefully surveys the historical Stoic position and Pharnaces' representation in the dialogue (77-81); on Aristotelianism in the dialogue: 2017b: 81-2. Lamprias and Lucius seem to represent the Platonist position, although cf. Donini (1988: 130-1). Plutarch also refers to a Lucius, student of Moderatus the Pythagorean (*Quaest. Conv.* VIII.7.727b) and a "Lucius, son of Florus" (VII.4.702f), but it is unclear if the Lucius in *De fac.* corresponds to either. Cf. Puech (1992: 4858). On inter-school polemics in the first portion of the dialogue, Donini (1988) emphasizes the hostility to Stoicism. Sambursky (1956) analyzes this portion of the dialogue as "perhaps the first work on astrophysics ever written" (205), comparing it to Aristotle and Posidonius, as well as later and even modern theory (205-18). On discussions of lunar influences on earth in Plutarch: Pérez Jiménez (2012) and Setaioli (2015).

<sup>2</sup> On the setting, see Hirzel (1895): "es fällt in die Zeit von Plutarchs Lehrthätigkeit und findet wohl zu Chaironeia statt" (184, although he refers to Delphi broadly in 182n1, 184n1); on the characters: Cherniss (1957: 3-14); on the date, based on the mention of a recent eclipse (931d): Sandbach (1929); on the history of the text: Dell'Aia (2017: 71-7).

The myth is, in fact, central to the dialogue. The beginning seems to be lost, but the extant portion opens with the Carthaginian Sulla promising his myth before giving a preliminary request: “but if you all could remove in advance something regarding the opinions at every hand and in every mouth about the face in the moon, I would pleurably learn it first.”<sup>3</sup> Sulla then yields to Lamprias and other interlocutors, but eventually Lamprias suggests the group cease their ambulatory discussion (περίπατον) and sit on benches to provide Sulla a suitable auditorium for the myth.<sup>4</sup> Sulla’s speech is divided into two parts. First, he describes his source for the story, a stranger who had travelled to Carthage from the fantastical far reaches of the north on an island beyond Britain, under which Cronus is chained, served by loyal *daemones* and faithful celebrants. Then, he reports a speech given by the stranger, who prefaces his account of the moon by presenting humans as divided into three separable elements:

The many correctly suppose, on the one hand, that the human is composite, but they incorrectly suppose that it is from two parts alone. For they think that mind is a portion of the soul, erring no less than those to whom the soul seems to be a part of the body. By as much as the soul is better and more divine than the body, so much so the mind over the

<sup>3</sup> ἀλλ’ εἰ δὴ τι πρὸς τὰς ἀνὰ χεῖρα ταύτας καὶ διὰ στόματος πᾶσι δόξας περὶ τοῦ προσώπου τῆς σελήνης προανεκρούσασθε, πρῶτον ἡδέως ἄν μοι δοκῶ πυνθέσθαι (920b). A handful of older scholars deny that the beginning is lost, such as Hirzel (1895)—“Es liegt kein gegenüber Grund vor anzunehmen, dass das Werk zu Anfang versümmelt ist” (186n6)—but the evidence of the mangled beginning and the delay of identifying Lamprias as the first-person narrator until 937d is indicative of a break. How much is lost, however, remains unclear—Cherniss (1957) summarizes the arguments and earlier scholarship (2-3, with 2nb and 3na). Taub (2008) takes the reference to a previous conversation to “suggest a direct parallel to the *Timaeus*” (75). Martin (1974) more cogently argues that the lost preface, whatever sort of address it might have had (85-88), would have situated *De fac.* as the discussion following a discussion (at which Lamprias was present) of a lecture (given by the unnamed “comrade”) at which everyone but Sulla was present (73-5, 77-8). This sort of structure would be similar especially to the anti-Epicurean dialogues: *Adv. Col.* is a lecture presented by Plutarch and *Non posse* the discussion that follows among students, with two particularly leading the discussion. Less elegantly, the two tractates both entitled *De esu carn.*, apparently composed for a Boeotian context (955e), are connected by the introduction to the second: “reason urges us with thought and zeal to return anew to the things said yesterday against eating flesh” (ἐπὶ τὰ ἔωλα τῆς σαρκοφαγίας προσφάτους ἡμᾶς ὁ λόγος παρακαλεῖ ταῖς τε διανοίαις καὶ ταῖς προθυμίαις γενέσθαι; 996d). See also 966a, *De Alex. fort.* 333d. On the face in the moon, cf. *De Pyth. or.* 398c-d.

<sup>4</sup> “‘We have related,’ I said, ‘as much of what was said then that has not fled from memory. But see to it and call upon Sulla, or rather demand his narrative as payment, since he became a listener on set conditions. So, if it seems best, let us cease our walk and sit on the benches to provide a stable auditorium to hear him’” (“ἡμεῖς μὲν οὖν” ἔφην, “ὄσα μὴ διαπέφυγε τὴν μνήμην τῶν ἐκεῖ λεχθέντων, ἀπηγγέλκαμεν· ὥρα δὲ καὶ Σύλλαν παρακαλεῖν, μᾶλλον δ’ ἀπαιτεῖν τὴν διήγησιν, οἷον ἐπὶ ῥητοῖς ἀκροατὴν γεγενημένον· ὥστε, εἰ δοκεῖ, καταπαύσαντες τὸν περίπατον καὶ καθίσαντες ἐπὶ τῶν βᾶθρων ἐδραῖον αὐτῷ παραάσχωμεν ἀκροατήριον;” 937c-d). See further Martin (1974: 85).

soul. The mixture of body and soul causes the passionate, the conjunction of mind and soul causes the rational.<sup>5</sup>

Not only does the soul depart from the body after the first death, but the mind too separates from the soul during what the stranger calls a “second death.” In parallel to this tripartite schema, he describes the cosmos as a being with three parts: the sun, the moon, and the earth. Each astrological level has functions that relate to “each of these three constituent parts” of humans:<sup>6</sup> “the earth provides the body and the moon the soul, but the sun provides the mind <for the human> entering generation, as it also provides light to the moon.”<sup>7</sup> After the intelligent souls of the pure have been on the moon for a sufficient time, they are drawn by desire (ἔρωτι) for the “image (εἰκόνοσ) in the sun”—apparently an image of the form of the good—and depart from their souls.<sup>8</sup> There are thus two sorts of processes of cosmic generation and degeneration, for each cosmic body gives and receives an appropriate part of the human: “... in time, the moon receives them (mindless souls) back into herself and reduces them to order. Then, when the sun

<sup>5</sup> τὸν ἄνθρωπον οἱ πολλοὶ σύνθετον μὲν ὀρθῶσ, ἐκ δυοῖν δὲ μόνων σύνθετον οὐκ ὀρθῶσ ἡγοῦνται. μόνιον γὰρ εἶναι πωσ ψυχῆσ οἶονται τὸν νοῦν, οὐδὲν ἦττον ἐκείνων ἀμαρτάνοντες, οἷσ ἡ ψυχῆ δοκεῖ μόνιον εἶναι τοῦ σώματος. νοῦσ γὰρ ψυχῆσ, ὅσφ ψυχῆ σώματος, ἄμεινόν ἐστί και θειότερον. ποιεῖ δ’ ἡ μὲν ψυχῆσ <και σώματος μῖξισ αἴσθησιν ἡ δὲ νοῦ και ψυχῆσ> σύνδοσ λόγον· ὦν τὸ μὲν ἡδονῆσ ἀρχῆ και πόνου τὸ δ’ ἀρετῆσ και κακίασ (943a). Cherniss (1957) prints παθητικὸν for Pohlenz (1955) αἴσθησιν, but either could be a contrast for λόγον, understood in the former sense as the ordering element of a human, or in the latter as the cognitive element. Pérez Jiménez (2002) describes the style as “sobrio.” The myth of *De gen.* presents a similar tripartite schema of body, soul, and δαίμονα (591d-e).

<sup>6</sup> This is broadly similar to the astrological model in *Pl. Ti.*: “The god made the bodies of each of these things and placed each into an orbit, each of which the orbit of difference propels, seven bodies into seven orbits—the moon into the first around the earth, and the sun into the second above the earth” (σώματα δὲ αὐτῶν ἐκάστων ποιῆσασ ὁ θεὸσ ἔθηκεν εἰσ τὰσ περιφοράσ ἅσ ἡ θατέρου περίοδοσ ἦειν, ἐπτά οὔσασ ὄνα ἐπτά, σελήνην μὲν εἰσ τὸν περὶ γῆν πρῶτον, ἥλιον δὲ εἰσ τὸν δεύτερον ὑπὲρ γῆσ; 38d). Cf. Burkert (1996: 22-3). Cumont (1913) emphasizes the importance of the “chaldéen” ordering of the planets that places the sun between Venus and Mars (452), but the system in the *De fac.* myth is sufficiently simple to fit any ordering. Cf. Procl. *In Tim.* III.65.16-26.

<sup>7</sup> τριῶν δὲ τούτων συμπαγέντων, τὸ μὲν σῶμα ἡ γῆ τὴν δὲ ψυχῆν ἡ σελήνη, τὸν δὲ νοῦν ὁ ἥλιος παρέσχεν εἰσ τὴν γένεσιν <τάνθρώπων> ὡσπερ αὐτῆ σελήνη τὸ φέγγοσ (943a). Cherniss (1957) supplies <τάνθρώπων>. On the moon’s reflection of the sun’s light, cf. *Pl. Crat.* 409b-c.

<sup>8</sup> 944e. Cf. *De. Is.* 383a, *Amat.* 764d, *Ad princ. inerud.* 780f, 781f. In *Pl. Leg. X*, the Athenian stranger distinguishes between the body of the sun and its soul, suggesting three possibilities for how the immaterial might interact with the material (898d-9a). Perhaps the image is also drawn from the form of the beautiful, since it is described in the *Phdr.* as the only form that is apprehensible by sense perception (περὶ δὲ κάλλουσ... κατελήφμεν αὐτὸ διὰ τῆσ ἐναργεστάτησ αἰσθήσεωσ; 250c-d). Cf. Cherniss (1957): “‘the image in the sun...’ here means the visible likeness of the good” (213ng); Brenk (2017): “Plutarch does not explicitly say ‘God’ here, but in the light of his general theism, a reader well acquainted with all his writing would probably think of God” (55). Cf. the role of true beauty in the ascent to the moon after death in the *Amat.* (766b).

sows mind back again, she receives this vital principle and makes new souls, and the earth, thirdly, provides a body.”<sup>9</sup> Each part of the world, according to the stranger’s account, plays a particular role in generation and degeneration. The moon has an intermediary nature that corresponds with the intermediary nature of the human soul, which makes it the fitting place for disincarnate souls to return after death, as well as the fitting agent of their generation into bodies on the earth.

Plutarch is elaborating a consistently Platonic system, although in part explicitly drawing on Xenocrates’ interpretation of the *Timaeus*, to serve as a teleological account of the purpose of the moon, the sort of account that Socrates describes and exemplifies in the final portions of the *Phaedo*. To make this a “likely” account, I argue that Plutarch draws on the analogy between microcosm and macrocosm in the *Timaeus*, where the creation of humanity is presented as an imitation of the creation of the world. Plutarch, moreover, fills out his analogous anthropology and cosmology by postulating intermediaries. By recognizing the myth’s status as both a teleological account and an explanatory analogy between macrocosm and microcosm, however, I illustrate its status as a hypothetical myth that is nevertheless plausible. He draws many details from the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*, as well as from the myth of the *Phaedrus* and the image of the sun in the *Respublica*, but these two particularly provide the machinery of the *De facie* myth as well as the broader conception of a physical world oriented towards the good.<sup>10</sup> Socrates’ myth of the “true earth” in the *Phaedo*, moreover, is a recurrent point of reference throughout the

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<sup>9</sup> χρόνος δὲ κάκεινας κατεδέξατο εἰς αὐτὴν ἢ σελήνη καὶ κατεκόσμησεν, εἶτα τὸν νοῦν αὐθις ἐπισπείραντος τοῦ ἡλίου τῷ ζωτικῷ δεχομένη νέας ποιεῖ ψυχάς, ἢ δὲ γῆ τρίτον σῶμα παρέσχευ (945c).

<sup>10</sup> The dialogues are, of course, related in this respect. See especially Opsomer (2017): “Plutarch’s Platonist interlocutors... apply the epistemological framework of Plato’s *Phaedo* and, above all, the *Timaeus*, according to which an explanation of the world in terms of material causality can only have the status of a ‘likely account’” (89-90). See also Wright (2000: 8).



dialogue of *De facie*, more than is sometimes realized in the scholarship.<sup>11</sup> Lamprias even compares it to the surface of the moon, and wonders whether Socrates meant to speak “riddlingly” of it.<sup>12</sup> The Platonic myth, moreover, provides Plutarch not just with references and parallels but an epistemological framework for teleological myth in scientific inquiry.<sup>13</sup> After relating the account, Socrates concisely describes how he wants his audience in the Athenian prison to understand its significance:

So, to affirm entirely that these things are in fact as I said would not be fitting for a rational man: but, nevertheless, it seems fitting and worthy to me to dare to think about our souls and their abodes either these things or something of a similar sort—for the daring is noble—and one must chant (ἐπαῖδειν) things of such a sort to oneself, which is why indeed I have been relating the myth at such length.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Donini (1988), for instance, makes no mention of the myth in the *Phd.*, but detects references to several others: “The scenery with imaginary geographical elements calls to mind the *Ti.* and the Atlantis myth; the experiences undergone away from the earth by the souls look back to the myths in the *Phdr.* and *Resp.*; and the presence of the demons reminds one of the *Symp.*, but even more of the demonological theories of Xenocrates” (128). Roskam (2015) barely discusses *De fac.* in his chapter on Plutarch’s reception of the *Phd.* (cf. 111, 114-5, 121-3), and even comments that “the works which contain lengthy eschatological myths... are not well represented” in his selection (112). See also Giavatto (2011: 137). In the same volume as Roskam, however, Tarrant (2015) begins with a substantial consideration of the *Phd.* in *De fac.* (134-7). Hamilton (1934) compares the epistemological claim in *Phd.* 114d at one point in his conclusion (29n3) but sees the *De fac.* myth as “a copy in miniature” of the *Ti.* (29). Cf. Teodorsson (1996: 115 with n4). Taub (2008) compares *De fac.* with the *Ti.* almost exclusively (57-60, 70-6), although she notes that David Konstan suggested “that in the *Phaedo* Plato’s approach may be more similar to that which we later encounter in Plutarch’s *On the Face on the Moon*” (75n51). In contrast to these scholars, however, Opsomer (2017b) suggests that the “*Phaedo* may well have served as a model for *De facie*. In this dialogue, too, a mythical narrative explains how the nature and the topography of a heavenly body, *in casu* the Earth, have a special role for the eschatology of individual souls” (85n38). On the *Phd.* in the *Vit.*, see Trapp (1999).

<sup>12</sup> ... ἐμυθολόγει... αἰττούμενος... (934f-5a). On this reference, cf. Cherniss (1957: 140na) and Russell (1972: 72). There are many more implicit references. In Sulla’s speech at the end of *De fac.*, certain details, such as the purity of the air and the companionship of the divine, are echoed in the geographical frame, while as the stranger’s speech uses language from this myth to describe “the moon itself,” such as its equipoise (ισόρροπον; 943e, echoing *Phd.* 109a; see also *Plt.* 270a) and its surface full of “depths and hollows” (βάθη... καὶ κοιλώματα 944c, echoing κοῖλα in 109b). Cherniss (1957) plausibly detects a reference to the *Phd.*’s “true earth” in the phrase “the moon itself” (αὐτῆς σελήνης) in 943e. Plato and Plutarch both reference the inhabited world from the pillars of Hercules (Ἡρακλείων στηλῶν) to Eastern bodies of water, the river Phasis in the former (*Phd.* 109a-b), the latter the Caspian and the Red Seas (ἔξω δὲ τὸν Κάσπιον καὶ τοὺς περὶ τὸν Ἐρυθρὰν θάλατταν; *De fac.* 944b-c). Tarrant (2015) suggests further similarities (134-7).

<sup>13</sup> On teleology in Plato, see Johansen (2004: 69-116) and Scolnicov (2017). Cf. Frede (1987), Natali (2013). On Plutarch’s conception of teleology, see Opsomer (1999: 425-8). Aenesidemus, a Pyrrhonic skeptic living in perhaps the first century B.C.E.—so Polito (2014: 1n5), cf. Rist (1970: 310-1)—evidently proposed eight “modes” (τρόποι) of “the refutation of the aetiologists” (τῆς τῶν αἰτιολογικῶν ἀνατροπῆς; Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* I.180). See further Barnes (1990: 2656-68) and Polito (2014: 226-39). Cf. Sext. Emp. *Pyr.* I.185. Lucretius, presumably following Epicurus, also specifically targets teleological explanation (IV.823-57).

<sup>14</sup> τὸ μὲν οὖν ταῦτα δυσχυρίσασθαι οὕτως ἔχειν ὡς ἐγὼ διειλήλυθα, οὐ πρέπει νοῦν ἔχοντι ἀνδρὶ· ὅτι μέντοι ἢ ταῦτ’

This disjunction, it seems, is between the potentially extraneous details, such as the particular characteristics of the “true earth” and the infernal rivers, which might well turn out to be inaccurate, and the central idea, that the disposition of the universe serves a greater ethical purpose as relates to us, which is worth believing. The identity of the good with the true is a central assumption behind Plato’s teleological physics, which the myth illustrates by weaving a hypothetical eschatological system together with this cosmological sketch.<sup>15</sup>

This epistemological evaluation seems to apply to the myth in *De facie* as well as the *Phaedo*. Plutarch’s *Lamprias* in fact echoes Socrates’ evaluation when he explains his anticipation of hearing Sulla’s myth, drawing attention due to the difficulty of *De facie*’s subject:

For as those with chronic diseases renounce the common aids and the typical ways of life as they turn toward healings and amulets and dreams, thus it is necessary in obscure and impassable inquiries, whenever the common, well-known, and customary accounts fail to persuade, to test the strangest things and not to dismiss contemptuously but to simply chant (ἐπάδειν) to ourselves the things of old and to scrutinize the truth in everything.<sup>16</sup>

Potential aporetic frustration, *Lamprias* explains, prompts the recourse to more exotic and strange avenues of inquiry. Yet he is not content to accept the myth without putting it to

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ἐστὶν ἢ τοιαῦτ’ ἅπαντα περὶ τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν καὶ τὰς οἰκίσεις, ἐπεὶ περ ἀθάνατόν γε ἡ ψυχὴ φαίνεται οὖσα, τοῦτο καὶ πρέπει μοι δοκεῖ καὶ ἄξιον κινδυνεύσαι οἰομένῳ οὕτως ἔχειν – καλὸς γὰρ ὁ κίνδυνος – καὶ χρὴ τὰ τοιαῦτα ὡς περ ἐπάδειν ἑαυτῷ, διὸ δὴ ἔγωγε καὶ πάλαι μηκύνω τὸν μῦθον (114c-d). On this see Hackforth (1955: 186); Dam. *In Phd.* I.187.466: “It is not all a myth, but only insofar as he concludes by saying that we must think the things in the house of Hades are ‘these things or something like them.’ For this was the form of Platonic myths, because they represent the truth beautifully, as he says in the *Respublica*” (οὐ πᾶν δὲ μῦθος ἐστὶν, ἀλλ’ ὅσον συμπεραίνεται λέγων ὡς “ταῦτα ἢ τὰ τοιαῦτα” [*Phd.* 114d] χρὴ τὰ ἐν Αἴδου ἡγεῖσθαι. τοῦτο γὰρ ἦν καὶ τὸ εἶδος τῶν Πλατωνικῶν μύθων ἅτε καλῶς τὴν ἀλήθειαν μιμουμένων, ὡς ἐν Πολιτείᾳ φησὶν [II.377d]). See further II.228.83. Before Socrates goes on to describe the “true earth,” he preemptively emphasizes the mythic nature of this part of the narrative: “If it is indeed a fine thing to tell a myth, it is worth listening, Simmias, to how the what sort of things there are upon the world but under the heavens” (εἰ γὰρ δὴ καὶ μῦθον λέγειν καλόν, ἄξιον ἀκοῦσαι, ὦ Σιμμία, οἷα τυγχάνει τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὑπὸ τῷ οὐρανῷ ὄντα; 110b). Simmias responds with anticipation of the pleasure (ἡδέως) of hearing the myth. The contrast between dialectic and myth is evoked early in the *Phd.*: 60a-1e.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. Dam. *In Phd.* I.199.526. On the identity of the good and the true, see *Phdr.* 246d-e. According to Aristotle, “Plato and the Pythagoreans” identify the true with the one (πότερον τὸ ἐν καὶ τὸ ὄν, καθάπερ οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι καὶ Πλάτων ἔλεγον; *Met.* B.996a). See also Aristox. *Harm.* II.30-1 (= Arist. frg. 26 Rose). Cf. Altman (2012: 305-36).

<sup>16</sup> ὡς γὰρ οἱ ἐννοσήμασι χρονίοις πρὸς τὰ κοινὰ βοηθήματα καὶ τὰς συνήθεις διαίτας ἀπειπόντες ἐπὶ καθαροὺς καὶ περιήματα καὶ ὄνειρους τρέπονται, οὕτως ἀναγκαῖον ἐν δυσθεωρήτοις καὶ ἀπόροις σκέψεσιν, ὅταν οἱ κοινοὶ καὶ ἔνδοξοι καὶ συνήθεις λόγοι μὴ πείθωσι, πειρᾶσθαι τῶν ἀτοπωτέρων καὶ μὴ καταφρονεῖν ἀλλ’ ἐπάδειν ἀτεχνῶς ἑαυτοῖς τὰ τῶν παλαιῶν καὶ διὰ πάντων τάληθες ἐξελέγγειν (920b-c).

*elenchus*, subjecting even myths to scrutiny just like any other part of a dialectical inquiry into the physical world. The verb for chanting directly recalls Socrates at the end of the *Phaedo*, which further draws attention to the burden that he sets for that dialogue’s myth—that one ought to believe these things or something like them, at least about the soul and its abodes—without vouching for all of, for instance, the details of underworld topography.<sup>17</sup> In the stranger’s speech in *De facie*, Plutarch is similarly not affirming the exact details, but the sort of schema more generally: either this cycle of psychic generation and decay through the moon, or some other account like it, presumably with similar conceptions of the qualities of the human soul, which serve as the sort of core argument of the myth.

In the first section, I discuss the framing of the myth in *De facie* and its significance for the epistemological status of the myth. Although this dialogue presents many difficulties, such as the lost beginning—the text, only preserved in two manuscripts, is the most lacunose by far of the works of Plutarch discussed at length in this study<sup>18</sup>—it is clear that the stranger’s description of the role of the moon in the generation and degeneration of souls is meant to fulfill the teleological requirements of the scientific inquiry that makes up the rest of the dialogue. The fantastical, geographical frame which explains the extraordinary origin and travels of Sulla’s stranger, I argue, emphasizes the epistemological status of the myth.<sup>19</sup> The over-determined exoticism of the former serves to draw attention to its fictionality and thus its epistemic status as

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. *De exil.* 602f: “he is wretched that does not constantly repeat and chant to himself the lines of Pindar” (οὗτος ἄλθιός ἐστι μὴ προσλαλῶν ἑαυτῷ τὰ Πινδαρικά μηδὲ ἐπάδων πολλάκις).

<sup>18</sup> The text of Cherniss, first partially printed in an article (1951) then the Loeb edition (1957), is usually preferable to that of Pohlenz’s (1955) Teubner. Cherniss is followed largely, for example, by Lernould (2013); Einarson’s (1958) praise for Cherniss is superlative (265-6), while he is very critical of Helmbold’s half of the volume (264). Donini (2011) also provides some novel suggestions. See also the translations of Görgemanns (1968) and Vernière (1977: 63-72). The *Amat.* is similarly only preserved in these lacunose manuscripts, on which see Flacelière (1952: 34-8).

<sup>19</sup> The sections are sufficiently different that scholars often emphasize one over the other. Lamberton’s (2001) praise for the former portion, for example, is exuberant: “The tale that grounds and validates the stranger’s claim to privileged knowledge is unforgettable. It is a story set in a fabulous geography of the limits of the world and an account of oracular mediation as beautiful as any in the corpus of Plutarch” (177).

a “likely account:” the fantastical frame discloses and emphasizes the hypothetical status of the myth, and so limits the chance of deceiving the audience, lest they take it as literal doctrine.<sup>20</sup> In the rest of the myth, moreover, Sulla’s stranger grounds his authority in sources that are common in a variety of discourses portrayed by Plutarch, such as appealing to Homer, traditional myth and ritual, and Xenocrates. The speech itself, in contrast to the fantastical frame, is grounded in a particularly Hellenic tradition, perfectly familiar to the Greek and Roman gentlemen that make up Plutarch’s world. The stranger’s speech thus distances itself further from the appeal to divine or extraordinary authority implied by the myth’s frame. He does not, moreover, construct a clear narrative, as we might expect from a myth. Perhaps these considerations explain why Sulla, in his concluding remarks, describes the stranger’s speech not as a *mythos*, but a *logos*.<sup>21</sup> The more narrative portion of the myth, the geographic frame, however, emphasizes the hypothetical nature of the stranger’s explanation of the psychological role of the moon in the world.

In the next two sections, I first examine Plato’s formulation of a teleological requirement in the *Phaedo*, and then the formulation of the microcosm-macrocosm analogy in the teleological account, the “likely myth,” of the *Timaeus*. The requirement of such an account is most clearly illustrated in Socrates’ critique of Anaxagoras in the *Phaedo*, which sets the burden for the final myth.<sup>22</sup> On three prominent occasions where Plutarch discusses different sorts of causation, he evokes the contrast between Socrates and Anaxagoras to distinguish between final causes and physical causes. The myths in each of the former two both constitute potential, but only hypothetical, sketches of the structure of the universe that explains what purposes the specific

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<sup>20</sup> This aspect of Plutarch’s myth is also responsive to Colotes’ argument, which the previous chapter discussed, that it is absurd to convey truth in fiction. The myth in *De fac.* is especially blatant in emphasizing its fictionality.

<sup>21</sup> “It is for you all, Lamprias, to make of the *logos* what you will” (ὅμιν δ’, ὃ Λαμπρία, χρῆσθαι τῷ λόγῳ ἢ βούλεσθε; 945e).

<sup>22</sup> Addressing teleology in *De facie*, Opsomer (2017), for instance, notes that, “For any Platonist, *Phaedo* 97d-98a would be the *locus classicus* regarding this issue” (85).

arrangement of the physical world might serve. A myth such as Socrates' "true earth," like Timaeus' carefully framed "likely myth," is the proper form for speculation about the physical world, about which we can only form opinions, rather than sure knowledge. Although Plutarch does not explicitly comment on the epistemological role of this myth in *De facie*, he imitates the structure of the end of the *Phaedo* by imbedding Sulla's myth similarly in a discussion of teleology. The requirement laid out in the *Phaedo*, moreover, is reflected in the "likely myth" of the *Timaeus*, which is in many ways another important model for Sulla's myth in *De facie*. I emphasize one aspect in particular, which Plutarch takes to be at the heart of Plato's psychology, namely the relationship between the universe and the human microcosm, the latter of which is described as an imitation of the former.

Then, I further examine the cosmology and anthropology of the stranger's speech. He fulfills Theon's teleological requirement by illustrating how the moon could function in the generation and degeneration of souls. The cosmic system that the myth imagines between the sun, the moon, and the earth is explained in relation to the human mind, soul, and body. This mythic construction seems to be a representation—not unlike Plutarch's interpretation of the relationship between the human soul and the world soul in the *Timaeus*—of the human as a microcosm of the astral macrocosm. The idea of macrocosm and microcosm in the myth attracted a rare early modern consideration, namely Christian August Lobeck's in *Aglaophamus*.<sup>23</sup> John Dillon, however, notes this idea in his study of Xenocrates' influence on Plutarch;<sup>24</sup> Lautaro Roig Lanzillota especially emphasizes Plutarch's "microcosmism," both in

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<sup>23</sup> 1829: 932. His opponent, Creuzer, however, refers to the myth largely for the mystic or symbolic qualities of Demeter and Persephone (e.g. 1843: 237-8), an approach that proves much more prominent in subsequent scholarship. On these scholars, see further Edmonds (2013: 54-5). Préaux (1973) surveys some of the older scholarship, much of which attempts to prove "l'inspiration orientale" (24n1). See further 44-7.

<sup>24</sup> Dillon (1999). See also Thévenaz (1938: 84-7).

his theory of the world soul and the cosmology of *De facie*.<sup>25</sup> Finally, I address the “sources” that lie behind the stranger’s speech. He appeals to Xenocrates for the idea of the moon as an intermediary force, but he presents the Early Academic as founding his cosmology in Plato’s *Timaeus*, a description which seems to reflect the broader myth itself as well. Although the psychological details in the *De facie* myth are broadly coherent with Plutarch’s thought and also draw on other Platonic dialogues, the affinities with the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus* testify that the stranger’s speech ought to be understood as a “likely account” of the purpose behind the nature of the moon. It is not a revelation of mysterious or certain doctrine, but the only sort of account that can be used to adequately speculate about the physical world, an unstable place of change.<sup>26</sup>

Often, however, as often in Plutarchan scholarship, it is claimed that the specifically religious or eschatological content of the myth is held to transcend the epistemic limits or the earlier discourse.<sup>27</sup> Especially in this myth, however, particular emphasis has been placed on a comparison with the mysteries, of a sort of conception that the myth grants secret knowledge that is otherwise unobtainable. The search for “sources” hidden behind Plutarch, as I examine below, has been particularly vigorous over the myth in *De facie* since the nineteenth century, when the eschatology of the myth was claimed for various philosophical or religious systems. More recent scholarship has attempted to explain the unintuitive epistemic role of the myth, placed as it is in an otherwise largely dry dialogue.<sup>28</sup> W. Hamilton takes Plutarch’s imitation of the Atlantis myth

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<sup>25</sup> 2015: 188-91.

<sup>26</sup> The relationship between this myth and the rest of the dialogue is, therefore, rather distinct the directly parallel structure between *mythos* and *logos* in *De sera*, which the prior chapter examined.

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Beardslee (1975): “The dialog [sic] is also important in showing how Plutarch brought science and religion together in one dialog [sic], treating one with as rigorous argument as possible and presenting the other in the non-arguable form of myth” (286); Flacelière (1976): “Plutarque fit de même en associant étroitement science et intuition, rationnel et irrationnel, calculs savants et traditions religieuses” (195). See also Aguilar (1996: 285), who considers all of the myths primarily concerned with “doctrina sobre el alma,” and thus considers the *De sera* myth more complex than the *De facie* myth (285). Cf. Taub (2008: 75-76).

<sup>28</sup> Despite the interest of Kepler, there is not much discussion of the myth among historians of science. Montgomery (1999), for instance, focuses on lunar topography, to the almost total exclusion of the psychological concepts in the

from the *Timaeus* in the first part to mean that the second part is meant to be understood as a “likely story” (εἰκὸς μῦθος), like the main speech of the *Timaeus*.<sup>29</sup> From this, Hamilton concludes: “Plutarch meant the main point of his myth, the distinction between mind and soul and their derivation from the sun and moon respectively, to be regarded as literal and not symbolic.”<sup>30</sup> Robert Lamberton, however, argues that the myth “cultivates the tension between rational or scientific explanation on the one hand and sublime storytelling on the other, and out of that tension emerges the richest presentation we have of Plutarch’s teleological Platonist cosmology.” Although he argues that the “myth will take over and prevail” in a sense, he ultimately places it on the same epistemological plane as the earlier part.<sup>31</sup> Yet the stranger manifestly contradicts the earlier discussion with some of his arguments about the physical properties of the moon: Lucius had much earlier begun his argument that the earth is vastly larger than the moon by appealing to the geometers, while the stranger argues such that “the breadth and magnitude are not how much the geometers claim, but many times greater.”<sup>32</sup> Harold

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myth (34-5). Sambursky (1956) barely mentions the myth at all, noting only “a strange contrast between the last chapters of the book, which discuss the mythology of the moon and particularly its function as the repository of the souls of the dead, and the other parts which are distinguished by the clarity and acumen of their scientific reasoning in the best tradition of the time” (205, cf. 217). Cf. Gillispie (2006 [1958]). Coones’ (1983) article on the significance of *De facie* for geographical science, however, aptly analyzes the structure in three parts, and finds the significance of the myth to be “describing the function of the moon as a habitation for souls after death, thereby establishing the purpose of the moon in the cosmos” (362).

<sup>29</sup> “If, then, the second part of the *de facie* myth is meant to hold a place in the whole corresponding to that of *Timaeus*’ discourse in the *Timaeus*, we are justified in inferring that Plutarch, who regarded that discourse as in the main serious doctrine, must have intended the corresponding portion of his own myth to contain and equally serious exposition of his own beliefs concerning the nature and fate of the soul” (1934: 29).

<sup>30</sup> 1934: 30. Cf. Opsomer (2017): “If one takes this literally, the souls are not only mortal, but also material. This would be a strange doctrine for Plutarch to espouse, but, as we have seen, the myth contains quite a few odd doctrinal elements. The quasi-material character of the soul, too, I would suggest, is an element that is not meant to be taken as the literal truth” (84). On the role of *Ti.* in the broader dialogue of *De fac.*, see Demulder (2015: 200-3). See also (Clough 1974 [1841]): “... All the questing and the guessing / Of the soul’s own soul within” (28).

<sup>31</sup> “There are many ways of apprehending the world and giving an account of it” (2001: 173-4); “The ‘scientific’ discussion has in any case been larded with poetic citations and arguments invoking the poets. This last one carries the dialogue into a new realm, as mediated analytical discourse yields to mediated poetic fiction” (177).

<sup>32</sup> εὗρος δὲ καὶ μέγεθος οὐχ ὅσον οἱ γεωμέτραι λέγουσιν ἀλλὰ μείζον πολλάκις ἐστί (944a); οἱ μαθηματικοὶ... (923b; cf. Cic. *Nat. d.* II.40.103). Just before the latter, Lucius disclaimed his own investment in the argument—“we say nothing ourselves that is our own, but those who hold that the moon is earth...” (ἡμεῖς μὲν οὐδὲν αὐτοὶ παρ’ αὐτῶν λέγομεν, οἱ δὲ γῆν ὑποτιθέμενοι τὴν σελήνην...; 923a)—yet he develops the argument further and invokes

Cherniss deems this sort of contradiction a “mythical correction”—a concept that implies that the myth carries categorically greater authority than the dialectical portion, even on issues such as characteristics of the material world.<sup>33</sup> Perluigi Donini, however, complicates the picture by pointing out where the details of the myth uphold the earlier discussion, and distinguishing between “corrections” and “contradictions:” he argues that the discrepancies ought to lead the audience to question both the accuracy of the scientific portion and the myth.<sup>34</sup> Jan Opsomer, building on Donini, suggests that the discrepancy is meant “to hint at the fallibilistic nature of all scientific reasoning.”<sup>35</sup> Building on this last line of argument, I argue that Plutarch crafts in *De facie* a thoroughly Platonic account, in its details, in its epistemological framing, and in the mechanisms that make the myth plausible, namely the role of intermediaries and the microcosm analogy.

### *Platonic teleology wrapped in Cronian garb*

In the *De facie* myth, Plutarch weaves together a physical account of the moon with a fantastical narrative. In this section, I argue that the latter plays a critical epistemological role for

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Homer as an additional authority, as the preface to his explanation of why an earthy moon need not fall into the earth (923a-c). Lamprias later surveys estimated measurements of the moon (932a-b).

<sup>33</sup> 1951: 152. Cherniss further argues that Plutarch “also gives a mythical explanation of the accelerated motion of which he had spoken in 933 B.”

<sup>34</sup> 1988. He later (2010) argues that myth is latent in the scientific part of the dialogue as well, particularly in Lamprias’ speech in 934a-935c, because Plutarch conceives of the moon as a goddess. He nevertheless emphasizes Plutarch’s skepticism about the divine, as well as in his commentary (2011) on the *De fac.*, e.g. in the lemma on Sulla’s final statement (245n439). See also Donini (1992). Sambursky (1956) is much more positivistic about the “scientific” portion of the dialogue, comparing Anaxagoras: “Only by Plutarch’s day this rationalizing process had a foundation of scientific fact which did not exist yet in the fifth century B.C. It is likely enough that this scientific progress aroused the same feeling of distance and objectivity with regard to celestial phenomena as marks the beginning of the modern period” (210).

<sup>35</sup> 2017b: 83; “We may conclude that even at the end of the dialogue the exact material composition of the moon is not something we are supposed to know with certainty or about which we are expected to express strong opinions. The use of myth allows the author to make robust statements without having to express the reservations required for a scientific discussion at every occasion, since everything that is being said stands under the general proviso of being part of an imaginative tale. ... The general function of the myth is to make the teleological dimension of the treatise more explicit and encompassing” (84-85). Baldassari (1992) similarly suggests that there are limits which are “in certo senso, ‘probabilistici’” (268). See also Tarrant (2015: 136-7).



the myth: the over-determined exoticism of Sulla's source for the myth, the stranger who once served Cronus, in fact undermines the credibility of his cosmological speech—similarly to the Atlantis myth in the *Timaeus*.<sup>36</sup> Myth is a proper form for the sort of teleological physics that the subsequent sections discuss precisely because it calls attention to its fictionality and avoids the risk of offering a certain account, which would be impossible for a subject mired in the material world, about which no certainty is possible. The authenticity of the stranger's backstory is further undermined by his superfluous sources of authority—his own philosophical and scientific training, his discovery of sacred scrolls in Carthage, and his discourses with Cronus' *daemones*—as well as the overwhelming Hellenicity of his actual speech—replete with citations of Greek writers, myths, and cult. The stranger's speech is nevertheless shaped as a likely account, for the reasons elucidated in the subsequent sections, but the absurdity of the mythic frame emphatically reminds the audience that it is only an account about the world of becoming, not a revelation of certain truth.

This dual structure of fantastical narrative and physical account is in part an imitation, it seems, of the myth in the *Phaedo*, which has the physical account of the nature of the world, as well as a most imagistic description. The latter has many specific resonances, moreover, with the Sulla's myth. Socrates argues that, although we believe that we live on the surface of the earth, we actually dwell in the hollows—just as we might imagine aquatic creatures would think that the water comprised the whole world, including the stars they can dimly see through it.<sup>37</sup> If

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<sup>36</sup> See *supra* in the Introduction.

<sup>37</sup> “We do not realize that, although we think that we dwell upon the earth, we actually dwell in its depths, as if someone dwelling in the midst of the bottom of the sea should think that he dwells upon it. He would see the sun and the other stars through the water and think that the sea is the sky; he would never reach the heights of the sea, because of his slowness and weakness, and he would never see it, escaping and lifting his head out of the sea and into our realm, nor would he ever hear from another who has seen it how much purer and more beautiful it is than their realm. Indeed, we too suffer the same: for we dwell in a hollow of the earth but think that we dwell upon it, and we call the air the heavens, as though stars would dance through a heaven such as this” (ἡμᾶς οὖν οἰκοῦντας ἐν τοῖς

someone could grow wings and fly up to the top, he could, “if his nature would be sufficient to behold it,” see the “true earth” (ὡς ἀληθῶς γῆ) and recognize its greater purity and beauty.<sup>38</sup> By contrast, things here—“the earth and stones and the whole place here”—are corrupted and corroded, presumably because of our proximity to the baleful brine of the sea.<sup>39</sup> Because of the distance of the surface of the “true earth” from the heavier elements such as water it, on the other hand, is much purer than ours.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the creatures that dwell there live for long, enjoying the manifest presence of the divine and the pleasure of seeing the sun, the moon, and the stars as they really are.<sup>41</sup> This blessed existence stands in contrast to the fate of worse souls, who were too attached to the body in life and consequently insufficiently purified.<sup>42</sup> The images in the tale are thus not just added for color and pleasure, but also serve to illustrate the myth’s

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κοίλοις αὐτῆς λεληθέναι καὶ οἶσθαι ἄνω ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οἰκεῖν, ὥσπερ ἂν εἴ τις ἐν μέσῳ τῷ πυθμένι τοῦ πελάγους οἰκῶν οἰοῖτο τε ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάττης οἰκεῖν καὶ διὰ τοῦ ὕδατος ὄρων τὸν ἥλιον καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἄστρα τὴν θάλατταν ἡγοῖτο οὐρανὸν εἶναι, διὰ δὲ βραδυτητά τε καὶ ἀσθένειαν μηδεπώποτε ἐπὶ τὰ ἄκρα τῆς θαλάττης ἀφιγμένος μηδὲ ἐωρακῶς εἶη, ἐκδύς καὶ ἀνακύψας ἐκ τῆς θαλάττης εἰς τὸν ἐνθάδε τόπον, ὅσῳ καθαρώτερος καὶ καλλίων τυγχάνει ὢν τοῦ παρὰ σφίσι, μηδὲ ἄλλου ἀκηκῶς εἶη τοῦ ἐωρακῶς, ταῦτόν δὴ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμᾶς πεπονθέναι· οἰκοῦντας γὰρ ἐν τινὶ κοίλῳ τῆς γῆς οἶσθαι ἐπάνω αὐτῆς οἰκεῖν, καὶ τὸν ἀέρα οὐρανὸν καλεῖν, ὡς διὰ τούτου οὐρανοῦ ὄντος τὰ ἄστρα χωροῦντα; 109c-d).

<sup>38</sup> ... εἰ ἢ φύσις ἰκανὴ εἶη ἀνασχέσθαι θεωροῦσα, γινῶναι ἂν ὅτι ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν ὁ ἀληθῶς οὐρανὸς καὶ τὸ ἀληθινὸν φῶς καὶ ἡ ὡς ἀληθῶς γῆ (109e).

<sup>39</sup> ἦδε μὲν γὰρ ἡ γῆ καὶ οἱ λίθοι καὶ ἅπας ὁ τόπος ὁ ἐνθάδε διεφθαρμένα ἐστὶν καὶ καταβεβρωμένα, ὥσπερ τὰ ἐν τῇ θαλάττῃ ὑπὸ τῆς ἄλμης (110a).

<sup>40</sup> Our air is said to be, approximately (ἐνὶ λόγῳ), their sea, while their air is our aether (111a).

<sup>41</sup> The colors of the “true earth,” moreover, are more vibrant—“the sea-purple, marvelous in its beauty, and the gold, the white brighter than chalk or snow... and still a greater variety and a greater beauty of colors than all those we have see” (τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἀλουργῆ εἶναι [καὶ] θαυμαστὴν τὸ κάλλος, τὴν δὲ χρυσοειδῆ, τὴν δὲ ὅση λευκὴ γύψου ἢ χιόνος λευκοτέραν, ... καὶ ἔτι πλείονων καὶ καλλίωνων ἢ ὅσα ἡμεῖς ἐωράκαμεν; 110c). The watery air of the hollows, moreover, is said to glimmer (στίλβοντα), yielding a coherent, continuous form that appears well-composed (ὥστε ἐν τῇ ταύτῃ εἶδος συνεχῆς ποικίλον φαντάζεσθαι; 110d). Its plants and stones, moreover, are purer: “our beloved gemstones (carnelians, jaspers, emeralds) are but fragments of those there” (ὢν καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε λιθίδια εἶναι ταῦτα τὰ ἀγαπώμενα μόρια, σάρδιά τε καὶ ἰάσπιδας καὶ σμαράγδους καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα; 110d). The explanation is that stones up there are not “devoured and corrupted as the ones here by decay and brine” (ὅτι ἐκεῖνοι λίθοι εἰσὶ καθαροὶ καὶ οὐ κατεδηδεσμένοι οὐδὲ διεφθαρμένοι ὥσπερ οἱ ἐνθάδε ὑπὸ σηπεδόνης καὶ ἄλμης; 110e).

<sup>42</sup> “But those who seem to live exceptionally pious lives, they are those who are freed from these places in the earth and released as if from prisons. They arrive into a pure dwelling above and live upon the earth (οἳ δὲ δὴ ἂν δόξωσι διαφερόντως πρὸς τὸ ὀσίως βιῶναι, οὗτοί εἰσιν οἱ τῶνδε μὲν τῶν τόπων τῶν ἐν τῇ γῇ ἐλευθερούμενοί τε καὶ ἀπαλλαττόμενοι ὥσπερ δεσμωτηρίων, ἄνω δὲ εἰς τὴν καθαρὰν οἴκησιν ἀφικνούμενοι καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς οἰκίζόμενοι.; 114b-c). The rest of the myth, in contrast, describes the abodes of less pure souls, a series of underground rivers which flow into the depths of the hollows—comprised especially of Acheron, Pyriphlegethon, Styx, and Tartarus—where dead souls go according to the severity of the impurities they acquired in life (111c-4c).

eschatological schema: this “true earth” exists as the reward for purified souls, whose delight seems to be the world’s purpose.

In *De facie*, Sulla offers his myth as an explanation of what purpose the composition of the moon serves, specifically in that it is the dwelling place of disembodied souls. But before he propounds this explanation, he reveals a learned and exotic foreigner as his source. Even in the lost beginning of the dialogue, Sulla seems to have emphasized his reliance on this figure, given the first extant line: “Sulla said these things, ‘for it belongs to my myth, and it is from this source.’”<sup>43</sup> When the Carthaginian finally interrupts Lamprias’ final speech, moreover, he immediately emphasizes the source again by continuing the theatrical metaphor from above: “I, then, am an actor, but first I will declare, if nothing should hinder it, that my poet began for us with Homer.”<sup>44</sup> The initial description of the myth and its immediate opening thus both focus on his interlocutor; the first portion of Sulla’s speech is then dedicated to geographic descriptions of the stranger’s origins and travels. These details, I argue, create such an over-determined exoticism that they call attention to the myth’s fictionality, which emphasizes its status as a “likely account” rather than a dogmatic exposition.

Sulla’s description of the stranger who relates the account to him mixes geographical and ethnographical portions, with theological or *daemonological* elements woven into both—all of which contribute to the exoticism of the myth. The Carthaginian begins with a line of Homer: “A

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<sup>43</sup> ὁ Σύλλας ταῦτ’ εἶπε· “τῷ γὰρ ἐμῷ μύθῳ προσήκει κάκειθὲν ἔστι;” (920b), accepting Cherniss’ emendation for Pohlenz’s printing of the MSS. † Ὀανοσύλλας.

<sup>44</sup> ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ὑποκριτῆς εἰμι, πρότερον δ’ αὐτοῦ φράσω τὸν ποιητὴν ἡμῖν εἰ μὴ τι κωλύει καθ’ Ὅμηρον ἀρξάμενον (941a). Pohlenz (1955) prints ὑμῖν for the MSS. ἡμῖν (as well as ἀρξάμενος for ἀρξάμενον) and detects a lacuna immediately after, apparently on the assumption that Sulla should cite his source on the outset. This was corrected by Cherniss (1951: 148), who is followed by more recent editors such as Donini (2011: 222) and Lernould (2013: 74). On the last phrase, Cherniss: “ἡμῖν has a special subtlety and gives special point to the apology, εἰ μὴ τι κωλύει, for it might seem incredible that the stranger from across the Atlantic should have a line of Homer so appropriate to his story” (149). Cf. Vernière (1977: 63).

certain island, Ogygia, lies far off in the sea.”<sup>45</sup> The mythic home of Calypso is said to be far removed from the Mediterranean, several days voyage west of Britain, a distant-most part of the early empire.<sup>46</sup> The stranger’s island is even farther west, and difficult to reach due to a legendary quality of the surrounding waters: “for the sea is slow to traverse and muddy from the magnitude of streams, and the streams discharge much earth such that embankments form and the sea is heavy and earthy, which is the source of its reputation for being congealed.”<sup>47</sup> These alluvial deposits—which W. Hamilton already in 1934 connected with a similar detail in Plato’s myth of Atlantis<sup>48</sup>—make journey to the island difficult and long. The region’s inhabitants—whom Sulla claims were initially “the people of Cronus,” but intermingled with Greeks that, appropriately for an aetiological myth, were left by Hercules<sup>49</sup>—are nevertheless induced to send expeditions even through the difficult path: “The non-Greeks mythologize that Cronus is confined in one of these islands by Zeus and that primeval <Briareus> holds guard over these islands and the sea, which

<sup>45</sup> ... καθ’ Ὀμηρον (*Od.* VII.244) ἀρξάμενος· “Ὀγυγίη τις νῆσος ἀπόπροθεν εἰν ἀλί κείται” (941a).

<sup>46</sup> “... it lies about five days west of Britain by sailing. But the other three islands are equally separated from at it from one another, lying generally towards the summer settings of the sun. ... But the great continent, by which the sea is surrounded in a circle, is less far from the other islands, but is around five thousand miles from Ogygia by oared ships...” (... δρόμον ἡμερῶν πέντε Βρετανίας ἀπέχουσα πλέοντι πρὸς ἐσπέραν· ἕτεραι δὲ τρεῖς ἴσον ἐκείνης ἀφεστῶσαι καὶ ἀλλήλων πρόκεινται μάλιστα κατὰ δυσμὰς ἡλίου θερινάς, τὴν δὲ μεγάλην ἠπειρον, ὕφ’ ἧς ἡ μεγάλη περιέχεται κύκλω θάλαττα, τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἔλαττον ἀπέχει<ν>, τῆς δ’ Ὀγυγίας περὶ πεντακισχιλίου σταδίου κωπήρεσι πλοίοις κομιζομένῳ...; 941a-b). Britain is so distant from the Mediterranean world that Diodorus Siculus, for instance, supposes that it was never invaded before Julius Caesar, even by Dionysus or Hercules (V.21.2).

<sup>47</sup> βραδύπορον γὰρ εἶναι καὶ πηλῶδες ὑπὸ πλῆθους ρευμάτων τὸ πέλαγος· τὰ δὲ ρεύματα τὴν μεγάλην ἐξίεναι γῆν καὶ γίνεσθαι προχώσεις ἀπ’ αὐτῶν καὶ βαρεῖαν εἶναι καὶ γεώδη τὴν θάλατταν, ἧ καὶ πεπηγέναι δόξαν ἔσχε (941b). On this detail, see Cherniss (1957: 182-3nd); cf. Donini (2011: 338).

<sup>48</sup> 25-6. Hamilton draws particular attention to Plato’s descriptions of the muddy water where the island of Atlantis once was: πηλοῦ καταβραχέος ἐμποδῶν ὄντος (*Tim.* 25d); ἄπορον πηλὸν τοῖς ἐνθένδε ἐπλεύουσιν (*Criti.* 108e). Clay (2014) closes his survey of responses to the Atlantis myth with Sulla’s myth (244-5).

<sup>49</sup> οἶεσθαι δὲ τοῖς Κρόνου λαοῖς ἀναμιχθέντας ὕστερον τοὺς μεθ’ Ἡρακλέους παραγενομένους καὶ ὑπολειφθέντας ἤδη σβεννύμενον τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐκεῖ... (941c). What follows describes a “quenched Hellenicity there, overpowered by barbaric tongue and customs” (σβεννύμενον τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐκεῖ καὶ κρατούμενον γλώττη τε βαρβαρικῇ καὶ νόμοις καὶ διαίταις), which these settlers from Hercules’ expedition rekindled (οἷον ἀναζωπυρῆσαι πάλιν ἰσχυρὸν καὶ πολὺ γενόμενον). This seems to imply an earlier Greek colonization even before this one placed far in the mythic past. Cf. Donini (2011): “Qui la geografia antropica del mito rischia di diventare confusa. ... Ci si può domandare se ci sia un significato riposto sotto questa fantasia” (339).

they call the Cronian sea, that are settled around him.”<sup>50</sup> Demetrius’ parallel narration in *De defectu* specifies Briareus—one of the hundred-handers from Hesiod’s *Theogonia*, who fought against the Titans and subsequently guard them in the gloom of Tartarus<sup>51</sup>—and Sulla seems to interweave this part of the traditional story into his more complex myth as well.<sup>52</sup>

In the latter, the presence of Cronus motivates an elaborate ritual of pilgrimage for priests who will be dedicated for at least thirty years on the island. The journey requires immense preparation and resources, which is only undertaken when a rare astrological occurrence emerges—implying that the people of Cronus have some ability in the observation of the heavens.<sup>53</sup> Not only is the journey expensive, but, from the mention of “those that are saved from the sea” (διασωθέντας). Not all of the expeditions reach their destination, so the journey is evidently dangerous as well. These aspects deepen the exoticism, but the journey too is full of wonders, such as preternaturally short nights—only one hour in thirty days, and even then, only a light and twilight night—on even the stopping point—a Greek island *en route* to Cronus’ island

<sup>50</sup> ὧν ἐν μιᾷ τὸν Κρόνον οἱ βάρβαροι καθεῖρχθαι μυθολογοῦσιν ὑπὸ τοῦ Διός, τὸν δ’ ὠγύγιον <Βριάρεων> ἔχοντα φρουρὸν τῶν τε νήσων ἐκείνων καὶ τῆς θαλάττης, ἣν Κρόνιον πέλαγος ὀνομάζουσι, παρακατοκίσθαι (941a); the MSS reads † τὸν δ’ ὡς υἱὸν, which Pohlenz (1955) prints, for Cherniss’ (1951) τὸν δ’ ὠγύγιον <Βριάρεων>.

<sup>51</sup> “Others were begotten in turn from Gaia and Uranus, three strong and mighty children, not to be named, Cottus and Briareus and Gyges, boastful children. A hundred adept hands jut from their shoulders and fifty heads rest upon strong limbs from their shoulders” (ἄλλοι δ’ αὖ Γαίης τε καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἐξεγένοντο / τρεῖς παῖδες μεγάλοι <τε> καὶ ὄβριμοι, οὐκ ὀνομαστοί, / Κόττος τε Βριάρεώς τε Γύγης θ’, ὑπερήφανα τέκνα. / τῶν ἑκατὸν μὲν χεῖρες ἀπ’ ὤμων αἰσσοῦντο, / ἄπλαστοι, κεφαλαὶ δὲ ἐκάστω πεντήκοντα / ἐξ ὤμων ἐπέφυκον ἐπὶ στιβαροῖσι μέλεσσι; 147-52). After the titanomachy, Posidon honors Briareus in particular by making him his step-son (γαμβρὸν) through marriage to Cymopoleia (818-20).

<sup>52</sup> “There is one island there, in which Kronus sleeps confined, guarded by Briareus. The sleep has been devised as the bond, and there are many *daemones* around him as attendants and servants” (ἐκεῖ μέντοι μίαν εἶναι νῆσον, ἐν ἣ τὸν Κρόνον καθεῖρχθαι φρουρούμενον ὑπὸ τοῦ Βριάρεω καθεύδοντα· δεσμὸν γὰρ αὐτῷ τὸν ὕπνον μεμηχανῆσθαι, πολλοὺς δὲ περὶ αὐτὸν εἶναι δαίμονας ὀπαδοῦς καὶ θεράποντας; 420a).

<sup>53</sup> “Whenever the star of Cronus—which we call Saturn (*Phainōn*), but they call the Guardian of Night—arrives in Taurus once every thirty years, they prepare the things for a sacrifice for a long time and draw lots to send out <a sufficient number of pilgrims for the envoy> on so many ships, loading on a great retinue and sufficient procurement for men preparing to sail such a vast sea by oar and to live for a long time on a foreign land” (ὅταν οὖν ὁ τοῦ Κρόνου ἀστήρ, ὃν Φαίνοντα μὲν ἡμεῖς, ἐκείνους δὲ Νυκτοῦρον ἔφη καλεῖν, εἰς Ταῦρον παραγένηται δι’ ἐτῶν τριάκοντα, παρασκευασαμένους ἐν χρόνῳ πολλῷ τὰ περὶ τὴν θυσίαν καὶ τὸν ἀπόστολον θεωροὺς ἱκανοὺς> ἐκπέμπει κλήρω λαχόντας ἐν πλοίοις τοσοῦτοις θεραπείαν τε πολλὴν καὶ παρασκευὴν; 941c-d, accepting Cherniss’ suggestion for the lacuna).

where the pilgrims are considered holy men.<sup>54</sup> The mountain that contains the titan is even more wondrous:

For Cronus sleeps enclosed in a deep cave of rock like gold—for the sleep was devised as his bond by Zeus—and birds fly down the peak of the rock to bring him ambrosia, spreading a pleasant smell throughout the whole island, dispersed from the rock as if from a spring. And there are *daemones* who follow and serve Cronus, who were companions to him, indeed when he was ruling over gods and men.<sup>55</sup>

The humans who live there, it seems, are similarly dedicated to Cronus:

It is only permitted for those that serve the god for thirty years to sail back homeward, but most, rather reasonably (ἐπιεικῶς), choose to stay there—some because of habit, others because everything is plentifully available without work and business—to spend their time at sacrifices and dances, or always involved in some conversations and philosophy.<sup>56</sup>

Their lives while dedicated to the god are paradisaic, and share two characteristics with the dwellers of the “true earth” in the *Phaedo*. In Socrates’ myth, the surrounding aether is purer than our air and the divine is entirely manifest:

Their seasons have such a composition that they are without sickness and live for much longer than we here, and in sight and hearing and judgement and every other thing like this, they are superior, by as much as air is superior to water or aether to air, with respect to purity. They have groves and shrines of the gods where the gods are true inhabitants, and they receive portents and prophecies and visions of the gods and all sorts of

<sup>54</sup> “Once they set sail, they experience different fates—as is likely—but those who are saved from the sea first arrive at the foremost islands, which are settled by Greeks; they see the hidden for less than an hour over the course of thirty days, and this is night, which nevertheless bears a gentle, twilight shadow, illuminated towards the west. They spend ninety days there with honor and hospitality, being considered and addressed as holy men; then they are carried to where they must go by the winds” (ἀναγκαίαν μέλλουσι πλεῖν πέλαγος τοσοῦτον εἰρεσία καὶ χρόνον ἐπὶ ξένης βιοτεύειν πολὺν ἐμβαλλομένους, ἀναχθέντας οὖν χρῆσθαι τύχαις, ὡς εἰκός, ἄλλους ἄλλαις, τοὺς δὲ διασωθέντας ἐκ τῆς θαλάττης πρῶτον μὲν ἐπὶ τὰς προκειμένας νήσους οἰκουμένας δ’ ὑφ’ Ἑλλήνων κατίσχειν καὶ τὸν ἥλιον ὄραν κρυπτόμενον ὥρας μιᾶς ἔλαττον ἐφ’ ἡμέρας τριάκοντα· καὶ νύκτα τοῦτ’ εἶναι, σκότος ἔχουσαν ἐλαφρὸν καὶ λυκαυγὲς ἀπὸ δυσμῶν περιλαμπόμενον. ἐκεῖ δὲ διατρίψαντας ἡμέρας ἐνενήκοντα μετὰ τιμῆς καὶ φιλοφροσύνης, ἱεροὺς νομιζομένους καὶ προσαγορευομένους, ὑπὸ πνευμάτων οἷ δεῖ περαιοῦσθαι; 941d). Cf. Pl. *Plt.* 272b-d. Pohlenz (1955) prints ἤδη for Cherniss’ (1957) οἷ δεῖ, but cf. Cherniss (1951: 149n91).

<sup>55</sup> αὐτὸν μὲν γὰρ τὸν Κρόνον ἐν ἄντρῳ βαθεῖ περιέχεσθαι πέτρας χρυσεῖδους καθεύδοντα. τὸν γὰρ ὕπνον αὐτῷ μεμηχανῆσθαι δεσμὸν ὑπὸ τοῦ Διός, ὄρνιθας δὲ τῆς πέτρας κατὰ κορυφὴν εἰσπετομένους ἀμβροσίαν ἐπιφέρειν αὐτῷ, καὶ τὴν νῆσον εὐωδία κατέχεσθαι πᾶσαν, ὥσπερ ἐκ πηγῆς σκιδναμένη τῆς πέτρας· τοὺς δὲ δαίμονας ἐκεῖνος περιέπειν καὶ θεραπεύειν τὸν Κρόνον, ἐταίρους αὐτῷ γενομένους, ὅτε διὸ θεῶν καὶ ἀνθρώπων ἐβασίλευε (941f-2a).

<sup>56</sup> ἐξεῖναι μὲν γὰρ ἀποπλεῖν οἴκαδε τοὺς τῷ θεῷ τὰ τρις δέκ’ ἔτη συλλατρεύσαντας, αἰρεῖσθαι δὲ τοὺς πλείστους ἐπιεικῶς αὐτόθι κατοικεῖν, τοὺς μὲν ὑπὸ συνηθείας τοὺς δ’ ὅτι πόνου δίχα καὶ πραγμάτων ἄφθονα πάρεστι πάντα, πρὸς θυσίαις καὶ χορηγίαις ἢ περὶ λόγους τινὰς αἰεὶ καὶ φιλοσοφίαν διατρίβουσι (941e).

communions between them and the divine: and indeed, the sun and moon and stars are seen by them too as they really are, and every happiness follows these things.<sup>57</sup>

In Plutarch's myth, "the nature of the island is marvelous, and the thinness of the surrounding air."<sup>58</sup> Second, in Plato's 'true earth,' "there are groves and sanctuaries to the gods among them, in which the gods are truly inhabitants, and utterances and prophecies and visions of the gods and things of this sort happen among them and in their presence."<sup>59</sup> On Plutarch's island, the *daemones* appear to the inhabitants as if intimate friends: "to some intending to sail away, a divine warning appears to them, as if they are neighbors and friends; they do not appear in sleep or through symbols alone, but many encounter the sights and voices of *daemones* even manifestly."<sup>60</sup> The people on Plutarch's island dedicated to Cronus thus live like the elevated dwellers of the "true earth" in the *Phaedo*.<sup>61</sup>

As with Plato's mythical Atlantis, Plutarch's geographical description spurred many, as surveyed by Harold Cherniss, to search for its real-world referent, so it must have had some

<sup>57</sup> τὰς δὲ ὥρας αὐτοῖς κρᾶσιν ἔχειν τοιαύτην ὥστε ἐκεῖνους ἀνόσους εἶναι καὶ χρόνον τε ζῆν πολὺ πλείω τῶν ἐνθάδε, καὶ ὄψει καὶ ἀκοῇ καὶ φρονήσει καὶ πᾶσι τοῖς τοιοῦτοις ἡμῶν ἀφεστάναι τῇ αὐτῇ ἀποστάσει ἢ περ ἀήρ τε ὕδατος ἀφέστηκεν καὶ αἰθὴρ ἀέρος πρὸς καθαρότητα. καὶ δὴ καὶ θεῶν ἄλση τε καὶ ἱερὰ αὐτοῖς εἶναι, ἐν οἷς τῶ ὄντι οἰκητὰς θεοὺς εἶναι, καὶ φήμας τε καὶ μαντείας καὶ αἰσθήσεις τῶν θεῶν καὶ τοιαύτας συνουσίας γίνεσθαι αὐτοῖς πρὸς αὐτούς· καὶ τὸν γε ἥλιον καὶ σελήνην καὶ ἄστρα ὀρᾶσθαι ὑπ' αὐτῶν οἷα τυγχάνει ὄντα, καὶ τὴν ἄλλην εὐδαιμονίαν τούτων ἀκόλουθον εἶναι; 111a-c). While as the inhabitants of the "true earth" live long and healthy lives, down here there is again the baleful influence of water, which "provides ugliness and sickness to both stones and earth and every other creature and plant" (ἃ καὶ λίθοις καὶ γῆ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ζῴοις τε καὶ φυτοῖς αἴσχη τε καὶ νόσους παρέχει; 110e). They dwell, however, as if on islands: "And there are many sorts of animals and humans upon it, some who dwell inland, others who live around the air as we do the sea, and others still who populate islands which the air flows around near the mainland..." (ζῶα δ' ἐπ' αὐτῇ εἶναι ἄλλα τε πολλὰ καὶ ἀνθρώπους, τοὺς μὲν ἐν μεσογαίᾳ οἰκοῦντας, τοὺς δὲ περὶ τὸν ἀέρα ὡσπερ ἡμεῖς περὶ τὴν θάλατταν, τοὺς δ' ἐν νήσοις ἅς περιρρεῖν τὸν ἀέρα πρὸς τῇ ἡπεύρω οὐσας...; 111a). Burnet (1911): "This is an attempt to fit the old idea of the Islands of the Blest into the mythical landscape" (110).

<sup>58</sup> θαυμαστὴν γὰρ εἶναι τῆς τε νήσου τὴν φύσιν καὶ τὴν πραότητα τοῦ περιέχοντος ἀέρος (941f).

<sup>59</sup> καὶ δὴ καὶ θεῶν ἄλση τε καὶ ἱερὰ αὐτοῖς εἶναι, ἐν οἷς τῶ ὄντι οἰκητὰς θεοὺς εἶναι, καὶ φήμας τε καὶ μαντείας καὶ αἰσθήσεις τῶν θεῶν καὶ τοιαύτας συνουσίας γίνεσθαι αὐτοῖς πρὸς αὐτούς (111b-c).

<sup>60</sup> ἐνίοις δὲ καὶ τὸ θεῖον ἐμποδῶν γίνεσθαι διανοηθεῖσιν ἀποπλεῖν ὡσπερ συνήθεσι καὶ φίλοις ἐπιδεικνύμενον. οὐκ ὄναρ <γὰρ> μόνον οὐδὲ διὰ συμβόλων, ἀλλὰ καὶ φανερώς ἐντυγχάνειν πολλοὺς ὄψει δαιμόνων καὶ φωναῖς (941f). The *De fac.* scenario differs from the *Phd.* myth, in that the divine beings are just *daemones* and not gods themselves, and that there is a possibility of leaving while still alive (cf. *Phd.* 114b-c)—but the underlying idea of the divine manifesting more clearly and intimately in a purer place in the Platonic myth is clearly evoked in the Plutarchean.

<sup>61</sup> These parallels are not often remarked upon in commentaries, such as by Donini (2011), who more generally compares the myth of the *Plt.* (341).

sense of plausibility; Cherniss himself concludes by deeming the elements of the description “the usual ‘corroborative detail intended to give artistic verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing narrative.’”<sup>62</sup> A group of modern Greek scientists has recently sought to affirm every detail, including the thirty-year cycles.<sup>63</sup> The details, however, should stress the unreality and implausibility of the myth and pushing the discourse beyond the limits of dry geographical description into the realm of the exotic and the fantastical. The island of Cronus itself is, moreover, not unique to *De facie*. In another of Plutarch’s dialogues, *De defectu*, a traveler named Demetrius claims to have “sailed in an envoy of the emperor for the sake of inquiry and investigation;” on this voyage, he visited the island himself, inhabited by only a few consecrated men and Cronus enchained in sleep.<sup>64</sup> One cosmological detail, however, only emerges in *De facie*: “For Cronus dreams as many things as Zeus premeditates, and the titanic passions and motions of his soul are straining, until sleep again restores his repose, and the kingly and divine

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<sup>62</sup> 1957: 21-3. On Francis Bacon’s treatment of the Atlantis myth, cf. Clay (2014: 233). Kepler identifies Plutarch’s real world referent—“he could hardly have written in this way merely from an unfettered imagination”—with the Americas. See Rosen (1967: 31n5). Cherniss surveys older arguments about Plutarch’s sources for the myth (23-5), and relatedly concludes: “Anyone who without a preconceived thesis to defend reads the *De Facie* will recognize that Plato was Plutarch’s inspiration throughout the dialogue but that Plutarch is himself the true author of the whole work and that, while there is in it a distillation of his wide and varied scientific and philosophical reading, he cannot possibly have composed it by copying out any source or combination of sources” (25). See also Hamilton (1934: 28-9n1-2).

<sup>63</sup> Liritzis et al. (2018): “Despite its eclectic mixture of rational inquiry and deliberate fantasy, the particular dialogue investigated here, which refers to the solar eclipse and details of the mysterious journey, possesses an intrinsic unity that is essential to the evolution and presentation of its scientific conclusion, mostly verified with current knowledge. Its inherent geographical and astronomical interest ultimately derives from the synthesis of this descriptive narration, and the dialogue contains rich detail and fertile ideas pertinent to geography, oceanography and archaeoastronomy” (672).

<sup>64</sup> πλεῦσαι δὲ αὐτὸς ἱστορίας καὶ θέας ἔνεκα πομπῆ τοῦ βασιλέως... (419e). Euhemerus, according to Diodorus Siculus as preserved by Euseb. (*Praep. evang.* II.2), similarly claimed to travel at the behest of the Hellenistic monarch Cassander (VI.1.4). Demetrius is introduced in *De def. or.* as “a literary scholar (γραμματικός) travelling from Britain down home to Tarsus” (410a). There is a substantial body of scholarship that treats a historical person named Demetrius as the source for this myth, and thus the identity of Sulla’s stranger, beginning with Cumont (1913: 476-7). Evidently two inscriptions in York testify to a Demetrius, published by Dessau (1911), although to Flacelière’s (1947) chagrin they do not include a toponym (26n1). He does not identify the stranger with Demetrius, although Vernière (1977) does (102-103).



royal part is, intrinsically, clean and pure.”<sup>65</sup> Whatever other consequences this mysterious set of details might have, for the present part of the myth they serve a specific purpose in explaining the source of knowledge for the *daemones*:<sup>66</sup> “They foretell many things from themselves because they are prophetic, but they announce the greatest things about the greatest things as if bringing down the dreams of Cronus.”<sup>67</sup>

Yet the stranger has other sources of knowledge. While he served Cronus on the island, Sulla tells us, his leisure was spent in study: “The stranger was indeed conveyed there (to the island), as he said, serving the god in leisure and bearing empirical knowledge of astrology, up to the farthest point is it possible for one doing geometry to progress, and he bore knowledge of the rest of philosophy, using natural science.”<sup>68</sup> Apparently the stranger is at least as much an astronomer himself as the characters in the initial, scientific portion of *De facie*<sup>69</sup>—or perhaps Plato’s own Timaeus, an astrologer from Locri. Yet he was evidently the rare inhabitant of the island who was both inclined to leave the island, and was not opposed by the *daemones*: he was overcome by “some desire and longing to behold (γενέσθαι... θεατής) the great island, which is, as it seems likely, what they call the part of the world we inhabit.”<sup>70</sup> Although he has two

<sup>65</sup> ὅσα γὰρ ὁ Ζεὺς προδιανοεῖται, ταῦτ’ ὄνειροπολεῖν τὸν Κρόνον, εἶναι δ’ ἀνάτασιν τὰ τιτανικὰ πάθη καὶ κινήματα τῆς ψυχῆς ἕως ἂν αὐτῷ πάλιν ἀνάπαυσιν ὁ ὕπνος <καταστήσῃ> καὶ γένηται τὸ βασιλικὸν καὶ θεῖον αὐτὸ καθ’ ἑαυτὸ καθαρὸν καὶ ἀκήρατον (942a).

<sup>66</sup> On the significance of this figure, cf. Bos (1989).

<sup>67</sup> καὶ πολλὰ μὲν ἀφ’ ἑαυτῶν μαντικὸς ὄντας προλέγειν, τὰ δὲ μέγιστα καὶ περὶ τῶν μεγίστων ὡς ὄνειρα τοῦ Κρόνου κατιόντας ἐξαγγέλλειν (942a).

<sup>68</sup> ἐνταῦθα δὴ κομισθεῖς, ὡς ἔλεγεν, ὁ ξένος καὶ θεραπεύων τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ σχολῆς, ἀστρολογίας μὲν ἐφ’ ὅσον γεωμετρήσαντι πορρωτάτω προελθεῖν δυνατόν ἐστιν ἐμπειρίαν ἔσχε, φιλοσοφίας δὲ τῆς ἄλλης τῷ φυσικῷ χρώμενος (942b). Donini (1988) takes these two activities, as well as their taking place on a sacred island, to represent a sort of elaborate “metaphor for a Platonic school of the first or second century A.D.,” based on “the threefold Aristotelian division of the theoretical sciences” into mathematics, physics, and theology (131-2). On the origin of this distinction, Jaeger (1948 [1923]), however, concludes that Xenocrates (frg. 1 Heinze) had formulated a “well known division of philosophy... which held for the later Plato too” before Aristotle (434n2).

<sup>69</sup> Perhaps, to whatever degree his study is based on empirical observation, he is even better equipped for astronomy on the island than the in the Mediterranean, given the thinness of the surrounding air.

<sup>70</sup> ἐπιθυμίαν δέ τινα καὶ πόθον ἔχων γενέσθαι τῆς μεγάλης νήσου θεατής (οὕτως γὰρ ὡς ἔοικε τὴν παρ’ ἡμῶν οἰκουμένην ὀνομάζουσιν), ... (942b). Further on the geographic designation of continents and islands: 941b-c. Cf. Bos (1989: 27).

potential sources of knowledge on the island—his own geometrical study and philosophical speculation, as well as intimacy with Cronus’ *daemones*—his burning desire for knowledge spurs him to seek even more sources. Sulla relates that he indeed found many, too many to survey for Lamprias and the rest: “what he experienced then and how many people he encountered—he both came across holy writings and was initiated in all the rites—to go through this would be a task greater than a single day, as he related it to us very thoroughly and brought to memory each point.”<sup>71</sup> The stranger’s Odyssean journey evidently allowed him to gain more elevated and exotic sources of knowledge, particularly through these sacred writings, whatever they might have been.

Yet Sulla specifies that one experience is particularly informative for the topic of *De facie*, which he emphatically exhorts the other speakers to “hear” in particular.<sup>72</sup> The stranger apparently set out for Carthage, based on its shared veneration of Cronus, which is where he met Sulla. While there, he apparently performed something like antiquarian archaeology, similarly, it seems, to what Diodorus Siculus relates about Euhemerus’ journey to Panchaia and his discovery of golden tablets there<sup>73</sup>—a comparison that should not imply credence, given Plutarch’s

<sup>71</sup> ἃ μὲν οὖν ἔπαθε καὶ ὅσους ἀνθρώπους διήλθεν, ἱεροῖς τε γράμμασιν ἐντυγχάνων ἐν τελεταῖς τε πάσαις τελοῦμενος, οὐ μιᾶς ἡμέρας ἔργον ἐστὶ διελθεῖν, ὡς ἐκεῖνος ἡμῖν ἀπήγγελλεν εὖ μάλα καὶ καθ’ ἕκαστον ἀπομνημονεύων· ὅσα δ’ οἰκεῖα τῆς ἐνεστῶσης διατριβῆς ἐστίν, ἀκούσατε (942c). Cf. Hom. *Od.* I.3-4: πολλῶν δ’ ἀνθρώπων... / πάθεν...

<sup>72</sup> ὅσα δ’ οἰκεῖα τῆς ἐνεστῶσης διατριβῆς ἐστίν, ἀκούσατε (942c). Cf. Cherniss (1957): “Nothing in the subsequent account supports the frequently expressed notion that the myth is supposed to have been discovered in these parchments” (191nc).

<sup>73</sup> Diodorus claims that Euhemerus travelled broadly and found somewhere near Arabia “the blest” (Εὐδαίμονος) a temple to “Zeus Triphylus” on a land he called Panchaia (VI.1.4-6): “and in that temple there is a gold engraving, in which the most important deeds of Ouranus and Cronus and Zeus are written in Panchaia letters” (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ ἱερῷ στήλην εἶναι χρυσεῖν, ἐν ἣ τοῖς Παγγαίοις γράμμασιν ὑπάρχειν γεγραμμένας τὰς τε Οὐρανοῦ καὶ Κρόνου καὶ Διὸς πράξεις κεφαλαιωδῶς; VI.1.7). Clay (2014) argues that Panchaia was “written in the wake of Plato’s lost Atlantis” (234). See further 238-42. Probably not coincidentally, Diodorus attributes accounts of the gods, such as Ouranus and his children, as great humans of the past to ancient “Atlantians” (III.56-61).

sarcastic derision of the story.<sup>74</sup> The expedition of Sulla's also yields an incredible find of secret writings:

He spent the most time in Carthage, certainly because Cronus bears great honors among us, and from when the earlier city was destroyed, he discovered some sacred hides that were carried out in secret and laid forgotten in the earth for a long while. And he also exhorted me that, of the visible gods, it is necessary to honor the moon especially, since she is held to be the most responsible for life <...>.<sup>75</sup>

The scrolls, it seems, must have pertained to the role of the moon in the cosmos, which, as the next section examines, is the subject of much of the stranger's speech. The Carthaginian scrolls, it seems, are presented as the most immediately salient source for his extraordinary knowledge about the cosmos, since they immediately precede his speech, although several potential sources of authority have been established.<sup>76</sup> Yet the conclusion of the myth specifies only one, from far earlier in the myth: "These things," Sulla said, "I heard the stranger relate in detail, and the servitors and servants of Cronus, as he said, proclaimed it to him."<sup>77</sup> Many scholars are content to straightforwardly take these figures as the ultimate surety for the myth.<sup>78</sup> But in that case, why

<sup>74</sup> Plutarch, no admirer of "the charlantry" (φανακισμοῖς) of Euhemerus (*De Is.* 360a), dismisses his purported journey and discovery: "... as the things that happened long ago have been written in Panchaia in gold letters, which neither Greek nor non-Greek has seen, but only Euhemerus, who, as it is likely, sailed to people who dwell in a land nowhere and never existed..." (... ὡς δὴ πάλαι γεγονότων ἐν δὲ Πάγχοντι γράμμασι χρυσοῖς ἀναγγεγραμμένων, οἷς οὔτε βάρβαρος οὐδεὶς οὔθ' Ἕλληνα, ἀλλὰ μόνος Εὐήμερος, ὡς ἔοικε, πλεύσας εἰς τοὺς μηδαμόθι τῆς γεγονότας μῆδ' ὄντας ...; 360a-b).

<sup>75</sup> πλεῖστον γὰρ ἐν Καρχηδόνι χρόνον διέτριπεν, ἅτε δὴ παρ' ἡμῖν μεγάλας <τοῦ Κρόνου τιμὰς> ἔχοντος, καὶ τινὰς, ὅθ' ἢ προτέρα πόλις ἀπόλλυτο, διφθέρας ἱεράς ὑπεκκομισθείσας κρύφα καὶ διαλαθούσας πολὺν χρόνον ἐν γῆ κειμένας ἐξευρών, τῶν τε φαινόμενων θεῶν ἔφη χρῆναι καὶ μοι παρεκελεύετο τιμᾶν διαφερόντως τὴν σελήνην ὡς τοῦ βίου κυριωτάτην οὔσαν ... ἐχομένην (942c). For the lacuna, Pohlenz (1955) suggests <πλεῖστά τε μετὰ τῆς μητρὸς ἀγαθὰ παρ>-εχομένην, while Cherniss (1957) prints <καὶ τοῦ θανάτου, τῶν Ἄιδου λειμῶνων>; Vernière (1977) similarly translates "et de la mort, ayant en partage les prairies de l'Hadès" (66).

<sup>76</sup> Speyer (1970), however, argues that Plutarch implicitly presents the scrolls to be written by Cronus (78).

<sup>77</sup> "ταῦτ'" εἶπεν ὁ Σύλλας "ἐγὼ μὲν ἤκουσα τοῦ ξένου διεξιόντος, ἐκείνῳ δ' οἱ τοῦ Κρόνου κατευνασταὶ καὶ θεράποντες, ὡς ἔλεγεν αὐτός, ἐξήγγειλαν" (945d-e).

<sup>78</sup> Lamberton (2001), for instance, does not even mention the Carthaginian scrolls, but only the "remote servants of Kronos who report the content of his dreams" (178); Brenk (2017): "The attendants of Kronos here... explain to the clairvoyant narrator a doctrine which looks very much like an attempt by Plutarch to tidy up his previous thoughts on the subject" (54). Deuse (2010) explains why, in *De gen.* and *De sera*, "the space above the moon is not really a part of the myth; the allusions to it only serve to inform the reader of the restriction of perspective" through these figures: "Only in *De facie* can the myth cover all aspects of the doctrine of the soul and thus also of cosmology, for it is to the *daimones* that the stranger owes his knowledge, and the *daimones* can give information about the doctrine of the soul and the hierarchy of the cosmos because it is their nature to wander between the worlds" (181). The role

would Plutarch introduce the stranger's study of natural philosophy and his discovery of mysterious gold tablets, as well as the initiations and other sacred writings that are mentioned without elaboration?<sup>79</sup>

Yet despite the exoticism of each of the stranger's potential sources, his discourse is thoroughly Hellenic. Rather than conveying Carthaginian or "Ogygian" stories about the gods, he begins by appraising the value of Greek ones when Sulla was "marveling and asking to hear more clearly": "Many things... Sulla, are not said entirely well about the gods, among the Greeks."<sup>80</sup> The stranger takes an imperious pose, perhaps like the priest of Saïs in Plato's myth of Atlantis, who deems the Greeks perpetual children when Solon presents his accounts of the distant past.<sup>81</sup> His explanation, however, relies on Greek etymology:

For example, they (the Greeks) call Demeter and Core by proper names, but at the same time they improperly assign them to the same place. For the former is in earth and holds authority over the things around earth, and the latter in moon and over things around moon. She is called Core and Persephone, the one because she is the light-bringer, and Core, that is the part of the eye in which the image of the onlooker shines back, just as the light of the sun is seen in the moon—for this reason we call her Core.<sup>82</sup>

The stranger switches between third-person and first-person attributions, eventually placing himself in the group under discussion. He describes the goddess through the physical qualities of

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of the myths in *De gen.* and *De sera*, however, might also explain the focus on the soul and sublunary world: the former is aimed at explaining the sign of Socrates, and the latter at showing the purpose of punishing the soul. On the image of the psychic cable, see further Brenk (2017: 51n17). Opsomer (2017b), however, aptly detects greater significance in the final attribution to the *daemones*: "I have used the expression 'author of the myth' in order to draw attention to the narratological complexity involved. Plutarch presents the story as being told by a character, Sulla, who has it from an unnamed stranger, who in turn claimed to have heard it from daemons. Prima facie this creates a distance between Plutarch and the contents of the myth. Hence it is necessary to raise the question as to what the epistemic status of the doctrines presented in the myth is supposed to be" (83). Cf. Beardslee (1975: 287).

<sup>79</sup> Perhaps similarly, the priest of Saïs in Plato's myth of Atlantis in the *Ti.* appeals to the existence of written records (cf. 27b).

<sup>80</sup> θαυμάζοντος δέ μου ταῦτα καὶ δεομένου σαφέστερον ἀκούσαι "πολλά" εἶπεν "ὦ Σύλλα, περὶ θεῶν οὐ πάντα δὲ καλῶς λέγεται παρ' Ἑλλήσιν (942d).

<sup>81</sup> "Solon, Solon, you Greeks are eternal children! There is not even one old Greek" (ὦ Σόλων, Σόλων, Ἑλληνες αἰεὶ παῖδες ἐστε, γέρων δὲ Ἑλλήν οὐκ ἔστιν; 22b).

<sup>82</sup> οἷον εὐθὺς ὀρθῶς Δήμητραν καὶ Κόρην ὀνομάζοντες οὐκ ὀρθῶς ὁμοῦ καὶ περὶ τὸν αὐτὸν ἀμφοτέρας εἶναι τόπον νομίζουσιν. ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἐν γῆ καὶ κυρία τῶν περὶ γῆν ἐστίν, ἡ δ' ἐν σελήνῃ καὶ τῶν περὶ σελήνην, Κόρη τε καὶ Φερσεφόνη κέκληται, τὸ μὲν ὡς φωσφόρος οὖσα, Κόρη δ' ὅτι καὶ τοῦ ὄμματός, ἐν ᾧ τὸ εἶδωλον ἀντιλάμπει τοῦ βλέποντος, ὥσπερ τὸ ἡλίου φέγγος ἐνοραῖται τῇ σελήνῃ, κόρην προσαγορεύομεν (942d).

the moon, particularly its duality: it bears light, but, as Lucius contended earlier in the dialogue, the moon “alone of all the objects in the heavens requires the light of another.”<sup>83</sup> The stranger interprets the Greek myths in a way to essentially confirm an earlier point of contention in the dialogue, which has a further significance for the rest of the myth: the moon both receives and gives light, a quality which represents its intermediary nature.<sup>84</sup> The method of interpretation, explaining the role of the gods in the cosmos by constructing etymological arguments, is a tactic that Plutarch depicts in a variety of different sorts of discourses, particularly in *De Iside et Osiride*.<sup>85</sup> A more distinctly Stoic sort of allegory, where the gods are identified with different elements in the physical world, which Plutarch ultimately rejects in *De Iside*, even appears in *De facie*.<sup>86</sup> Lamprias jeers at Theon’s inclination for poetic exegesis by predicting that, were he speaking, he would quote a line of Alcman—“such does Dew, the daughter of Zeus and Selene, nourish”—and explain Zeus as air that is liquified by the moon and turned into dew-drops.<sup>87</sup> The stranger’s invocation of Greek myth, and his etymological interpretation, would be perfectly

<sup>83</sup> ... τῶν ἐν οὐρανῷ τοσοῦτων τὸ πλῆθος ὄντων μόνη φωτὸς ἀλλοτρίου δεομένη... (929a). He then quotes Parmenides (= frg. B15 Diels), Anaxagoras, and a host of other natural philosophers. Evidently the phrase ἀλλότριον φῶς is Parmenidean (frg. B14 = Plut. *Adv. Col.* 1116a).

<sup>84</sup> The interpretation is thus not a purely physical one of the Stoic sort. Cf. Powell (2002): “By adding a philosophical meaning, Plutarch’s physical allegory turns the myth into a vehicle for what he considers a deeper truth” (20). In *De Is.*, however, he introduces a category of “those who mix parts of mathematics drawn from astrology with physical things of this sort” (οἱ δὲ τοῖσδε τοῖς φυσικοῖς καὶ τῶν ἀπ’ ἀστρολογίας μαθηματικῶν ἐνια μινύοντες; 367c-e). According to Griffiths (1970), this could refer either to Stoics or Egyptians (455-8). Cf. Sallustius’ description of “Egyptian” interpretation of myth (IV.3).

<sup>85</sup> See *supra* pg. 81.

<sup>86</sup> See 376f. Plutarch is particularly wary of one-to-one identifications of gods with either basic elements or parts of the agricultural cycle or climate: “do not reduce and sunder the divine into the winds and floods and sowings and ploughings and incidents of the earth and changes in the seasons, such as those who make Dionysus wine and Hephaestus fire; Persephone is said somewhere by Cleanthes to be ‘the wind borne through the crops and dying away’” (μη λάθωσιν εἰς πνεύματα καὶ ρεύματα καὶ σπόρους καὶ ἄροτους καὶ πάθη γῆς καὶ μεταβολὰς ὥρων διαγράφοντες τὰ θεῖα καὶ διαλύοντες, ὥσπερ οἱ Διόνυσον τὸν οἶνον, Ἥφαιστον δὲ τὴν φλόγα· Φερσεφόνην δὲ φησί που Κλεάνθης [frg. 547] τὸ διὰ τῶν καρπῶν φερόμενον καὶ φονευόμενον πνεῦμα). Cf. *De Pyth. or.* 400a-c and *Lucr.* II.655-60.

<sup>87</sup> διὸ πρὸς σὲ τρέψομαι μᾶλλον, ὃ φίλε Θεῶν· λέγεις γὰρ ἡμῖν ἐξηγούμενος ταυτὶ τὰ Ἀλκμᾶνος (frg. 48 D) “<οἷα Διὸς> θυγάτηρ Ἔρσα τρέφει καὶ <διάς> Σελάνας,” ὅτι νῦν τὸν ἀέρα καλεῖ Δία καὶ φησιν αὐτὸν ὑπὸ τῆς σελήνης καθυγραϊνόμενον εἰς δρόσους τρέπεσθαι (940a). The Stoic flavor of this argument is reinforced by reinforced by Lamprias’ reference to the Stoic character in the dialogue, Pharnaces, immediately before the poetic quotation.

suited to the learned conversation of Greek gentlemen earlier in the dialogue. Rather than an exotic pronouncement, he avails himself of the same argumentative tools as the other speakers.

The stranger continues to interpret the details of the Persephone myth, namely the length of time she is said in the myth to be separated from Demeter every year, which he takes to relate to the lunar cycle.<sup>88</sup> He soon appeals to the central Greek cultural authority, besides Plato at least—the poet Homer:

It is impossible for her to leave Hades, because she is the boundary of Hades. As Homer too says, concealing it not poorly: “but into the plain of Elysium and the limits of the earth.” Where the encroaching shadow of the earth ceases, this is set as the limit and the end of the earth.<sup>89</sup>

The stranger uses a line of poetry available to all to illustrate a very unintuitive cosmological idea, extending the limit of the earth to the shadow it casts upon the moon. This allows him to divide the moon into parts which serve different functions in the cycle of souls. He later cites the image of Hercules from the *nekyia* from the *Odyssey*. Besides these appeals to Homer, that corner-stone of Hellenic tradition, the stranger also appeals to the myth of Endymion, as well as ritual *realia* apparently from rural Greece: rustics banging bronzeware during eclipses to ward off baleful souls.<sup>90</sup> He invokes Xenocrates, the second successor to Plato’s Academy, who is one

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<sup>88</sup> “There is some truth in the things said about their wandering and their search: for they seek after one another although they are apart, and they often intertwine in the shadow. And that Core is in heaven and light at one point but dark and night at another is not a lie, but it causes an error in the amount of time: it is not that we do not see her for six months, but that we see her overtaken by the earth, as if by her mother, in shadow every six months, and sometimes she suffers this every five months” (τοῖς τε περὶ τὴν πλάνην καὶ τὴν ζήτησιν αὐτῶν λεγομένοις ἔνεστι <μέν τι καὶ> ἀληθές· ἀλλήλων γὰρ ἐφίενται χωρὶς οὔσαι καὶ συμπλέκονται περὶ τὴν σκιὰν πολλάκις· τὸ δὲ νῦν μὲν ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ φωτὶ νῦν δ’ ἐν σκοτῷ καὶ νυκτὶ γενέσθαι [περὶ] τὴν Κόρην ψεῦδος μὲν οὐκ ἔστιν, τοῦ δὲ χρόνου τῷ ἀριθμῷ πλάνην παρέσχηκεν· οὐ γὰρ ἕξ μῆνας ἀλλὰ παρ’ ἕξ μῆνας ὀρῶμεν αὐτὴν ὑπὸ τῆς γῆς ὥσπερ ὑπὸ τῆς μητρὸς τῆς σκιᾶ λαμβανομένην, ὀλιγάκις δὲ τοῦτο διὰ πέντε μηνῶν πάσχουσιν; 942e). Pohlenz also lists Bernardakis’s <ὡς ἔουκέ τι>, but Cherniss (1957) appealing suggests <ἠνιγμένον> τὸ, Plutarch’s characteristic verb for allegorical encoding—cf. Hardie (1992: 4744-5), Bernabé (1999: 193-200)—for Pohlenz’s <μέν τι καὶ> (194); Vernière (1977) similarly suggests “sous forme allégorique” (66).

<sup>89</sup> ἐπεὶ τὸν γ’ Ἄιδην ἀπολιπεῖν ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν αὐτήν, τοῦ Ἄιδου πέρας οὔσαν· ὥσπερ καὶ Ὀμηρος ἐπικρυψάμενος οὐ φαύλως τοῦτ’ εἶπεν “ἀλλὰ <σ’> ἐς Ἥλύσιον πεδίον καὶ πείρατα γαίης” (*Od.* IV.563) ὅπου γὰρ ἡ σκιά τῆς γῆς ἐπινεμομένη παύεται, τοῦτο τέρμα τῆς γῆς ἔθετο καὶ πέρας (942e-f).

<sup>90</sup> “This is why the many are accustomed to beat bronzeware during eclipses, raising a din and tumult against wicked souls: the so-called face terrifies them off whenever it comes close, because it is something fearful and terrible to

of the most frequently cited authorities throughout the *Moralia*. When the stranger refers to the *daemones* that preside over religious cults, he refers briefly to those that serve Cronus far to the north once more, but his other examples are closer to home for Sulla’s interlocutors: “the Idean Dactyls in Crete or the Corybantes in Phrygia or the Trophonians settled in Boetia and many others throughout the inhabited world.”<sup>91</sup> Although the last are obscure to us, they certainly would not have been to Lamprias, who was himself was a priest at the famous shrine of Trophonius at Lebedaea.<sup>92</sup>

Yvonne Vernière, building upon a long line of French and German scholarship that seeks aspects of non-Greek religious influence, takes the specific location of Carthage in Sulla’s myth to indicate that “aspects du culte saturnien d’Afrique” lie behind some of the content of the stranger’s myth—particularly, while she allows the theory of the tripartite human to have its origin in Plato, the relationship between the sun, moon, and earth are traced to exotic, non-Greek religion.<sup>93</sup> Rather, the stranger’s discourse takes place mid-way between the fantastical island to the north and the exotic shores of Carthage to the south, in the intellectual world of Imperial

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look upon. Yet it is nothing of this sort” (διὸ καὶ κροτεῖν ἐν ταῖς ἐκλείψεσιν εἰώθασιν οἱ πλείστοι χαλκῶματα καὶ ψόφον ποιεῖν καὶ πάταγον ἐπὶ τὰς φαύλας· ἐκφοβεῖ δ’ αὐτὰς καὶ τὸ καλούμενον πρόσωπον, ὅταν ἐγγὺς γένωνται, βλοσυρόν τι καὶ φρικῶδες ὀρώμενον. ἔστι δ’ οὐ τοιοῦτον; 944b). On this sort of interpretation, see Hardie (1992: 4757-8); on Endymion: 945b.

<sup>91</sup> ἐκ δὲ τῶν βελτιῶνων ἐκείνων οἱ τε περὶ τὸν Κρόνον ὄντες ἔφασαν αὐτοὺς εἶναι καὶ πρότερον ἐν τῇ Κρήτῃ τοὺς Ἰδαίους Δακτύλους, ἐν τε Φρυγίᾳ τοὺς Κορύβαντας γενέσθαι καὶ τοὺς περὶ Βοιωτίαν ἐνιδρύοντας Τροφονιάδας καὶ μυρίους ἄλλους πολλαχόθι τῆς οἰκουμένης (944d-e). I adopt Donini’s emendation of ἐνιδρύοντας for Pohlenz’ ἐν Ἰ Οὐδώρα and Cherniss’ ἐν Οὐδώρα. On these figures, cf. Bonnechere (2003: 123-5). That the stranger expects them to be familiar to his audience—perhaps not just the Carthaginian Sulla—is clear: “their shrines and honors and names persist, but their powers have fallen away to another place as they obtain the best alteration” (ὧν ἱερὰ καὶ τιμαὶ καὶ προσηγορίαι διαμένουσιν, αἱ δὲ δυνάμεις ἔνευον εἰς ἕτερον τόπον τῆς ἀρίστης ἐξαλλαγῆς τυχανόντων; 944e).

<sup>92</sup> *De def. or.* 411e-2a, 431c-d. The stranger refers, moreover, to the myth of Pytho at Delphi (945c).

<sup>93</sup> 1977: 102-5. She thus emphasizes iconography with astrological elements found in the archaeological record: “D’où le signe très fréquent du croissant sommé parfois d’un disque ou d’une étoile. D’où cette parèdre romaine de Saturne, Coelestis, héritière de Tanit : car les découvertes épigraphiques effectuées dans le sanctuaire de Thinissut ‘démontrent à l’évidence l’identité absolue des groupes Baal-Tanit et Saturne-Coelestis’. Souvent d’ailleurs, Soleil et Lune entourent le dieu, comme une sorte de commentaire théologique d’image qu’ils accompagnent” (104). See also Opsomer (2017): “It is likely that Plutarch was in the end more convinced by the scientific arguments than by a myth fabricated by him on the basis of foreign source material” (83).

Rome.<sup>94</sup> The alternative sources of knowledge for the stranger, moreover, emphasize the fictionality of the appeal to authority inherent in the frame of the myth and therefore illustrate its status as plausible or likely, rather than authoritative and transcendent. The stranger's unexpected appeals to mainstays of Plutarchean discourse—namely interpretation of traditional myth, Homer, ritual *realia*, and Xenocrates—further emphasize the overdetermined and self-consciously fictive epistemological status of the myth. Yet the speech nevertheless seems to meet the requirement, which the next section examines, of a specific kind of provisional or hypothetical description of the physical world, namely a teleological account.

*Anaxagoras, the Phaedo, and Plutarch's theory of causation*

Sulla's myth echoes the *Phaedo* in many of the details, as the previous section detailed, but *De facie* more significantly draws on the theory of causation elaborated in that dialogue through Socrates' description of his dissatisfaction with Anaxagoras' theory of *nous*. The physicist, he argues, only describes how the world is disposed and not why, the final purposes such a disposition might have been intended to serve. Plutarch draws often on this formulation of teleology, the search for final causes, in both the *Moralia* and the *Vitae*, as I survey below, but he imbeds it especially in *De facie*, where the final myth presents an account designed to fit such a teleological requirement. The final portion of *De facie* marks an explicit turn in the conversation toward exactly this sort of causation. Before Sulla begins relating the myth, Theon, a character

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<sup>94</sup> Vernière, however, describes the “prêtres de Cronos, qui jouent un tel rôle dans le mythe de Sylla” through North African iconography (105)—as if the myth had not gone to great lengths to stress the otherworldliness of the land beyond Britain inhabited by the stranger's former colleagues devoted to the sleeping titan. Similarly, Campbell (1968): “In a similar type of essay devoted in large part to the religion of Kronos...” (376).



marked for his enthusiasm for poetry and literary scholarship, interrupts and raises an objection that will frame the rest of the dialogue:<sup>95</sup>

Lamprias, I desire no less than for you all to hear what will be said, but I would pleasurablely hear first about those who are said to live on the moon—not if some dwell there, but if it is possible to dwell there. If it is not possible, it is irrational for the moon to be earthy. It will surely seem to have no purpose and to have come about in vain if she neither bears fruits nor provides a seat, an origin, and a means of life for some humans, at least: we affirm, according to Plato, that it was for the sake of this that this (earth) came about, as “our nurse, our attentive guardian and creator through day and night.”<sup>96</sup>

If Lamprias is correct that the moon is earthy, why does it matter? Theon, drawing on the function imputed to the earth in the *Timaeus*, shifts the discussion from “what” the moon is to “why,” reorienting the discussion from physics to teleology, inquiry on a particular kind of cause. Described according to Aristotle’s systematic schema, the earlier conversation only addressed the material cause—out of what does something exist, such as the bronze of a statue and the silver of the bowl—without fully addressing the final cause—for the sake of what something exists, for example health as the cause or aim of going on a stroll.<sup>97</sup> Theon is

<sup>95</sup> Lamprias appeals to Theon as an enthusiast for and expert in poetry: e.g. “but you, always embracing and marveling at Aristarchus, do not assent to Crates’ reading: ‘Ocean, who is brought to pass as the origin of all men and gods, flows over most of the earth’” (ἀλλὰ σύ, τὸν Ἀρίσταρχον ἀγαπῶν ἀεὶ καὶ θαυμάζων, οὐκ ἀκούεις Κράτητος ἀναγινώσκοντος· “Ὠκεανός, ὅσπερ γένεσις πάντεσσι τέτυκται / ἀνδράσιν ἠδὲ θεοῖς, πλείστην ἐπὶ γαῖαν ἴησιν” [Hom. *Il.* XIV.246]; 938d). Lamprias earlier jests that if Theon were arguing, he would cite Mimnermus, Cydias, Archilochus, Stesichorus, and Pindar (931e).

<sup>96</sup> ἐγὼ τοι, ὦ Λαμπρία... ἐπιθυμῶ μὲν οὐδενὸς ἤττον ὑμῶν ἀκοῦσαι τὰ λεχθησόμενα, πρότερον δ’ ἂν ἠδέως ἀκούσαιμι περὶ τῶν οἰκεῖν λεγομένων ἐπὶ τῆς σελήνης, οὐκ εἰ κατοικοῦσί τινες ἀλλ’ εἰ δυνατόν ἐκεῖ κατοικεῖν. εἰ γὰρ οὐ δυνατόν, ἄλογον καὶ τὸ γῆν εἶναι τὴν σελήνην. δόξει γὰρ πρὸς οὐθὲν ἀλλὰ μάτην γεγονέναι μήτε καρποῦς ἐκφέρουσα μήτ’ ἀνθρώποις τισὶν ἔδραν παρέχουσα καὶ γένεσιν καὶ διαίταν, ὧν ἔνεκα καὶ ταυτην γενονένας φαμὲν κατὰ Πλάτωνα “τροφὸν ἡμετέραν, ἡμέρας τε καὶ νυκτὸς ἀτρεκῆ φύλακα καὶ δημιουργόν” (937d-e, paraphrasing *Ti.* 40b). His initial appeal (πρότερον δ’ ἂν ἠδέως ἀκούσαιμι) seems to be a play on Sulla’s (πρῶτον ἠδέως ἂν μοι δοκῶ πυνθέσθαι). Cf. Cherniss (1957): “this ‘transitional episode’ raises the philosophical question, without the answer to which the strictly astronomical conclusion could to a Platonist or Aristotelian be no complete or satisfactory explanation, and itself contains the metaphysical answer, of which the myth is, despite all its intrinsic interest, essentially a poetical embellishment” (18). Many are more negative about the discussion of habitability, however, such as Beardslee (1975: 287). Cf. Coones (1983: 364-6).

<sup>97</sup> αἴτιον λέγεται τὸ ἐξ οὗ γίνεται τι ἐνυπάρχοντος, οἷον ὁ χαλκὸς τοῦ ἀνδριάντος καὶ ὁ ἄργυρος τῆς φιάλης (*Ph.* II.3.194b24-6)... ἔτι ὡς τὸ τέλος· τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ οὗ ἔνεκα, οἷον τοῦ περιπατεῖν ἢ ὑγιαίνειν (194b31-3). See also *Metaph.* 1013a24-b4.

unsatisfied with the merely material or efficient causes for the moon's earthiness and demands an intelligent purpose.

This shift in the dialogue is strongly reminiscent of Socrates' description of his own disappointment as a young man with the explanations offered by natural scientists in the *Phaedo*. It is especially in this scene, sometimes referred to as "Socrates' autobiography," that Plato most clearly formulates his theory of teleological causation.<sup>98</sup> He presents it as a critique of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae, famous in later literature as the teacher of Pericles and other prominent Athenians of the Classical era.<sup>99</sup> After explaining his perplexity at how addition or division could be explained in a materialist paradigm—and by extension how anything "comes to be or perishes or exists"<sup>100</sup>—he finds a potential solution:

But I heard someone reading from Anaxagoras' book, as he said, and saying that intellect (νοῦς) is the ordering force and the cause (αἴτιον) of everything. I was pleased with this cause because intellect being the cause of everything seemed to me to be a good turn. I thought if it is thus, the ordering mind orders everything and sets each thing in such a way that might be best.<sup>101</sup>

Socrates expects Anaxagoras to be able to tell him first what shape the earth is, whether flat or spherical, and then "to demonstrate the cause and the necessity, saying that it is better and that it

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<sup>98</sup> Betegh (2009) argues that teleology is a broader theme in the dialogue, including in Socrates' Aesopic fable of Zeus chaining together the heads of pain and pleasure (60b-c). On teleology in ancient philosophy generally, see the essays in Rocca (2017). See also Sedley (2007).

<sup>99</sup> Plato discusses Anaxagoras as the teacher of Pericles in the *Phdr.* (270a; cf. *Alc. I* 118c), which Plutarch quotes approvingly in *Per.* (VIII.1). Diogenes Laertius also describes Euripides as his student (μαθητήν; II.10 = frg. A1 Diels).

<sup>100</sup> οὐδὲ γε δι' ὅτι ἐν γίγνεται ὡς ἐπίσταμαι, ἔτι πείθω ἑμαυτόν, οὐδ' ἄλλο οὐδὲν ἐνὶ λόγῳ δι' ὅτι γίγνεται ἢ ἀπόλλυται ἢ ἔστι, κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον τῆς μεθόδου... (97b). Cicero also appeals to the relationship between Anaxagoras and Pericles in his defense of the Academy as the best school for orators, although he also cites Demothenes as Plato's student (*Orat.* IV.15, see also *Brut.* §44).

<sup>101</sup> ἀλλὰ ἀκούσας μὲν ποτε ἐκ βιβλίου τινός, ὡς ἔφη, Ἀναξαγόρου ἀναγιγνώσκοντος, καὶ λέγοντος ὡς ἄρα νοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ διακοσμῶν τε καὶ πάντων αἴτιος, ταύτη δὴ τῇ αἰτίᾳ ἦσθην τε καὶ ἔδοξέ μοι τρόπον τινὰ εὔχεσθαι τὸν νοῦν εἶναι πάντων αἴτιον, καὶ ἡγησάμην, εἰ τοῦθ' οὕτως ἔχει, τὸν γε νοῦν κοσμοῦντα πάντα κοσμεῖν καὶ ἕκαστον τιθέναί τε ταύτη ὅπη ἂν βέλτιστα ἔχη (97b-c).

was better for it to be such a way.”<sup>102</sup> He has similar expectations for the position of the earth—if Anaxagoras could prove that it is better that it is in the center of the world, Socrates “was prepared to no longer desire any other sort of cause”<sup>103</sup>—as well as the positions, characteristics, and motions about the sun, moon, and stars.

Yet when Socrates read Anaxagoras’ book, he found discussion of physical elements such as air and aether—how they were arranged, rather than the reason why this was the best way for the intellect to arrange them. He compares the absurdity of explaining why Socrates is sitting in the Athenian prison by describing the disposition of his bones and sinews, rather than his rational decision to abide the court’s sentence.<sup>104</sup> These are not the salient cause of his sitting: although his bones and sinews might be required for the fulfillment of the salient cause, doing what he thinks is best, they are clearly not the salient causes themselves. Plato’s characterization here, however, is not charitable: the longest fragment of Anaxagoras that discusses the cosmic intellect describes its attributes in ways that imply intentionality.<sup>105</sup> Plato’s position throughout

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<sup>102</sup> ... ἐπεκδηγήσεσθαι τὴν αἰτίαν καὶ τὴν ἀνάγκην, λέγοντα τὸ ἄμεινον καὶ ὅτι αὐτὴν ἄμεινον ἦν τοιαύτην εἶναι (97e). Scolnicov (2017): “Plato is careful with his words, throughout this passage as elsewhere. In the sensible world there is only a better, at most a best; never a good *tout court*” (52). The origin of this concern for what is better, if pre-Platonic, is difficult to discern. According to Simplicius, the natural philosopher Diogenes of Apollonia concludes a description of the role of “intelligence” (νῆσις) in dividing seasons, time, and weather with a general teleological claim: “One would discover, if he wished to consider it, that the other things too are disposed thus, as beautifully as possible” (καὶ τὰ ἄλλα, εἴ τις βούλεται ἐννοεῖσθαι, εὐρίσκοι ἂν οὕτω διακείμενα ὡς ἀνυστὸν κάλλιστα; frg. B3 Diels). Sider (2005), for instance, characterizes Diogenes, as compared to Anaxagoras, as truly teleological, because he provides not only many outright references to god, but also “the Panglossian notion of the ‘best of all possible worlds’ which Socrates found lacking in Anaxagoras” (130). Sedley (2007) argues that the context of the fragment, however, reveals that it is limited to the disposition of air, such that “we can see that no Panglossian teleology is here being formulated. And that fits with the fact that, when Diogenes later turns to discussing physical details such as the distribution of veins in the human body, he uses a style of discourse which in no degree whatsoever anticipates the teleological descriptions of the human body’s internal structure later pioneered by Plato and developed further by Aristotle and Galen” (77). Rather, Sedley argues that Socrates himself, as depicted by Xenophon (especially *Mem.* I.4), developed a “radically unconventional theology” that includes teleological design (80). Cf. *Mem.* I.1.11-2, 16; Jaeger (1947: 167-71). Bydén (2009), however, casts doubt on the historical assumptions that would allow these ideas in Xenophon to be attributed back to Socrates himself.

<sup>103</sup> παρεσκευάσμεν ὡς οὐκέτι ποθεσόμενος αἰτίας ἄλλο εἶδος (98a).

<sup>104</sup> 98b-9a. “It would be very strange to call such things causes” (ἀλλ’ αἰτία μὲν τὰ τοιαῦτα καλεῖν λίαν ἄτοπον; 99a).

<sup>105</sup> It is described as “limitless and self-ruling and mixed with no thing, but it is alone itself unto itself” (νοῦς δὲ ἐστὶν ἄπειρον καὶ αὐτοκρατὲς καὶ μέμεικτα οὐδενὶ χρήματι, ἀλλὰ μόνος αὐτὸς ἐπ’ ἑωυτοῦ ἐστίν; frg. B12 Diels). Its

the corpus is ultimately, however, more sympathetic than just Socrates' intellectual autobiography in the *Phaedo*. At one point in the *Philebus*, as Sedley emphasizes, Socrates divides philosophers such that he belongs to the lineage of Anaxagoras:

Is it the case, Protarchus, that we should say that the power of the irrational and the random and the coincidental governs everything and that which is called the whole, or is the opposite, just as those that came before us claimed, that intellect (νοῦν) and some wonderful judgement (φρόνησίν) arrange and steer them?<sup>106</sup>

power is described partly through its purity—"for it is the lightest and purest of all things"—as well as its knowledge of everything and superlative strength (ἔστι γὰρ λεπτότατόν τε πάντων χρημάτων καὶ καθαρότατον, καὶ γνώμην γε περὶ παντὸς πάσαν ἴσχει καὶ ἰσχύει μέγιστον; B12). This knowledge, which seems tied together with its strength, indeed extends to everything: "And Nous gave heed to all the things coming together, separating out, and breaking up; and whatever sorts of things were to be—what were no longer, what are, and what will be—Nous put all in order, as well as this revolution through which now revolve the stars, sun, moon, air and aether which separate out" καὶ τὰ συμμιγόμενα τε καὶ ἀποκρινόμενα καὶ διακρινόμενα πάντα ἔγνω νοῦς· καὶ ὅποια ἔμελλεν ἔσεσθαι—καὶ ὅποια ἦν ἄσσα νῦν μὴ ἔστι, καὶ ὅποια ἔμελλεν ἔσεσθαι—πάντα διεκόσμησε νοῦς, καὶ τὴν περιχώρησιν ταύτην, ἣν νῦν περιχωρεῖ τὰ τε ἄστρα καὶ ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἡ σελήνη καὶ ὁ ἀήρ καὶ ὁ αἰθήρ οἱ ἀποκρινόμενοι (B12; trans. Sider). The cosmogony, moreover, had a distinct beginning (ἀρχήν), when the cosmic intellect "took control of the entire vortex" (καὶ τῆς περιχωρήσιος τῆς συμπάσης νοῦς ἐκράτησεν...), which in turn separates things out (B12). See further B13-4. On the sometimes ambiguous referent of intellect throughout the fragment: Schofield (1980: 15-22). The cosmic intellect's knowledge, stretching back and forth in time, implies some sort of deliberate purpose or cogitation, but it is not clear why or to what end. Sedley (2007) argues that this intellect separates out matter in a particular way so as to create the perfect conditions for the seeds of life to sprout, like a gardener. His argument builds on his interpretation of multiple worlds in "with the same kind of flora and fauna as ours, including human civilization as we know it" (17): "When intelligence creates worlds, it designedly constructs them so as to be hospitable to agricultural civilizations like Anaxagoras's own. It not only sets up the original hothouse conditions in which the ubiquitous seeds will germinate, but also provides the right heavenly bodies to serve the vital agricultural needs of the humans who will emerge from the primeval earth" (22). He argues further but more speculatively that the human agriculture in B4 is a microcosm. Because *nous* "regards humans as, among all living creatures, the best vehicles for *nous* itself to occupy," it "constructs and, as it were, farms worlds primarily in order to generate human beings" (24). But even if this is so, Anaxagoras is only arguing descriptively about how the intellect orders, and not explicitly why this sort of world is the preferable than a world where the intellect had ordered things differently. Similarly, Marmodoro (2017): "I submit the good *is* part of Anaxagoras's ontology through the presence and operation of the *nous*, but its modus operandi is less explicit than in subsequent teleological systems, such as e.g., Plato's or Aristotle's" (144-5). Cf. Jaeger (1947): "The concept of *telos*, to be sure, belongs primarily to Socraticism; but that which Socraticism seeks in everything—the good, the intelligible, and the perfect—is already virtually present in Anaxagoras' *diakosmeisis* and the idea of order which it involves" (164). The scholarship on the specifics of Anaxagoras' system, however, is sharply divided on basic issues, such as what the basic things in the system are or how they relate. Teodorsson (1996), for instance, surveys many opinions on "the role of the σπέρματα in the system" (45-64). The paucity of fragments—helpfully commented on at length by Sider (2005)—make speculation rather difficult, and what does pertain to νοῦς (B11-4) leaves open various questions, including whether it is material—e.g. Cleve (1973: 38-9)—or immaterial—cf. Teodorsson (1982: 90-1), Sedley (2007: 12). Sedley and Marmodoro both take the "seeds" in B4a-b to be biological, following, among others, Schofield (1980), who argues that they are "like the seed of an animal or plant, a germ which contains a variety of substances (flesh, hair, blood) each of which gradually manifests itself as the organism develops" (123). On Anaxagoras' famous *dictum* "in everything there is a share of everything" (ἐν παντί παντὸς μοῖρα ἔνεστιν), cf. Porph. *Sent.* X.

<sup>106</sup> πότερον, ὦ Πρωταρχε, τὰ σύμπαντα καὶ τόδε τὸ καλούμενον ὄλον ἐπιτροπεύειν φῶμεν τὴν τοῦ ἀλόγου καὶ εἰκῆ δύναμιν καὶ τὸ ὅπῃ ἔτυχεν, ἢ τὰναντία, καθάπερ οἱ πρόσθεν ἡμῶν ἔλεγον, νοῦν καὶ φρόνησίν τινα θαυμαστὴν συντάττουσαν διακυβερνᾶν (28d); Sedley (2007: 1n2, 8n27). On this, see Sedley (2003: 92, 118). This lineage seems reflected in the ordering of book II of Diogenes Laertius: Anaxagoras and his student Archelaus precede

Socrates and his companion heartily affirm their agreement with their forbearers (τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν) on this broad-level issue, it would seem with Anaxagoras among them. Yet Plato's criticism for the Anaxagorean system despite this broader agreement is nevertheless substantial. In the *Leges*, Plato refers approvingly to “some who even then dared to posit this very thing, that intellect (νοῦς) is what has ordered everything that is in the heavens,” although the Athenian Stranger still charges him with misunderstanding the nature of the soul and consequently filling the heavens with soulless things like stones “to distribute the causes of the whole world.”<sup>107</sup> It is evidently this notion, along with his explanations of phenomena such as meteorites and earthquakes, that left him open to the charge of atheism or impiety in Athenian public discourse.<sup>108</sup> Plato, nevertheless, favored the impetus behind Anaxagoras' notion of intelligence as the cause of the disposition of the world, but finds his mechanical explanations to be ethically

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Socrates and his student Xenophon. At one point in book I, he argues that philosophy was born with Anaxagoras' adaptation of Linus (§4, cf. 12-4). In what would be a simultaneously development, Betegh (2014) distinguishes the Dervini papyrus from Philolaus by the exact issue of teleology: “The main character in the Derveni author's cosmogony is the demiurgic divine Mind: it is Mind who forms the sun, thereby organizing the cosmos in a teleological way, and who purposefully bridles the heat of fire and demarcates individual entities” (165).

<sup>107</sup> καὶ τινες ἐτόλμων τοῦτο γε αὐτὸ παρακινδυνεύειν καὶ τοτέ, λέγοντες ὡς νοῦς εἶη ὁ διακεκοσμηκῶς πάνθ' ὅσα κατ' οὐρανόν. οἱ δὲ αὐτοὶ πάλιν ἀμαρτάνοντες ψυχῆς φύσεως... τὰ κατ' οὐρανὸν φερόμενα μεστὰ εἶναι λίθων καὶ γῆς καὶ πολλῶν ἄλλων ἀνύχων σωμάτων διανεμόντων τὰς αἰτίας παντὸς κόσμου (XII.967b-c). He explains this as the cause of charges of atheism and the slanders (λοιδορήσεις) of the poets. Further on allusions to Anaxagoras in the *Leg.*, see Yunis (1988: 36n16). Cf. Plut. *Per.*: “Anaxagoras, whom men once called *Nous*, either because they marveled at his great and manifestly remarkable intelligence for natural philosophy or because he was the first to establish not chance or necessity as the principle of ordering the entire world, but *nous*, pure and unmixed...” (ὄν οἱ τότε ἄνθρωποι Νοῦν προσηγόρευον, εἴτε τὴν σύνεσιν αὐτοῦ μεγάλην εἰς φυσιολογίαν καὶ περιττὴν διαφανεῖσαν θαυμάσαντες, εἴθ' ὅτι τοῖς ὅλοις πρῶτος οὐ τύχην οὐδ' ἀνάγκην διακοσμήσεως ἀρχὴν, ἀλλὰ νοῦν ἐπέστησε καθαρὸν καὶ ἄκρατον...; IV.6).

<sup>108</sup> Thus in *Pl. Ap.*, when Meletus accuses Socrates of “saying that the sun is a stone and the moon is earth,” he responds, “Do you think you are charging Anaxagoras, dear Meletus?” (“μὰ δὲ ὧ ἄνδρες δικασταί, ἐπεὶ τὸν μὲν ἥλιον λίθον φησὶν εἶναι, τὴν δὲ σελήνην γῆν.” “Ἀναξαγόρου οἶε κατηγορεῖν, ὃ φίλε Μέλιτε;” 26d). He emphatically concludes, “... the books of Anaxagoras of Clazomenae are full of these accounts” (τὰ Ἀναξαγόρου βιβλία τοῦ Κλαζομενίου γέμει τούτων τῶν λόγων; 26d). Anaxagoras seems to have been formally accused of impiety (*asebeia*), although the sources are not clear about the details—Diogenes Laertius surveys the accounts of four historians (II.12-4). Yunis (1988), however, argues that there is insufficient evidence that Anaxagoras was actually tried, but perhaps only threatened (66-8). Cf. Plut. *De superst.* 169f, Teodorsson (1982: 7n2).

insufficient for his sense of teleology.<sup>109</sup> In the language of the *Timaeus*, “it is necessary to distinguish two sorts of causes, necessary (ἀναγκαῖον) and divine (θεῖον).”<sup>110</sup>

Plutarch similarly depicts an evolution in the ability to explain causes that begins with Anaxagoras and culminates in Plato.<sup>111</sup> This approach to natural causation arises frequently in discussions of reactions to eclipses in the *Vitae*.<sup>112</sup> In the *Nicias*, he explains that the doomed leader’s frenzied and superstitious reaction to an eclipse could have been averted through the sort of philosophical understanding of what is happening that, as Plutarch describes in another *Vita*, Plato gave to Dion.<sup>113</sup> Eclipses were strange and difficult to comprehend, at least before the advent of natural philosophy:

The first to most clearly and bravely set an account of the bright shining and shadow of the moon into writing was Anaxagoras—but he was neither ancient nor was his account popular, so it proceeded as a secret still, through only a few and with some caution rather than trust. But they would not suffer the natural philosophers and star-gazers, as they

<sup>109</sup> Plato’s specific complaint in the *Leg.* is that the soul is made to be posterior (νεώτερον) to body, rather than soul prior (πρεσβύτερον) to body (XII.967c). Part of Plotinus’ criticism is that Anaxagoras did not “make intellect prior to matter, but simultaneous” (νοῦν... ποιῶν οὐδὲ πρότερον τῆς ὕλης ἀλλ’ ἅμα; II.6.7), which makes more sense as a criticism of e.g. frg. B1 than Plato’s in the *Leg.*, if it is indeed aimed at Anaxagoras and not another thinker.

<sup>110</sup> διὸ δὴ χρὴ δὴ αἰτίας εἶδη διορίζεσθαι, τὸ μὲν ἀναγκαῖον, τὸ δὲ θεῖον (68e). Cf. Natali (2013: 43n15).

<sup>111</sup> On Anaxagoras in Plutarch generally, see Hershbell (1982). Cf. Porter (2010): “But Plutarch’s criticisms are far gentler than Plato’s” (80n11).

<sup>112</sup> When an eclipse occurred as Dion was sailing to drive out Dionysius from Syracuse, in contrast, he was able to sail on undisturbed (οὐδὲν διαταραχθεὶς ἀνήχθη) and accomplish his purpose (§6). Plutarch describes the episode in more detail in *Dion* XXIII-XXX. In *Conj. prae.*, part of Plutarch’s advice for women to be philosophically educated is so that, if a woman hears someone claim the ability to draw down the moon, her knowledge of astronomy will cause her to “laugh at the ignorance and stupidity of women who believe such things” (ἂν δὲ τις ἐπαγγέλληται καθαιρεῖν τὴν σελήνην, γελάσεται τὴν ἀμαθίαν καὶ τὴν ἀβελτερίαν τῶν ταῦτα πειθομένων γυναικῶν; 145c-d). See also Cleom. 208.3-6. Further on eclipses: Brenk (1977: 45-47), Brenk (2017: 24). Given the persistent (ancient and modern) popularity of Aristotle’s fourfold distinction of causation, it might be surprising the Plutarch omits any mention of him here, but this reflects his characteristic approach of interpreting Plato through Plato. Cicero also plays with the idea in his *Resp.*, where Laelius initially rebukes the men for speculating on the portent of a *alter sol* appearing in the sky—“are our affairs, what pertains to our homes and to our republic, already sufficiently understood, since you strive for what is conducted in the heavens?” (*iam explorata nobis sunt ea, quae ad domos nostras quaeque ad rem publicam pertineant, siquidem, quid agatur in caelo, quaerimus*; I.13.19). See also Xen., *Mem.* I.1.12). Scipio offers a positive example of how using knowledge from an Archimedean globe (I.14.22), Gaius Sulpicius Gallus freed soldiers in Macedonia from empty superstition and fear (*inanem religionem timoremque*; I.15.23-4). Scipio also appeals to the example of Anaxagoras and Pericles (I.16.25).

<sup>113</sup> “... the moon was eclipsed in the night, and a great fear came to Nicias and to the rest of those struck by ignorance or superstition at these things” (ἐξέλιπεν ἡ σελήνη τῆς νυκτός, μέγα δέος τῷ Νικίᾳ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τοῖς ὑπ’ ἀπειρίας ἢ δεισιδαιμονίας ἐκπεπληγμένοις τὰ τοιαῦτα; XXIII.1). Thucydides describes Nicias as “disposed” (προσκεείμενος) to “excessive superstition” (ἄγαν θειασμῶ; VII.50.4), which Plutarch quotes in *Nic.* IV.1; he is even harsher in *De Superst.* (169a-b), but gentler in *De malign. Hdt.* (855b). Cf. Brenk (1977: 42-5).

were then called, because they wear down the divine into irrational causes and powers outside of providence and constrictive states.<sup>114</sup>

Anaxagoras could provide at least some explanation of phenomena like eclipses, but his teaching did not pass far beyond a few such as Pericles. Rather, Plutarch continues, he incurred the wrath of the common people to such an extent that his friend could only just save him; Protagoras suffered the threat of trial from the animosity, and “Socrates, who took part in none of these things, nevertheless died for the sake of philosophy.”<sup>115</sup> But then: “At long last, the reputation of Plato shines forth through the life of the man, and, because he subjected physical necessities to divine and more authoritative powers, he removed the criticism of these accounts and granted the path to everyone through his teachings.”<sup>116</sup> While as Anaxagoras had only reached a small audience, Plato laid open the nature of causation for all to potentially understand. Plutarch implicitly accepts the criticism of Anaxagoras in the *Phaedo* and emphasizes the mechanistic perception of his explanations.<sup>117</sup> Plato did not do away with these sorts of causes, but rather subordinated them to higher—meaning divine, intelligent, and providential—causes.

An anecdote about Anaxagoras, in the course of the description of Pericles’ teachers in his biography, further illustrates what Plutarch sees as the relationship between these sorts of

<sup>114</sup> ὁ γὰρ πρῶτος σαφέστατον τε πάντων καὶ θαρραλεώτατον περὶ σελήνης καταυγασμῶν καὶ σκιάς λόγον εἰς γραφὴν καταθέμενος Ἀναξαγόρας οὔτ’ αὐτὸς ἦν παλαιὸς οὔθ’ ὁ λόγος ἐνδοξος, ἀλλ’ ἀπόρητος ἔτι καὶ δι’ ὀλίγων καὶ μετ’ εὐλαβείας τινὸς ἢ πίστεως βαδίζων. οὐ γὰρ ἠνεύχοντο τοὺς φυσικοὺς καὶ μετεωρολέσχας τότε καλουμένους, ὡς εἰς αἰτίας ἀλόγους καὶ δυνάμεις ἀπρονοήτους καὶ κατηναγκασμένα πάθη διατρίβοντας τὸ θεῖον, ... (XXIII.3-4).

<sup>115</sup> καὶ Σωκράτης, οὐδὲν αὐτῶ τῶν γε τοιούτων προσῆκον, ὅμος ἀπώλετο διὰ φιλοσοφίαν (XXIII.4).

<sup>116</sup> ὄψε δ’ ἡ Πλάτωνος ἐκλάμψασα δόξα διὰ τὸν βίον τοῦ ἀνδρός, καὶ ὅτι ταῖς θεαῖς καὶ κυριωτέραις ἀρχαῖς ὑπέταξε τὰς φυσικὰς ἀνάγκας, ἀφεῖλε τὴν τῶν λόγων τούτων διαβολὴν καὶ τοῖς μαθήμασιν εἰς ἅπαντας ὁδὸν ἐνέδωκεν (XXIII.5).

<sup>117</sup> Proclus similarly adopts Plato’s depiction of Anaxagoras in the *Phd.* (*In Tim.* I.2.11-5). Hermias argues that Socrates criticizes certain myth rationalizers in *Phdr.* 229c-e for this same reason (*In Phdr.* 30.9-1.2 Couvreur): “For this is the same interpretation as those wise men present, namely those who toil away on physical things, and it is precarious and probabilistic: for they do not turn toward what is actually existent, but elements of nature and winds and airs and whirlpools, as he says in the *Phd.* (αὕτη γὰρ ἡ ἀνάπτυξις ὡς ἀναπτύσσουσιν οἱ σοφοί, τουτέστιν οἱ περὶ τὰ φυσικὰ διατρίβαντες, γλίσχρος ἐστὶ καὶ εἰκοτολογία· οὐ γὰρ ἐπὶ τὰ ὄντως ὄντα ἀνατρέχουσιν, ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ φύσεις καὶ πνεύματα καὶ <ἀέρας> καὶ δῖνας, ὡς ἐν <Φαίδωνι> ἔφη; 30.20-3).

causes.<sup>118</sup> Although the statesman had several teachers, the man from Clazomenae “accompanied Pericles the most and most conferred dignity and a mind weightier than demagoguery, and helped to raise the honor of his character to the heavens.”<sup>119</sup> The effect of the philosopher’s influence that Plutarch emphasizes most was to remove superstitious fear in favor of “piety” through explanations of the “causes of things.”<sup>120</sup> He further illustrates what sort of physical explanations they are through a story (λέγεται δέ ποτε) of a conflict over the interpretation of a portent, a one-horned ram, that was brought to Pericles.<sup>121</sup> A prominent seer, Lampon, interpreted it to mean that which of the two prominent politicians in the city, Pericles and Thucydides, that received the sign would be the one to receive sole power; Anaxagoras, on the other hand, cut the

<sup>118</sup> Plutarch’s *Per.* ascribes several teachers to the great statesman, such as Damon, whose talents were either in music or dangerous sophistry, and Zeno the Eleatic, who studied both nature and practiced a sort of art of refutation (ἐλεγκτικὴν) through contradiction (διὰ ἀντιλογίας; IV.1-5). Plutarch claims that Damon “slinked away and hid under the name of music” (καταδύεσθαι μὲν εἰς τὸ τῆς μουσικῆς ὄνομα; §2) but was eventually found out and “ostracized for his ambition and desire for tyranny” (μεγαλοπράγμων καὶ φιλοτύραννος ἐξωστρακίσθη; §3). Cf. §1 (= Arist. frg. 401 Rose). Despite the role of these teachers in Pericles’ education—scientific, rhetorical, and ethical—Xenophon (2016), whose monograph is dedicated largely to “ethical education” in the *Vitae*, omits any discussion of Pericles’ teachers.

<sup>119</sup> ὁ δὲ πλεῖστα Περικλεῖ συγγενόμενος καὶ μάλιστα περιθειὲς ὄγκον αὐτῷ καὶ φρόνημα δημαγωγίας ἐμβριθέστερον, ὅλως τε μετωρίας καὶ συνεξάρας τὸ ἀξίωμα τοῦ ἥθους, Ἀναξαγόρας \*ἦν ὁ Κλαζομένοις, ... (IV.6). Pericles’ “proud mind and lofty speech” (φρόνημα σοβαρὸν καὶ τὸν λόγον ὑψηλὸν) is described as the result of admiring and being filled with Anaxagoras’ “meteorology” (μετεωρολογίας καὶ μεταρσιολογίας; V.1). Plutarch later addresses the disparity between Anaxagoras’ asceticism and Pericles’ wealthy household by distinguishing “the life of theoretical philosophy and the life of politics” (θεωρητικοῦ φιλοσόφου καὶ πολιτικοῦ βίος; XVI.6).

<sup>120</sup> “Pericles enjoyed the companionship of Anaxagoras not only in these respects, but he also seems to have become superior to superstition, which terror in the face of the things above produces in those who do not know the causes of these things, who are maddened about the divine, and terrified through their ignorance. The physical account removes this fear, and produces stable piety with good expectations in the place of fearful, swelling superstition” (οὐ μόνον δὲ ταῦτα τῆς Ἀναξαγόρου συνουσίας ἀπέλαυσε Περικλῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ δεισιδαιμονίας δοκεῖ γενέσθαι καθυπέρτερος, ἦν τὸ πρὸς τὰ μετέωρα θάμβος ἐνεργάζεται τοῖς αὐτῶν τε τούτων τὰς αἰτίας ἀγνοοῦσι καὶ περὶ τὰ θεῖα δαιμονῶσι καὶ ταραττομένοις δι’ ἀπειρίαν αὐτῶν, ἦν ὁ φυσικὸς λόγος ἀπαλλάττων ἀντὶ τῆς φοβερᾶς καὶ φλεγμαιοῦσης δεισιδαιμονίας τὴν ἀσφαλῆ μετ’ ἐλπίδων ἀγαθῶν εὐσέβειαν ἐνεργάζεται; VI.1). Anaxagoras predicted, for instance, that meteorites, as pieces of fiery rock that break off from celestial bodies, could fall to earth shortly before one actually did at Aegospotami: Diog. Laert. II.10; Plut. *Lys.* 12.2-4.

<sup>121</sup> Historians tend to dismiss this passage. Holden (1894), for instance, disdainfully deems the details “trifling events” (xlili). Similarly, Yunis (1988): “if there is no kernel of truth in the patently fictitious elaboration, the story may have been invented to explain a conflict between the two” (69). Cf. Flower (2008: 119). Stadter (1989), however, emphasizes the importance of teleology (86). Jacobs (2018) clarifies the connection to Pericles’ attempt to calm his men during an eclipse (XXXV.1-2): “to calm his steersman, Pericles holds his cloak over the man’s eyes and convinces him that the darkness is simply caused by something larger... As elsewhere in the *Lives*, the eclipse foreshadows an important reversal—in this case, the upcoming plague and actions to remove Pericles from office and find him” (136n26).



skull open and showed that there was a deformity in the brain that explained the single horn.<sup>122</sup>

Plutarch concludes by distinguishing the sort of cause each was identifying:

But nothing was preventing it from being the case, I think, that both the natural philosopher and the seer hit the mark: but the former understood the cause (*αἰτίαν*), while the latter beautifully understood the end (*τέλος*). For it is proper for the former to contemplate from what it comes and how is it disposed by nature, while it is proper for the latter to proclaim for what purpose it comes about and what it signifies.<sup>123</sup>

Divine causation in the world of becoming, such as what is at play in divination, does not act through purely immaterial causes, but rather rely on the same sorts of material causation as anything else in this world. Rather than disproving the divine causation, Anaxagoras simply explains the manner in which it manifests.<sup>124</sup> The two sorts of explanation, the physical cause and the final cause, can evidently function complementarily, as Plutarch similarly argues in the biography of Dion.<sup>125</sup>

In *De defectu*, Lamprias further emphasizes the role of not just final causes, but also physical ones. He had earlier proposed exhalations from beneath the earth, an idea he attributes

<sup>122</sup> VI.2. According to Plutarch, Pericles sent Lampon as one of the colonists of Thurii (Λάμπωνα δὲ Θουρίων οικιστὴν ἐξέπεμψεν; *Prae. ger. reip.* 812d). Aristophanes uses the term Θουριομάντις in a list of comic synonyms for charlatan in *Nub.* (332) and the scholia explains that of the ten colonists, “Lampon the seer was going to be the exegete for the foundation of the city” (ὦν καὶ Λάμπων ἦν ὁ μάντις ἐξηγητὴς ἐσόμενος τῆς κτίσεως τῆς πόλεως; 332a). See further Dillery (2005: 195-8), Flower (2008: 122-4), Dillon (2017: 104-5), and Foster (2017: 136-7).

<sup>123</sup> ἐκόλυε δ’ οὐδὲν, οἶμαι, καὶ τὸν φυσικὸν ἐπιτυχάνειν καὶ τὸν μάντιν, τοῦ μὲν τὴν αἰτίαν, τοῦ δὲ τὸ τέλος καλῶς ἐκλαμβάνοντος. ὑπέκειτο γὰρ τῷ μὲν, ἐκ τίνων γέγονε καὶ πῶς πέφυκε θεωρῆσαι, τῷ δὲ, πρὸς τί γέγονε καὶ τί σημαίνει προεἰπεῖν (VI.4). Although Anaxagoras was met with immediate awe, Plutarch writes, Lampon overtook him once the prediction was fulfilled and Thucydides fell from power (VI.3). Hardie (1992) compares the Stoic “*theologia tripertita*” (4760).

<sup>124</sup> Plutarch argues this general principle by comparing sorts of indirect human signification: “Those who say that the discovery of the cause is the removal of the sign are not aware that, along with the divine signs, they are removing artificial ones as well—the sounds of gongs, the lights of torches, the shadows cast upon sun-dials. Each of these has been made a sign of something by some cause and construction. But perhaps these are matters for another treatise” (οἱ δὲ τῆς αἰτίας τὴν εὔρεσιν ἀναίρεσιν εἶναι σημείου λέγοντες οὐκ ἐπινοοῦσιν ἅμα τοῖς θείοις καὶ τὰ τεχνητὰ τῶν συμβόλων ἀθετοῦντες, ψόφους τε δίσκων καὶ φῶτα πυρσῶν καὶ γνωμόνων ἀποσκιασμούς· ὦν ἕκαστον αἰτία τινὶ καὶ κατασκευῇ σημείου εἶναι τινος πεποίηται. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἴσως ἐτέρας ἐστὶ πραγματείας; VI.5).

<sup>125</sup> Dion and his circle were unfazed by the occurrence of an eclipse (θαυμαστὸν οὐδὲν), because they reasoned through (λογιζομένοις) the regular, astronomical cause (XXIV.1); but the men were terrified, so a seer (μάντις), Miltas, bade them to realize that the divine (τὸ δαμόνιον) was signaling (σημαίνειν) the eclipse of another shining thing (§2): Dionysius’ tyranny (§3). Cf. §4-10. In another *Vita*, Plutarch describes Aemilius Paulus as “not entirely unaware or ignorance of the irregularities of eclipses” (οὐκ ἦν μὲν ἀνήκοος οὐδ’ ἄπειρος παντάπασι τῶν ἐκλειπτικῶν ἀνωμαλιῶν; XVII.9), but his love of sacrifice and prophetic ability (φιλοθύτης ὦν καὶ μαντικός) guide him (§10-13).

to the Peripatetics, as the source of “mantic vapors” that inspire the Pythia’s ability for prophecy, but Ammonius objects that it seems strange (δεινὸν) to attribute this to “what is set down by chance and automatically” rather than “to god and providence.”<sup>126</sup> Lamprias replies by evoking Plato as his “witness and advocate” (μάρτυρα καὶ σύνδικον), alluding to the *Phaedo*:

That man faulted Anaxagoras of old for being excessively entangled in the physical causes and always pursues and seeking what is accomplished by the incidents of bodies according to necessity; but he removed the questions “for what end?” and “by whom?,” which are better causes and principles.<sup>127</sup>

Lamprias echoes Plutarch’s inherited criticism, but he also alleges fault against the other sort of thinker, represented by “the very old theologians and poets,” who “choose to only pay attention to the greater cause... no longer heeding necessary and physical causes.”<sup>128</sup> This incompleteness on each side remains until Plato combines each sort of causation in one schema:

He [Plato] himself was the first to fully carry out both, or the greatest of the philosophers to do so: he assigns the source of things disposed according to reason to the god, but he does not strip the matter from the necessary causes in the face of generation. Rather, he realizes that the entire sensible world, even arranged in a certain sort of way, is neither pure nor unmixed, but it takes its generation from matter plaited together with reason.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>126</sup> περὶ μαντικῶν πνευμάτων... (434b); δεινὸν ἡγοῦμαι μὴ θεῶ καὶ προνοία τὴν εὐρεσιν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀρχὴν ἀλλὰ τῶ κατὰ τύχην καὶ αὐτομάτως ἀνατίθεσθαι (436d-e). Lamprias presents his response as a pious search for probability: “It has not just roused me, Philip but also confounded me, if I should seem, in the presence of you all, so many men of such an age, to pride myself on the plausible in my argument inappropriately for my age, while removing and shaking up what has been thought truthfully and piously about the divine” (ἐμὲ δ’... οὐ κεκίνηκεν, ὃ Φίλιππε, μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ συγκέχυκεν, εἰ ἐν τοσούτοις καὶ τηλικούτοι οὖσιν ὑμῖν δοκῶ παρ’ ἡλικίαν τῶ πιθανῶ τοῦ λόγου καλλωπιζόμενος ἀναιρεῖν τι καὶ κινεῖν τῶν ἀληθῶς καὶ ὁσίας περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ νενομισμένων; 436e). He argues further that exhalations (ἀναθυμίασιν) are not stable but wax and wane, which explains the variability in the shrine (434b-c, 437c). In Cic. *Div.*, Quintus proposes a similar phenomenon (*diuino afflatu*; I.19.38), but Marcus replies incredulously (II.67.117-8).

<sup>127</sup> ἐκεῖνος γὰρ ὁ ἀνὴρ Ἀναξαγόραν μὲν ἐμέμψατο τὸν παλαιόν, ὅτι ταῖς φυσικαῖς ἄγαν ἐνδεδεμένος αἰτίαις καὶ τὸ κατ’ ἀνάγκην τοῖς τῶν σωμάτων ἀποτελούμενον πάθεσι μετιῶν ἀεὶ καὶ διώκων, τὸ οὐ ἔνεκα καὶ ὑφ’ οὐ, βελτίονας αἰτίας οὔσας καὶ ἀρχάς, ἀφῆκεν (435e-f).

<sup>128</sup> οἱ μὲν σφόδρα παλαιοὶ θεολόγοι καὶ ποιηταὶ τῇ κρείττονι μόνῃ τὸν νοῦν προσεῖχον... ταῖς δ’ ἀναγκαίαις καὶ φυσικαῖς οὐκέτι προσήεσαν αἰτίαις (436d). Lamprias characterizes this group as applying a line of *Orphica* (frg. 21a.2 Kern = *OF* 31 Bernabé) as common to all things (τοῦτο δὴ τὸ κοινὸν ἐπιφθεγγόμενοι πᾶσι πράγμασι): “Zeus is the beginning, Zeus is the middle, all things from Zeus” (Ζεὺς ἀρχὴ Ζεὺς μέσσα, Διὸς δ’ ἐκ πάντα πέλονται). Lamprias presents the younger natural scientists (νεώτεροι... φυσικοὶ) as a sort of overcorrection, such that each side was “deficient in what is proper” (ἀμφοτέροις ὁ λόγος ἐνδείης τοῦ προσήκοντός ἐστι; 436e).

<sup>129</sup> αὐτὸς δὲ πρῶτος ἢ μάλιστα τῶν φιλοσόφων ἀμφοτέρας ἐπεξήληθε, τῶ μὲν θεῶ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀποδιδοῦς τῶν κατὰ λόγον ἐχόντων, οὐκ ἀποστερῶν δὲ τὴν ὕλην τῶν ἀναγκαίων πρὸς τὸ γινόμενον αἰτιῶν, ἀλλὰ συνορῶν, ὅτι τῆδὲ καὶ τὸ πᾶν αἰσθητὸν διακεκοσμημένον οὐ καθαρὸν οὐδ’ ἀμιγές ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ τῆς ὕλης συμπλεκόμενης τῶ λόγῳ λαμβάνει τὴν γένεσιν (435f-6a). See further 436e-7a. Lamprias also uses an extended comparison with craftsmanship (436a-d).

A complete account of any phenomenon in the physical world, Lamprias argues, must address both the arrangement of material itself and the reason for which it is arranged in such a way.<sup>130</sup> In all of these discussions of causation, Plutarch treats Plato as the first philosopher to identify what a complete account would require, evidently in Socrates' critique of Anaxagoras in the *Phaedo*.

This conception of teleological explanation is also the crux of the epistemology of *De facie*. Theon forces the group to grapple with a more general but more substantial question: what does it matter what the moon is made out of, what purpose does its material allow it serve in the machinery of the world? The assumption is that the world—especially at the highest level of earth, moon, and stars—is ordered by a cosmic intelligence whose plan is the final cause.<sup>131</sup> As a result, it would be unbecoming if the moon's earthiness, if that does describe its material composition accurately, served no greater purpose. Theon thus objects that the earthy moon most have a purpose, such as to provide habitation and sustenance, like the earth (or Socrates' "true earth"). Lamprias takes the objection seriously and responds with a two-fold argument: if any given place is inhabitable, it can still serve a variety of purposes;<sup>132</sup> and it is possible that the moon is in fact habitable, despite Theon's mockery of some questionable possibilities for its

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<sup>130</sup> Cf. Oakensmith (1902): "The blank between the Creator and His creatures is occupied, therefore, partly by natural causes, partly by the Daemons, whose existence and mode of operation are now involved in the working of natural causes regarded as under their superintendence, and now appear as supernatural agencies vaguely dependent upon the will of the Supreme Power" (162).

<sup>131</sup> The Pyrrhonic sceptic Sextus Empiricus opposed this kind of causation in particular, and instead proposed that the dogmatist should be asked the cause of the antecedent cause, such as to throw them in a state of infinite regress (εις ἄπειρον ἐκπεσεῖται; *Pyrr.* I.186). Cf. Diog. Laert. IX.99; Barnes (1990: 2654); Arist. *Met. α*.

<sup>132</sup> "I said, ... 'To start straight-away then, it is not necessary, if humans do not dwell on the moon, that it came about in vain and for no purpose. For we see that the entire earth is not productive of occupied either, but just a small part is productive of animals and plants, as if in some points or peninsulas rising from the depths, but of the others, there are parts that are desolate and fruitless due to winters and droughts, but most have sunk under the sea'" (... ἔφην, ... "εὐθὺς οὖν τὸ πρῶτον οὐκ ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστιν, εἰ μὴ κατοικοῦσιν ἄνθρωποι τὴν σελήνην, μάτην γεγονέναι καὶ πρὸς μηθέν. οὐδὲ γὰρ τήνδε τὴν γῆν δι' ὅλης ἐνεργὸν οὐδὲ προσοικουμένην ὁρῶμεν, ἀλλὰ μικρὸν αὐτῆς μέρος ὥσπερ ἄκροισι τισὶν ἢ χερρονήσοις ἀνέχουσιν ἐκ βυθοῦ γόνιμόν ἐστι ζώων καὶ φυτῶν, τῶν δ' ἄλλων τὰ μὲν ἔρημα καὶ ἄκαρπα χειμῶσι καὶ αὐχμοῖς, τὰ δὲ πλεῖστα κατὰ τῆς μεγάλης δέδουκε θαλάσσης; 938c-d).

inhabitants.<sup>133</sup> In both cases, Lamprias is insistent that his earthy moon has a significant role in the cosmos. His final argument for the moon as a place of habitation, however, appeals to skepticism by adapting an image from Socrates' myth in the *Phaedo*:

But we do not see these things, nor that another place, nature, or climate is fitting for them. As if, then, we were unable to approach the sea and to touch it, but only beholding the sight of it from afar and learning that it is bitter, undrinkable, and briny water: someone might say how 'it rears many great creatures in all sorts of shapes through the depths, and that it is full of creatures that use water as we use air,' and it would seem that they give discourses similar to myths and wonders, thus we might liken the same thing to also hold about the moon, that some men here do not believe it is inhabited.<sup>134</sup>

Similarly, from the moon, Lamprias continues, it would seem fantastical that anything could live here in the moisture and heat of the earth.<sup>135</sup> Lamprias' allusion to the *Phaedo* prompts Sulla to jump in with an entreaty: "Leave off... and put an end to your speech, before you run the myth aground and mix up my play, which has another scene and another plot."<sup>136</sup> This sudden interruption might seem surprising, since the myth will explain the moon as the place between

<sup>133</sup> "Since nothing that has been said at least, dear Theon, shows that the so-called inhabitation of it is impossible" (ἐπεὶ τῶν γ' εἰρημένων οὐδὲν, ὃ φίλε Θεῶν, ἀδύνατον δείκνυσι τὴν λεγομένην ἐπ' αὐτῆς οἰκησιν; 938f). In the *Quaest. Rom.*, Plut. attributes the habitability of the moon to a certain Castor (LXXVI.282a) In Cicero's *Somn.*, Africanus stresses the smallness of the inhabited world to contrast the grandeur of the heavens (VI.19.20).

<sup>134</sup> ἀλλ' οὐτε ταῦτα συνορώμεν οὐθ' ὅτι καὶ χώρα καὶ φύσις καὶ κρᾶσις ἄλλη πρόσφορος ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς. ὥσπερ οὖν εἰ τῇ θαλάττῃ μὴ δυναμένων ἡμῶν προσελθεῖν μηδ' ἄψασθαι, μόνον δὲ τὴν θεῶν αὐτῆς πόρρωθεν ἀφορώντων καὶ πυνθανομένων ὅτι πικρὸν καὶ ἄποτον καὶ ἀλμυρὸν ὕδωρ ἐστίν, ἔλεγέ τις ὡς 'ζῶα πολλὰ καὶ μεγάλα καὶ παντοδαπὰ ταῖς μορφαῖς τρέφει κατὰ βυθοῦ καὶ θηρίων ἐστὶ πλήρης ὕδατι χρωμένων ὅσα περ ἡμεῖς ἀέρι,' μύθοις ἂν ὅμοια καὶ τέρασιν ἐδόκει περαίνειν, οὕτως εἰκόκαμεν ἔχειν καὶ ταῦτὸ πάσχειν πρὸς τὴν σελήνην, ἀπιστοῦντες ἐκεῖ τινὰς ἀνθρώπους κατοικεῖν (940d-e). Bos (1989) deems this passage a "reversal of perspective' linked to a 'reversal of values'" (22).

<sup>135</sup> "But I think that those there would all the more marvel looking down upon the earth how the sediment and slime of everything shines through the wetness and mists and clouds a dim and low and motionless place, if it should sprout and nourish animals partaking in motion, breath, and heat. And if they should come to hear from somewhere the Homeric lines, 'terrible and dank, the places the gods too hate' and, 'Hades is so far below, as heaven is above earth' they would say simply about this place that what is called Hades and Tartarus is settled here far away, and moon is the one earth, since the things above are equally far from the things below" (ἐκείνους δ' ἂν οἶομαι πολὺ μᾶλλον ἀποθαυμάσαι τὴν γῆν ἀφορώντας οἷον ὑποστάθμην καὶ ἰλὸν τοῦ παντὸς ἐν ὑγροῖς καὶ ὀμίχλαις καὶ νέφεσι διαφαινομένην ἀλαμπῆς καὶ ταπεινὸν καὶ ἀκίνητον χωρίον, εἰ ζῶα φύει καὶ τρέφει μετέχοντα κινήσεως ἀναπνοῆς θερμότητος: κἂν εἴ ποθεν αὐτοῖς ἐγγένοιτο τῶν Ὀμηρικῶν τούτων ἀκοῦσαι "σπερδαλέ', εὐρώεντα, τὰ τε συγγέουσι θεοὶ περ [Il. XX.65]," καὶ "τόσσον ἐνερθ' Αἶδαο, ὅσον οὐρανὸς ἔστ' ἀπὸ γαίης [Il. VIII.16]," ταῦτα φήσουσιν ἀτεχνῶς περὶ τοῦ χωρίου τούτου λέγεσθαι καὶ τὸν Αἶδην ἐνταῦθα καὶ τὸν Τάρταρον ἀπαρκίσθαι, γῆν δὲ μίαν εἶναι τὴν σελήνην, ἴσον ἐκείνων τῶν ἄνω καὶ τῶν κάτω τούτων ἀπέχουσαν; 940e-f).

<sup>136</sup> ἔτι δὲ μου σχεδὸν λέγοντος ὁ Σύλλας ὑπολαβὼν "ἐπίσχες" εἶπεν "ὦ Λαμπρία, καὶ παραβαλοῦ τὸν θυρίον τοῦ λόγου, μὴ λάθῃς τὸν μῦθον ὥσπερ εἰς γῆν ἐξοκειλάς καὶ συγγέης τὸ δράμα τοῦ μὲν ἑτέραν ἔχον σκηνην καὶ διάθεσιν" (940f). The beginning of Sulla's appeal is almost equivalent to Soclarus' in *De soll. an.* (965b).

the sun and the earth, inhabited by souls and *daemones*. They are rather unlike the embodied beings that Theon proposed, but this adaptation of the myth of the *Phaedo* begins to move the discussion from meandering geography to teleology.<sup>137</sup> Yet what form does Plutarch's Theon or Plato's Socrates expect such a teleological account to take?

### *The Timaeus as a teleological account of humanity and the universe*

The burden for a fully explanatory account of the physical world that Socrates articulates in the *Phaedo* is weighty and difficult to comprehend in its totality, but scholars such as David Sedley have argued that the final myth within the dialogue offers a model for what that might entail.<sup>138</sup> Socrates claims to be persuaded by someone else about “how the earth is disposed and how immense it is,” and couches the details of the myth in disclaimers such as “it is said,” but he vouches with relative certainty that souls receive proper punishments and rewards.<sup>139</sup> The

<sup>137</sup> Theon goes on to discuss mouthless men in India, fed by inhalations (τῆ ὄσμη), whom he attributes to a certain Megasthenes—these too, he argues, cannot exist on the moon if it does not rain there (938b-c).

<sup>138</sup> 1991: 359-61. See also Betegh (2009: 98-9).

<sup>139</sup> “There are many wondrous places of the earth, and those accustomed to speak about the earth do not fathom either how it is nor how great, as I have been persuaded by someone” (εἰσὶν δὲ πολλοὶ καὶ θαυμαστοὶ τῆς γῆς τόποι, καὶ αὐτὴ οὔτε οἷα οὔτε ὅση δοξάζεται ὑπὸ τῶν περὶ γῆς εἰωθότων λέγειν, ὡς ἐγὼ ὑπὸ τίνος πέπεισμαι; 108c). On the uncertain identity of the indefinite persuader, see already Burnet (1911: 127). Sedley (1991) suggests Parmenides (374n31). Socrates also describes how “it is said” (λέγεται; cf. Dam. *In Phd.* I.189.476, II.230.93) that each of the dead has a *daimon*, which was allotted in life and attempts to guide the dead to their proper place: “for the path is not as Aeschylus’ Telephus says—that the way into the house of Hades is simple, but it is neither simple nor does it seem to me that there is one way” (ἔστι δὲ ἄρα ἡ πορεία οὐχ ὡς ὁ Αἰσχύλου Τήλεφος λέγει· . . . ἀπλῆν οἴμιόν φησιν εἰς Ἄϊδου φέρειν, ἢ δ’ οὔτε ἀπλῆ οὔτε μία φαίνεται μοι εἶναι; 107e-8a). Each sort of soul—those obsessed with the body (ἐπιθυμητικῶς τοῦ σώματος), the most heinous of criminals and parricides, and those who lived with temperance and purity (καθαρῶς τε καὶ μετρίως)—is assigned to a fitting place, so Aeschylus’ simple path could not suffice: the somatic soul flits around the visible world (ἐπτοημένη καὶ περὶ τὸν ὀρατὸν τόπον), but its *daimon* eventually leads it away with great force and difficulty (βίαι καὶ μόγις; 108a-b); the wicked soul is said to be “borne away by necessity to their proper place” (ὑπ’ ἀνάγκης φέρεται εἰς τὴν αὐτῆ πρέπουσαν οἴκησιν; 108c); the pure and temperate soul, in contrast, “meets with gods as their companions and guides, and settles in the place that is proper to itself” (συνεμπόρων καὶ ἡγεμόνων θεῶν τυχοῦσα, ᾤκησεν τὸν αὐτῆ ἐκάστη τόπον προσήκοντα; 108c). When Simmias eventually encourages Socrates to go on, he demurs once more: “But it seems to me, Simmias, that not even the art of Glaucus is enough to relate what it is; truly, it even appears too difficult for the art of Glaucus. . . . But nothing hinders me from describing the places that comprise the sort of form I have been persuaded that the earth takes” (ἀλλὰ μέντοι, ὦ Σιμμία, οὐχ ἢ Γλαύκου τέχνη γέ μοι δοκεῖ εἶναι διηγήσασθαι ἅ γ’ ἐστίν· ὡς μέντοι ἀληθῆ, χαλεπότερόν μοι φαίνεται ἢ κατὰ τὴν Γλαύκου τέχνην. . . τὴν μέντοι ἰδέαν τῆς γῆς οἷαν πέπεισμαι εἶναι, καὶ τοὺς τόπους αὐτῆς οὐδὲν με κωλύει λέγειν; 108d-e). See also *Resp.* X.615a.

earth is posited to be a spherical mass, equipoised in the exact center of the heavens, which has a surface with many hollows.<sup>140</sup> These physical details correspond exactly to the questions that Socrates earlier described as the topics of which he desired to hear a proper account from the natural philosophers such as Anaxagoras. The frame of the myth, moreover, clearly distinguishes the description of the “true earth” and the underground rivers from these more basic physical questions: the latter are attributed to someone, while Socrates describes the former on his own authority and demarcates it as mythic. This split structure seems to subordinate the physical prerequisites to the structure that underlies the eschatological system of purification and punishment. The teleological purpose of the former is only implicit, but must be that the eschatological system is good, which means that the physical arrangement of the world that allows it is good. The sphericity and centrality are presented as instrumental goods that allow a final good, which seems to be a mechanism of the providential care of the world.<sup>141</sup>

This interpretation of the last portion of the *Phaedo*, however, relies almost entirely on ideas that are implicit in the structure, yielding a dissatisfying example in the final analysis. It also simply pushes the basic teleological argument back: if the purpose of the earth’s physical qualities is to allow an eschatological system, one might ask, why is it better that there be an eschatological system at all?<sup>142</sup> This question perhaps remains insoluble, although the *Timaeus*

<sup>140</sup> “I am persuaded, then, ... that if (the earth) is spherical in the heavens...” (πέπεισμαι τοίνυν... εἰ ἔστιν ἐν μέσῳ τῷ οὐρανῷ περιφερῆς οὐσα; 108e). See also 110b; 109b: “for (I am persuaded that) there are many hollows around the world, of all kinds and shapes and magnitudes...” (εἶναι γὰρ πανταχῆ περὶ τὴν γῆν πολλὰ κοῖλα καὶ παντοδαπὰ καὶ τὰς ἰδέας καὶ τὰ μεγέθη). Socrates demarcates the first argument as what “I was persuaded” of (πρῶτον μὲν τοίνυν... τοῦτο πέπεισμαι; 109a). He further distances himself from the authority of technical science by glossing “the heavens which contain the stars” (τῷ οὐρανῷ ἐν ᾧ πέρ ἐστι τὰ ἄστρα) as “that which many of those accustomed to speak about such things call the aether” (ὃν δὴ αἰθέρα ὀνομάζειν τοὺς πολλοὺς τῶν περὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα εἰωθότων λέγειν; 109b).

<sup>141</sup> οὕτως οὖν δὴ κατὰ λόγον τὸν εἰκότα δεῖ λέγειν τόνδε τὸν κόσμον ζῶον ἔμψυχον ἔννουν τε τῇ ἀληθείᾳ διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ γενέσθαι πρόνοιαν (30b-c).

<sup>142</sup> Betegh (2009), however, argues that Socrates’ “myth cannot be an alternative to what Socrates expected to hear from Anaxagoras”: “A complete teleological explanation, for Plato, needs to refer to agency and the practical reasoning of the agent” (99). See further 93.

offers a much clearer example of Plato's conception of a teleological account that could better meet the burden set out by the *Phaedo*.<sup>143</sup> While in the second chapter I discussed one of the most metaphysically difficult parts of the teleological account comprised by the “likely myth,” the composition of the soul that animates the world, this section argues that Plutarch found the idea that the human is a microcosm of the world in the *Timaeus*. This idea, which Plato constructs using the idea of imitation, is part of what contributes likelihood to Timaeus' “likely myth.” Although some scholars, following Karl Reinhardt, argue that Plutarch is drawing this aspect of his own myth in *De facie* from the idea of Stoic sympathy, I argue that he is elaborating a system distinctively grounded in Platonism: his macrocosm-microcosm system is built upon the idea in the *Timaeus* that the parts correspond to one another because the latter is an imitation of the former, while both are imitations of the eternal world gazed upon by the demiurge. The causation on both levels is paradigmatic (αἰτία παραδειγματική), as coined by subsequent Platonists, not sympathetic. In the sections that follow, I argue that Plutarch incorporates this idea from the *Timaeus* into his own myth in *De facie* as a mechanism to make the system more probable, along with Xenocrates' elaboration of Platonic intermediaries.

When later Platonists discuss Platonic causation, they often distinguish the Aristotelian term *telos* from the ultimate paradigmatic cause—a term that Proclus attributes to Xenocrates.<sup>144</sup>

<sup>143</sup> E.g. Wright (2000): “The *Timaeus* is Plato's own answer to the objections he raised in the *Phaedo* against his predecessors' approach to cosmology” (10); “The *Timaeus* has close ties... with the *Phaedo* in providing the teleology that was wanting in previous accounts of the natural science, and in the use of myth for the unverifiable” (11); Betegh (2009): “We are not surprised that [Timaeus] describes his narrative as both a *logos* and a *muthos* – as we should not be surprised that what Socrates expects to read but does not find in Anaxagoras' book is also a *muthos* that can be taken seriously” (100).

<sup>144</sup> αἰτία παραδειγματική (frg. 30 Heinze = *In Parm.* 888-9). Damascius explains the spherical shape of the true earth in the *Phd.* by reference to different sorts of causality: ἀπὸ τῆς τελικῆς αἰτίας... ἀπὸ τῆς παραδειγματικῆς... ἀπὸ τῆς ποιητικῆς (II.235.177). Olympiodorus identifies six (*In Gorg.* pref.5). The Anon. *Proleg.* credits Plato with “discovering theology” (θεολογικὰ εὑρεῖν) by formulating the “paradigmatic cause” (ἐν τῷ παραδειγματικῷ) as opposed to Pythagoras' and Aristotle's efficient cause (ἐν τῷ ποιητικῷ; V.36-46); this text also compares Anaxagoras and the other Ionians (VIII.1-14) and Peripatetics generally (XIX.29-34). Proclus, however, deriving a tripartite schema of causation (τὰς δὲ κυρίως αἰτίας) from the *Ti.* in the beginning of his commentary, distinguishes “the productive, the paradigmatic, and the final” (τὸ ποιητικόν, τὸ παραδειγματικόν, τὸ τελικόν; I.2.7-9).

This cause is rooted in the narrative of the *Timaeus*: the demiurge, being a good god, desired to create a beautiful world, so he fashioned it according to the best model, the unchanging and eternal forms.<sup>145</sup> Seneca, relating a discussion with Platonists and Aristotelians, describes Plato’s theory of causation as the addition of a fifth sort of cause onto the Aristotelian four—“a paradigm (*exemplar*), which he calls an ‘idea’ (*idean*),” evidently detecting a pun between the demiurge’s gazing upon the ideas and the Greek verb ἰδεῖν.<sup>146</sup> The final cause of everything in the demiurge’s creation, it seems, is that it bears this mimetic relationship somehow to the eternal and unchanging model.<sup>147</sup> Yet the demiurge’s attitude differs between the one “living creature”—the world, single in imitation of the singularity of the eternal model—and the many intelligent creatures that comprise that world—namely humans.<sup>148</sup> The demiurge composes the world soul and creates the bodies of the stars, but he only provides one element to humanity, as he discloses in his address to the younger gods whose task is the creation of the rest:

“And, to the extent that it is fitting to name part of them immortal, the part that is called divine and obeying in them, at least those who desire to be just and follow us, I will sow and be the first to render them; the rest is yours, harmonizing mortal to immortal...”<sup>149</sup>

<sup>145</sup> See *supra* pg. 40.

<sup>146</sup> *his quintam Plato adicit exemplar, quam ipse “idean” vocat; hoc est enim ad quod respiciens artifex id quod destinabat effecit* (*Ep.* LXV.7). Dillon (1977) compares passages from Philo and Varro, arguing that this “Middle Platonic scholastic formulation” could either have come from Eudorus of Alexandria, as evidenced by the former, or Antiochus, as by the latter (135-9).

<sup>147</sup> Why is the world spherical, for instance? It is because the demiurge “thought that something similar was far more beautiful than something dissimilar” (νομίσας μῦρῳ κάλλιον ὅμοιον ἀνομοίου; 33b). See also, for instance, the description of time as the imitation or image of eternity (εἰκὼ... αἰῶνος; 37c-e).

<sup>148</sup> τῶν μὲν οὖν ἐν μέρους εἶδει πεφυκότων μηδενὶ καταξιώσωμεν—ἀτελεῖ γὰρ εἰκότος οὐδέν ποτ’ ἂν γένοιτο καλόν—οὗ δ’ ἔστιν ἄλλα ζῶα καθ’ ἐν καὶ κατὰ γένη μόρια, τούτῳ πάντων ὁμοιότατον αὐτὸν εἶναι τιθῶμεν. τὰ γὰρ δὴ νοητὰ ζῶα πάντα ἐκεῖνο ἐν ἑαυτῷ περιλαβὸν ἔχει, καθάπερ ὅδε ὁ κόσμος ἡμᾶς ὅσα τε ἄλλα θρέμματα συνέστηκεν ὁρατά (30c-d).

<sup>149</sup> καὶ καθ’ ὅσον μὲν αὐτῶν ἀθανάτοις ὁμώνυμον εἶναι προσήκει, θεῖον λεγόμενον ἡγεμονοῦν τ’ ἐν αὐτοῖς τῶν αἰεὶ δίκη καὶ ὑμῖν ἐθελόντων ἔπεσθαι, σπείρας καὶ ὑπαρξάμενος ἐγὼ παραδώσω· τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν ὑμεῖς, ἀθανάτῳ θνητὸν προσυφαίνοντες (41c).



Timaeus then describes the demiurge as “sowing” divine intellects into the planets.<sup>150</sup> The work of the younger gods is eventually described as an imitation of the demiurge’s creation—an imitation of an imitation, as it were. While the demiurge uses the eternal, unchanging things as a model for the cosmic soul, the ordering of the human soul is described after the demiurge creates the elements:

He himself became the demiurge of the gods but enjoined the generation of mortal things from those born from himself. They, imitating him in turn, received the immortal origin of the soul and then shaped a mortal body around it. They gave the entire body a vehicle, and built in addition another, mortal form of soul in it, one bearing fearsome and constrained sufferings in itself, first pleasure, the greatest bait of evil, ...<sup>151</sup>

Because of this imitative relationship, the body and soul of humans are *causally* related to the material cosmos and the world soul.<sup>152</sup> This causal relationship gives the microcosm-macrocosm analogy its explanatory power: the human is like the world because it is made in imitation of the world, which means that their parts and attributes are also similar.

Similarly to the myth of the *Phaedo*, Timaeus’ description of the physical world distinguishes between secondary causes and the ultimate cause, the form of the good, such as in

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<sup>150</sup> “He composed the whole and divided souls in equal number to the stars and distributed each of them to each, mounting them as onto a chariot he showed them the nature of the world and told them the fated laws...” (συστήσας δὲ τὸ πᾶν διεῖλεν ψυχὰς ἰσαριθμούς τοῖς ἀστροῖς, ἐνεμέν θ’ ἐκάστην πρὸς ἕκαστον, καὶ ἐμβιβάσας ὡς ἐς ὄχημα τὴν τοῦ παντὸς φύσιν ἔδειξεν, νόμους τε τοὺς εἰμαρμένους εἶπεν αὐταῖς...; 41d).

<sup>151</sup> καὶ τῶν μὲν θείων αὐτὸς γίγνεται δημιουργός, τῶν δὲ θνητῶν τὴν γένεσιν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ γεννήμασιν δημιουργεῖν προσέταξεν. οἱ δὲ μιμούμενοι, παραλαβόντες ἀρχὴν ψυχῆς ἀθάνατον, τὸ μετὰ τοῦτο θνητὸν σῶμα αὐτῇ περιετόρνενυσαν ὄχημά τε πᾶν τὸ σῶμα ἔδοσαν ἄλλο τε εἶδος ἐν αὐτῷ ψυχῆς προσωκοδόμουν τὸ θνητόν, δεινὰ καὶ ἀναγκαῖα ἐν ἑαυτῷ παθήματα ἔχον, πρῶτον μὲν ἡδονήν, μέγιστον κακοῦ δέλεαρ... (69c-d). See also 42e: “and he [the demiurge] arranged everything and was remaining in his own habit according to his character; when he was remaining, his children were understanding his arrangement and were obeying it, and taking the immortal beginning of the living mortal, and imitating their own demiurge...” (καὶ ὁ μὲν δὴ ἅπαντα ταῦτα διατάξας ἔμενεν ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ κατὰ τρόπον ἡθει· μένοντος δὲ νοήσαντες οἱ παῖδες τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς τάξιν ἐπέιθοντο αὐτῇ, καὶ λαβόντες ἀθάνατον ἀρχὴν θνητοῦ ζῆφου, μιμούμενοι τὸν σφέτερον δημιουργόν...). Cornford (1937) refers to details such as these as “the machinery of the myth” (146). See also *Phlb.* 30a.

<sup>152</sup> The scholarship on the *Timaeus* is divided on what qualities distinguish the two sorts of soul. For instance, Cornford (1937: 142-143): “The human soul, no less than the World-Soul, must be so composed as to be like the objects it is to know ... Human souls are inferior, because they can do wrong of their own wills;” Thévenaz (1938: 84): “elles [l’âmes individuelles] ont une certaine similitude d’essence avec l’âme du monde, mais n’en émanent pas.”

the discussion of human vision.<sup>153</sup> The greater cause (αἰτία) of vision is so that humans can see the orderly motion of the heavens, gain knowledge of the demiurge's intelligent ordering of the visible divine, and consequently become philosophers.<sup>154</sup> This quality is central to the dialogue's depiction of the divine: because the demiurge "is good, there is never envy in him about anything, and because this is outside of him, he wants more of all that everything should become like to himself."<sup>155</sup> He does not begrudge knowledge of the universe's order either, it seems, and discussions of divination later in the dialogue further build on this idea that a fundamental part of the divine ordering of a world is a sort of self-revelation, almost as if it wanted to be sought after and discovered, insofar as possible, by intelligent humans.<sup>156</sup> This amounts to a teleological explanation, but it is grounded in the relationship between model and imitation, macrocosm and microcosm.

The scholarship that exists, however, on this sort of teleological macrocosm-microcosm analogy tends to associate it most closely with Stoicism.<sup>157</sup> Karl Reinhardt, in his later work,

<sup>153</sup> "There are all in the class of auxiliary causes, which god uses to fulfill, insofar as is possible, the form of the excellent" (ταῦτ' οὖν πάντα ἔστιν τῶν συναιτιῶν οἷς θεὸς ὑπηρετοῦσιν χρῆται τὴν τοῦ ἀρίστου κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν ιδέαν ἀποτελεῶν; 46c-d). On this passage, see Sedley (1991: 375-7).

<sup>154</sup> "By my account, vision came as the cause of the greatest aid to us, because none of the accounts that have now been formulated about the world would never have been formulated without seeing the stars or the sun or the heavens. ... From these things we bring about the class of philosophy, than which no greater good has ever or will ever come about as a gift from the gods to the mortal race" (ὄψις δὴ κατὰ τὸν ἐμὸν λόγον αἰτία τῆς μεγίστης ὠφελίας γέγονεν ἡμῖν, ὅτι τῶν νῦν λόγων περὶ τοῦ παντὸς λεγομένων οὐδεὶς ἂν ποτε ἐρρήθη μήτε ἄστρα μήτε ἥλιον μήτε οὐρανὸν ἰδόντων... ἐξ ὧν ἐπορισάμεθα φιλοσοφίας γένος, οὗ μείζον ἀγαθὸν οὔτ' ἦλθεν οὔτε ἤξει ποτὲ τῶ θνητῶ γένει δωρηθὲν ἐκ θεῶν; 47a-b). See further 46b-e, 90b-d.

<sup>155</sup> ἀγαθὸς ἦν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε ἐγγίγνεται φθόνος· τούτου δ' ἐκτὸς ὧν πάντα ὅτι μάλιστα ἐβουλήθη γενέσθαι παραπλήσια ἑαυτῷ (29e). In the *Phdr.*, Socrates applies this characteristic to all the gods: φθόνος γὰρ ἔξω θεοῦ χοροῦ ἴσταται (247a).

<sup>156</sup> 71a-2d. See Struck (2014: 25-34). Plutarch's Simmias in *De gen.*, however, argues that some men, such as Socrates, are more receptive to divine signs because of the purity of their souls (588d-9e). Cf. [Pl.] *Epin.* 975d.

<sup>157</sup> Lobeck (1829), however, treats the cosmological system in *De fac.* as an elaboration of a "publica olim persuasio" (947), rather than an idea originating outside of Greece, specifically in the context of "mathematici" and Pythagorean geometry (929-32). The survey in Concer (1922) emphasizes the prominence of Plato (1-10), although he sees Philo as the first writer to make it "clearly explicit," perhaps due to "the infusion of Babylonian or Egyptian" elements (27-8). See also Arist. *Phys.* VIII.2.252b. Moreau (1939) attributes the Stoic "l'analogie du macrocosme et du microcosme" to "l'idéalisme platonicien," although he finds the "système astrobiologique" to be "originaire de la Chaldée," although transmitted to Zeno through Heraclitus and the *Timaeus* (188).

attributed the entirety of this teleological paradigm to Posidonius, deeming the relevant sections of Plutarch's *De facie* beholden to "Poseidonischen Gedanken... gegen den mechanischen Naturbegriff der Epikureer."<sup>158</sup> The idea of cosmic sympathy, linked generally to the Stoics, is seen as Plutarch's mechanism for this relationship.<sup>159</sup> Herwig Görgemanns presents a more nuanced argument, but nevertheless concludes that Plutarch "bietet nur eine stoisierende Fassung der alten Lehre," particularly basing his argument on the concept of "cohesion."<sup>160</sup> Claire Préaux, writing at nearly the same time, however, argues for a Pythagorean origin with an emphasis on the concept of "harmonie... sur un modèle musicale."<sup>161</sup> Rather, I argue, Plutarch is clearly drawing on the *Timaeus* to construct an argument against the world entailed by the Stoic conception of providence. Lamprias implicitly explains the form of the world through the assumption that it is a macrocosm of a human, which is an idea that Sulla's stranger will elaborate further in the myth. There is some evidence that Posidonius also made use of the analogy between microcosm and macrocosm—such as Diogenes Laertius' claim that he understood "the heavens as the rational part of the world"<sup>162</sup>—yet far less than Reinhardt holds.

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<sup>158</sup> 1926: 331, 321. In his earlier monograph (1921: 343-5), Reinhardt builds his conception of Posidonian "Mikrokosmos" theory upon Jaeger's (1914) attribution of the entirety of Nemesius' *De nat. hom.*, including "der Lehre vom Makrokosmos und Mikrokosmos" back to Posidonius (126). He further postulates a shared source with Cic. *Nat. D.* II.60-1.152-3—despite the frequent discussions of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, such as in even the initial doxography (1.1-151). Cf. Shorey (1915). This argument is circular as there are no explicit attributions of the idea taken to such an extent as we find in *De facie* to Posidonius. Pohlenz, however, broadly follows Reinhardt, implicitly adopting his attributions in his monograph (1947) and citing him often as the only authority in his Teubner edition (1955: 84-8). Préaux (1973), however, praises Reinhardt's chapter on *De fac.* as "un précieux recueil de sources sur la croyance au séjour des âmes dans la lune" (142n2), but rejects his conclusions "Mais un analyse plus prudente de ce mythe, où Posidonius n'est d'ailleurs pas cité, alors que Plutarque cite d'autres sources, interdit, semble-t-il, pareille reconstruction" (142-3).

<sup>159</sup> See e.g. Vernière (1986): "De là à conclure à une affinité réelle entre ces deux êtres, l'âmes et la lune, du fait de leur commun caractère de moyenne proportionnelle, il n'y a qu'un pas pour une pensée encore imprégnée de la notion de sympathie cosmique qui glisse de la ressemblance à la parenté" (104). Cf. Opsomer (1999) on Plutarch's conception of ἀντιπερίστασις and ἀπόρροιαί (423-4).

<sup>160</sup> 1970: 108n66.

<sup>161</sup> 1973: 28-33.

<sup>162</sup> ... Ποσειδώνιος ἐν τῷ Περὶ θεῶν τὸν οὐρανὸν φασὶ τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν τοῦ κόσμου, Κλεάνθης δὲ τὸν ἥλιον (VII.139 = frg. 23 Edelstein & Kidd). This claim, however, is little more developed than the first plausible articulation of the principle by Anaximenes: "just as our soul, he said, being our air has control over us, so too does spirit and air

The clearest explicitly Stoic example seems to come from Seneca, as George Concer argues. After explaining that Stoics, unlike Plato and Aristotle, only claim two causes, god and matter, he argues: “God, that which acts, is more powerful and more precious than matter, which is passive to god. God’s place in this world is that of the soul in a man. There is matter in the world, which corresponds to the body in us: both inferior things serve superior things.”<sup>163</sup> Seneca’s analogy between god to soul and matter to body is a clearer example of the macrocosmic-microcosmic relationship, but it is perhaps significant that this formulation occurs in the same letter in which he earlier discussed causation in Plato’s *Timaeus*. Both Platonists and Stoics, moreover, interpreted this dialogue, which seems therefore to be a common inspiration for the idea.<sup>164</sup>

Plutarch explicitly grounds his conception of the relationship of microcosm to macrocosm on the relationship between the world soul and the human soul in the *Timaeus*. In the treatise *De virtute morali* begins with a doxography distinguishing various Stoics and their conception of a unitary soul from the composite soul of Plato.<sup>165</sup> He argues that, because the world soul in the *Timaeus* is compounded through competing elements, such as the cycles of sameness and difference, our soul too is a compound of opposing elements, one rational and the other irrational:

However, Plato manifestly, steadfastly, and incontrovertibly testified both that the ensouled part of the world is neither simple nor uncompounded nor unitary; rather, it has

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encompass the entire world” (οἶον ἢ ψυχῆ, φησίν, ἢ ἡμετέρα ἀἴρ οὔσα συγκρατεῖ ἡμᾶς, καὶ ὅλον τὸν κόσμον πνεῦμα καὶ ἀἴρ περιέχει; frg. B2 Diels). See also Concer (1922: 2).

<sup>163</sup> *potentius autem est ac pretiosius, quod facit, quod est deus, quam materia patiens dei. quem in hoc mundo locum deus obtinet, hunc in homine animus. quod est illic materia, id in nobis corpus est; seruiant ergo deteriora melioribus* (Ep. LXV.23-4).

<sup>164</sup> ... φησίν ὁ Ποσειδώνιος τὸν Πλάτωνος Τίμαιον ἐξηγούμενος... (Sext. Emp. *Math.* VII.93 = frg. 85 Edelstein & Kidd). See also Plut. *De an. proc.* 1023b-d = frg. 141a. On the long scholarly quest for Posidonius as a “source” for Plutarch, see further below. Cf. Reydam-Schils (1999); the first chapter, *supra* 107, further discusses the relationship between Platonism and Stoicism.

<sup>165</sup> 441a-42b. On the philosophical alignment of the dialogue, see Babut (1969: 2-6, 71-80). He affirms that the work should be viewed as original, rather than Posidonian or Aristotelian, but as a “platonicien” (76) or in the “tradition académicienne” (79). On the anti-Stoic polemic in the treatise, see Ingenkamp (1999).

been mixed from the powers of sameness and difference... and that the human soul is a portion or imitation of that of the world, also harmonized through ratios and numbers befitting them; it is neither simple nor affected in the same way, but it bears one intellectual and rational part, to which leading and ruling over a human are fitting by nature, and another part passionate and irrational and much wandering and disorderly, needing an external ruler.<sup>166</sup>

Plutarch identifies a parallel and mimetic relationship between the world soul and the human soul that is thoroughly grounded in the *Timaeus*. Through reasoning by analogy, he attributes properties on one psychic level to the other.<sup>167</sup> While more is said in recent scholarship about the macrocosm-microcosm relationship of city to individual in Plato's *Respublica*, the analogy of world to human in the *Timaeus* provided Plutarch with a powerful tool for both anthropology and cosmology.<sup>168</sup> Nor does he only analogize the world soul and the human soul, but their bodies as

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<sup>166</sup> ἐμφανῶς μέντοι καὶ βεβαίως καὶ ἀναμφιδόξως Πλάτων συνείδεν, ὅτι τούτου τε τοῦ κόσμου τὸ ἔμψυχον οὐχ ἀπλοῦν οὐδ' ἀσύνθετον οὐδὲ μονοειδές ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῆς ταυτοῦ καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἑτέρου μεμιγμένον δυνάμεως, ... ἢ τ' ἀνθρώπου ψυχὴ μέρος ἢ μίμημα τῆς τοῦ παντός οὔσα καὶ συνηρμοσμένη κατὰ λόγους καὶ ἀριθμοὺς εὐοικότητας ἐκείνοις οὐχ ἀπλή τις ἐστίν οὐδ' ὁμοιοπαθής, ἀλλ' ἕτερον μὲν ἔχει τὸ νοερὸν καὶ λογιστικόν, ᾧ κρατεῖν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατὰ φύσιν καὶ ἄρχειν προσήκόν ἐστιν, ἕτερον δὲ τὸ παθητικὸν καὶ ἄλογον καὶ πολυπλανές καὶ ἄτακτον ἐξεταστοῦ δεόμενον (441e-2b). Plutarch proceeds to distinguish two elements in the irrational part in the human soul, but Cacciatore (2016) finds a further distinction, in regard to the cosmic soul: "In the irrational part (the precosmic soul) we may distinguish a dyadic and intermediary part... that corresponds to an irrational principle" (60). Opsomer (2012), however, argues that "there is no tripartition in the world soul" (324n70).

<sup>167</sup> E.g. *De an. proc.* 1023d-e: καὶ μὴν οὐ μόνον αἱ τῶν θνητῶν ψυχαὶ ... ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν τοῦ κόσμου...; Opsomer (2012): "harmony enters into the very composition of the world-soul, and hence the human soul as well" (329-30). Thévenaz (1937), however, criticizes Plutarch on the grounds that "il ne cherche même pas à caractériser les différences qui opposent l'âme du monde à l'âme humaine... une sorte d'érudition superficielle" (85). He concludes that "toute sa théorie métaphysique des deux âmes" is ethically motivated and metaphysically vacuous: "Comme dans le stoïcisme, la physique, la métaphysique et la logique n'ont pas de but en elles-mêmes: elles contribuent seulement à fonder la morale sur des bases solides" (87). More recent scholarship has been more favorable to Plutarch's approach, such as Roig Lanzillotta (2015): "Plutarch is no exception to the ancient view that sees the human being in the light of the cosmological framework. The Universe and human being are so closely related to one another that they are conceived of as macrocosmos and microcosmos, large and small examples of the same order" (180). See also Brenk (1977: 132-3), Opsomer (1994); Opsomer (2012): "for Plutarch... world soul and human soul are structurally identical as far as the relation between an irrational part reason is concerned. In other words, the part added by the lesser gods is structurally the same as the 'divisible and being' used by the demiurge" (314). This sort of argument based on the mimetic relationship between cosmic and human soul appears also in Macrobius' explanation of why "irrational animals" (*animalia ratione carentia*) could be swayed by Orpheus' music: just as the soul of the world is composed "musically" (i.e. from harmonies), so too are theirs (*Comm.* II.3.8). He also describes the *corpus mundi* as being made *ad imaginem contextionis animae* (II.3.15). Macrobius is commenting on Cicero's treatment of the music of the spheres in this section, but later in the text of the *Somnium*, Scipio compares the primary god's moderation of cosmic motion with the human soul's of bodily passion (with a coordinating *quam... tam* clause, *Resp.* VI.24.30).

<sup>168</sup> E.g. Pender (2000: 206-13, 254-6), Smith (2001), Williams (2001). Grube (1935: 142-4) is a rare exception. Plato formulates the idea most clearly in book II: "perhaps there would be more justice in the bigger and it would be easier

well. Earlier in *De facie*, Lamprias concludes a series of arguments against Stoic cosmology by taking up the idea from the *Timaeus* that the world is a “creature.”<sup>169</sup> The arrangement of the parts of a human body, such as the heart and the eyes, cannot be explained by the elements separating out to their natural positions.<sup>170</sup> Nor too would it be rational to this explain the positions of the stars and the moon through this idea of natural elemental position, as the Stoic Pharnaces had argued earlier in the dialogue.<sup>171</sup> Rather things must be, Lamprias argues, arranged by reason (λόγῳ διακεκοσμημένον):

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to learn. If you want, therefore, we could first examine what sort of thing is in cities. Then let us thus investigate it in each, examining the similarity of the greater in the form of the smaller” (ἴσως τοίνυν πλείων ἂν δικαιοσύνη ἐν τῷ μείζονι ἐνεῖη καὶ ῥάων καταμαθεῖν. εἰ οὖν βούλεσθε, πρῶτον ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι ζητήσωμεν ποῖόν τί ἐστίν· ἔπειτα οὕτως ἐπισκεψώμεθα καὶ ἐν ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ, τὴν τοῦ μείζονος ὁμοιότητα ἐν τῇ τοῦ ἐλάττονος ἰδέα ἐπισκοποῦντες; 368e-9a). This sort of comparison is even more explicit in [Arist.] *Mund.*: οὕτως ὑποληπτέον καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς μείζονος πόλεως, λέγω δὲ τοῦ κόσμου (400b27-28); See also Cic. *Leg.* I.7.23. The universe as the most extensive polity, shared by all rational beings (οἰκειώσεις), becomes a common topic in Imperial Stoicism, such as in e.g. Sen. *Otio*: “There are two countries are comprehended by the soul, the one great and true country which contains gods and men... (*duas res publicas animo complectamur, alteram magnam et uere publicam qua di atque homines continentur*...; IV.1). This trope is especially common in discussions of exile, such as in Muson. XI: “is the world not the common fatherland of all humanity, as Socrates thought?” (οὐχὶ κοινὴ πατρις ἀνθρώπων ἀπάντων ὁ κόσμος ἐστίν, ὥσπερ ἦξιου Σωκράτης; 12-3). See also Boethius *Cons.* I.p.V. Plut. invokes Empedocles (frg. B115.59 Diels) for the idea that embodied man is an “exile and wanderer from heaven” (φυγὰς θεόθεν καὶ ἀλήτης; 607c-d).

<sup>169</sup> “It is thus likely that the world too, if it is indeed a creature...” (ὥσπερ εἰκὸς ἔχειν καὶ τὸν κόσμον, εἴ γε δὴ ζῶν ἐστὶ...; 928a). Plato uses this term several times in the *Ti.*, e.g.: “So he arranged all these things first, then the world was composed from them, one living thing bearing all the living things in itself, both mortal and immortal” (ἀλλὰ πάντα ταῦτα πρῶτον διεκόσμησεν, ἔπειτ’ ἐκ τούτων πᾶν τόδε συνεστήσατο, ζῶν ἐν ζῶα ἔχον τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ θνητὰ ἀθάνατά τε; 69b-c).

<sup>170</sup> “For the eye of this body is not pushed out by its lightness, nor does the heart fall and sink down into the chest because of its heaviness, but rather because it was better for each to be arranged thus” (οὐδὲ γὰρ ὀφθαλμὸς ἐνταῦθα τοῦ σώματός ἐστιν ὑπὸ κουφότητος ἐκπιεσθεῖς, οὐδ’ ἡ καρδία τῷ βάρει ὀλισθοῦσα πέπτωκεν εἰς τὸ στήθος, ἀλλ’ ὅτι βέλτιον ἦν οὕτως ἐκάτερον τετάχθαι; 928a-b).

<sup>171</sup> Evidently this was also the position of Metrodorus of Chios: “Nor, accordingly, do we think that of the parts of the world, the earth lies here because it sinks through its weight, nor that the sun, as Metrodorus of Chios thought, has been squeezed out into the upper place in the manner of a wineskin, nor have the other stars come into the places where they reside by falling through the difference of weight, as if on a scale” (μὴ τοίνυν μηδὲ τῶν τοῦ κόσμου μερῶν νομίζομεν μήτε γῆν ἐνταῦθα κείσθαι συμπεσοῦσαν διὰ βάρος, μήτε τὸν ἥλιον, ὡς ᾤετο Μητροδόωρος ὁ Χῖος, εἰς τὴν ἄνω χώραν ἀσκοῦ δίκην ὑπὸ κουφότητος ἐκτεθλίφθαι, μήτε τοὺς ἄλλους ἀστέρας ὥσπερ ἐν ζυγῷ σταθμοῦ διαφορᾷ ῥέψαντας ἐν οἷς εἰσι γεγενῆσθαι τόποις; 928b). Earlier in the dialogue, the Stoic position is represented as similar. Lucius, Lamprias’ comrade, for instance imputes to Pharnaces the fear that the moon would fall (ὁμως ὑπὲρ τῆς σελήνης μὴ πέσῃ) if it were earthy rather than fiery (923b), but responds: “And indeed, the moon is bolstered from falling by its very motion and rapid whirling, just as things placed in slings are prevented from falling by the circular whirling motion. For there is a natural motion in everything, unless it is diverted by something else. Therefore, it is not weight that directs the moon, because weight is repulsed by the orbit” (καίτοι τῇ μὲν σελήνῃ βοήθεια πρὸς τὸ μὴ πεσεῖν ἢ κίνησις αὐτῆ καὶ τὸ ροιζῶδες τῆς περιαγωγῆς, ὥσπερ ὅσα ταῖς σφενδόναις ἐντεθέντα τῆς καταφορᾶς κώλυσιν ἴσχει τὴν κύκλῳ περιδίησιν· ἄγει γὰρ ἕκαστον ἢ κατὰ φύσιν κίνησις, ἂν ὑπ’ ἄλλου μηδενὸς ἀποστρέφεται. διὸ τὴν σελήνην οὐκ ἄγει τὸ βάρος, ὑπὸ τῆς περιφορᾶς τὴν ροπήν ἐκκρουόμενον; 923c-d). On the theory of theory of “natural position,” see Chroust (1977).

Rather, because it is governed according to reason (τοῦ κατὰ λόγον κρατοῦντος), they revolve “bound in” the face of the world as the “light-bearing eyes,” and the sun bears the power of the heart since it spreads and disperses *pneuma* and heat and light from itself, and the world uses earth and sea through nature, just as an animal uses bowels and bladder. But moon, between sun and earth, as the the liver or some other soft viscera lying between the heart and the bowels, conveys warmth from above to here and sends up exhalations from here, rarifying them by ripening and purification around herself.<sup>172</sup>

Lamprias establishes an analogous relationship between the body of the world and of a human so that he can describe the qualities of the former, which are more difficult to directly observe, by the qualities of the latter. The liver is evidently conceived of here as an intermediary organ that breaks down food and extracts nutrients.<sup>173</sup> By extension, the moon is explained as an intermediary between the air that surrounds the earth and the higher heavens. The question of final causation, however, is raised but only unsatisfactorily addressed: “If the earthiness and firmness of the moon meets some fitting need or other ends, it is unclear to us.”<sup>174</sup> He vouches that “the better” (τὸ βέλτιον) prevails in everything but does not yet attempt to suggest what possibilities it might be.

The comparison between the two bodies creates a probable paradigm so that one can reason from one level to the other, hence why Lamprias asks what “probability” (τί... τὸ εἰκός) one can find in what the Stoics hold. Herwig Görgemanns emphasizes the significance of

<sup>172</sup> ἀλλὰ τοῦ κατὰ λόγον κρατοῦντος οἱ μὲν ὡςπερ “ὄμματα φωσφόρα” τῷ προσώπῳ τοῦ παντός “ἐνδεδεμένοι” περιπολοῦσιν, ἥλιος δὲ καρδίας ἔχων δύναμιν ὡςπερ αἷμα καὶ πνεῦμα διαπέμπει καὶ διασκεδάννυσιν ἐξ αὐτοῦ θερμότητα καὶ φῶς, γῆ δὲ καὶ θαλάσση χρῆται κατὰ φύσιν ὁ κόσμος, ὅσα κοιλία καὶ κύστει ζῶον. σελήνη δ’ ἡλίου μεταξὺ καὶ γῆς ὡςπερ καρδίας καὶ κοιλίας ἦπαρ ἢ τι μαλθακὸν ἄλλο σπλάγγνον ἐγκειμένη τὴν τ’ ἄνωθεν ἀλέαν ἐνταῦθα διαπέμπει καὶ τὰς ἐντεῦθεν ἀναθυμιάσεις πέψει τινὶ καὶ καθάρσει λεπτύνουσα περὶ αὐτὴν ἀναδίδωσιν (928b-c). Vernière (1986) deems this passage “très étrange” (104).

<sup>173</sup> Although the comparison of the heart and the sun is relatively common, that between the moon and the liver is not. See Jones (1932: 121-6) and Cherniss (1957: 94-5nb).

<sup>174</sup> εἰ δὲ καὶ πρὸς ἄλλα τὸ γεῶδες αὐτῆς καὶ στερέμνιον ἔχει τινὰ πρόσφορον χρείαν, ἄδηλον ἡμῖν (928c). See further Donini (1988: 135). Cf. Görgemanns (1970): “Damit ist eine Brücke geschlagen vom Zentrum des wissenschaftlichen Teils zum mythischen: in beiden wird die teleologische Frage behandelt, doch kann der Mythos etwas aussagen, was die Wissenschaft als ‘für uns unbekannt’ erklären muß” (79). The historian of science, Montgomery (1999), however, completely misses the importance of teleology for the dialogue: “Instead of the typical philosophical or moral subject, a wholly visual, visible object stands at the center of the discussion. ... It would have been easy for the party to look up and observe the lunar face directly overhead—Aristotle would almost certainly have advised as much” (36).

teleological explanation in the whole of *De facie* in both Lamprias' account and Sulla's speech.<sup>175</sup> The latter, he argues, stands at odds with an earlier teleological line of argument, insofar as it is anthropocentric in a manner more reminiscent of the Stoics than the Plutarch of *De sollertia animalium* or the other "tierpsychologischen Schriften."<sup>176</sup> This is reminiscent, however, of the structure also of Socrates' myth in the *Phaedo*: the explanation for the position of the earth in the cosmos, not explicitly concerned with human habitation, is a preface for the explanation of how the various places within the earth serve as habitations for human souls.<sup>177</sup> Similarly, here the explanation of the stability of the moon is a preface for the more distinctively "anthropocentric" arguments about the generation and degeneration of souls: without the latter, the former does not meet the sort of teleological burden set by Socrates in the *Phaedo* and Theon in *De facie*. In both Lamprias' argument and Sulla's myth, however, the central mechanism that seems to make each likely is the imitative relationship between the human and the world. There is nothing specifically Stoic about this argument, despite the appeals in the scholarship to "sympathy" or Posidonius.<sup>178</sup> Plutarch grounds it explicitly in the *Timaeus*. The next sections examine the

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<sup>175</sup> Cf. Préaux (1973: 151).

<sup>176</sup> 1970: 80-2. Insofar as Plutarch allows for the reincarnation of human souls into animals, although he demures from using it as an argument for vegetarianism in *De esu*, the role of the moon in generation and degeneration of souls is central to all living creatures, and not just humans—especially if Plutarch truly does believe that animals, no less than humans, possess reason, as Autobulus argues in *De soll. an.* (e.g. 960a). Cf. Roig Lanzillotta's (2015) argument that Plutarch is more fundamentally "anthropocentric than cosmocentric" (191-3).

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Sedley (1991: 364-70) on the earth's stability. He concludes: "It seems more realistic to say that the perfectly coherent *surface reading* of the myth is indeed non-teleological, and that the teleological reading is contrived to lie below the surface" (370). This requires a "two-tiered" reading to integrate the physical (ostensibly mechanistic) details into a teleological system: "It is easy enough to agree with those who judge the opening passage on the earth's equilibrium more 'scientific' than the description of the True Earth which follows... The didactic function of the myth has relatively little to do with its literal truth or falsity. The lessons buried in it about cosmic justice and the proper character of teleological explanations are the same lessons whether or not the earth is structured in the way described" (383).

<sup>178</sup> E.g. Vernière (1986): "De là à conclure à une affinité réelle entre ces deux êtres, l'âmes et la lune, du fait de leur commun caractère de moyenne proportionnelle, il n'y a qu'un pas pour une pensée encore imprégnée de la notion de sympathie cosmique qui glisse de la ressemblance à la parenté" (104). She takes this part of the myth to be See also Préaux (1973: 24), Görgemanns (1970: *passim*). The Stoic formulation of sympathy, in contrast to Plutarch's use of analogy, sees things on earth as influenced by things in the heavens in a more straightforward way. Epictetus offers an example in the miniature dialogue entitled "that the divine oversees all things" (ὅτι πάντας ἐφορᾷ τὸ θεῖον; Arr.



cosmological and psychological content of the stranger's myth, which becomes a likely account in part by imbedding this explanatory analogy between microcosm and macrocosm into the core of the stranger's speech, where both the macrocosm and the microcosm are explained as systems of three parts with intermediary elements—namely, the cosmic moon and the human soul.

### *The human soul as a microcosm of the cosmic moon*

Sulla's stranger transitions from his mythic exegesis of Demeter and Persephone through the mention of a "second death:"<sup>179</sup> the first death, that of the body, takes place on the earth, identified with Demeter, while the second one, that of the soul, takes place on the moon, identified with Persephone.<sup>180</sup> Yet the moon has a sort of dual eschatological role, represented by the two gates that characterize its topography:

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*Epict. diss.* I.14.1-2): "When someone asked him how someone could be persuaded that everything that he does is overseen by god, he said, 'doesn't it seem to you that all is unified?... Why then? Don't the things upon the earth seem to you to sympathize with the heavens?'" (πυθομένου δέ τινος, πῶς ἂν τις πεισθεῖη, ὅτι ἕκαστον τῶν ὑπ' αὐτοῦ πραττομένων ἐφορᾶται ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, "οὐ δοκεῖ σοι," ἔφη, "ἠνῶσθαι τὰ πάντα... τί δέ; συμπαθεῖν τὰ ἐπίγεια τοῖς οὐρανίοις οὐ δοκεῖ σοι;"). Stoic sympathy does play a role in Neoplatonism, however, as Meijer (2007) argues with regard to Plotinus (86).

<sup>179</sup> After introducing the plain of Elysium by reference to Homer, the stranger declares: "Into here, no paltry or impure person rises, but the good are conveyed here after death and thus have an easy life, but not a blessed or holy one until they pass their second death" (εἰς δὲ τοῦτο φαῦλος μὲν οὐδεὶς οὐδ' ἀκάθαρτος ἄνεισιν, οἱ δὲ χρηστοὶ μετὰ τὴν τελευτὴν κομισθέντες αὐτόθι ῥᾶστον μὲν οὕτως βίον, οὐ μὴν μακάριον οὐδὲ θεῖον ἔχοντες ἄχρι τοῦ δευτέρου θανάτου διατελοῦσι; 942f).

<sup>180</sup> "That death which we die, one makes the human two from three and the other one from two. And the former is in the <earth> and belongs to Demeter—<wherefore to end life is said> to be a service to her and the Athenians long ago named the dead Demeterians—but the latter is in the moon and belongs to Persephone. And Hermes of the earth is companion of the former, and Hermes of the heavens the companion of the latter. But Demeter quickly and with force dissolves the soul from the body, while Persephone gently and over much time dissolves the mind from the soul—hence why she is called 'the single-born,' since only the best part of a human becomes separate from the soul" (ὄν δ' ἀποθνήσκομεν θάνατον, ὁ μὲν ἐκ τριῶν δύο ποιεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὁ δ' ἐν ἐκ δυοῖν, καὶ ὁ μὲν ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ <γῆ> τῆς Δήμητρος, <διὸ τελευτᾶν λέγεται τὸν βί>ον αὐτῇ τελεῖν καὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς Ἀθηναῖοι Δημητρεῖους ὠνόμαζον τὸ παλαιόν· <ὁ> δ' ἐν τῇ σελήνῃ τῆς Φερσεφόνης· καὶ σύνοικός ἐστι τῆς μὲν χθόνιος ὁ Ἑρμῆς τῆς δ' οὐράνιος. λυεῖ δ' αὐτὴ μὲν ταχὺ καὶ μετὰ βίας τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος, ἡ δὲ Φερσεφόνη πρᾶως καὶ χρόνῳ πολλῷ τὸν νοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ διὰ τοῦτο μονογενῆς κέκληται· μόνον γὰρ γίνεται τὸ βέλτιστον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου διακρινόμενον αὐτῆς; 943a-b). Immediately before this explanation, following the first mention of the phrase "second death," the discourse is reoriented with a direct address: "what is this, Sulla? Do not ask about these things, for I myself will explain" (τίς δ' οὗτός ἐστιν, ὦ Σύλλα; μὴ περὶ τούτων ἔρη. μέλλω γὰρ αὐτὸς διηγεῖσθαι; 943a). This is how Cherniss (1957), at least, renders the punctuation, taking all the statements to be spoken by the stranger. Pohlenz (1955), however, separates the first question, which he takes to be "non est 'quaestio rhetorica'... sed vera

Just as our earth has deep and wide hollows, one flowing out from the Pillars of Hercules and into our land then out towards the Caspian and those dwelling near the Red Sea, just so there are depths and hollows in the moon. They call most immense the recess of Hecate—where souls give and receive penalties for what they suffer or do once they have become *daemones*—and there are two immense Gates: for souls pass through them, both into the parts of the moon that face the heavens and down again to the parts facing the earth. The parts of the moon facing the heavens are called the Elysian plain, while those facing here are called the house of Persephone, she who faces the earth.<sup>181</sup>

The moon is the home of disembodied souls who become *daemones*, but it is also an intermediary point between the upper heavens and the earth. Minds that are drawn out from the soul and towards the sun leave evidently through the Elysian plain, while souls, either those visiting earth as *daemones* drawn to earth or drawn into reincarnation, travel through the shadow cast by the earth.<sup>182</sup>

This duality is the fundamental characteristic of the moon in the stranger’s account, as in Lamprias’ earlier characterization of the moon as a sort of cosmic liver. This idea of the “second death,” the separation of the mind from the soul, might be suggested by the cryptic hint in the myth of the *Phaedo* that there are some dwellers of the “true earth” that “sufficiently purify themselves through philosophy to live entirely without bodies for all time, those men arrive into

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quaestio Lampriae” (82), from the following sentences, which he takes to be Sulla’s response. Cf. Cherniss (1951): “If τίς... ὃ Σύλλα; here were an interruption by Lamprias, all the rest of the myth would be Sulla’s own statement given on his own authority... which is impossible, as the unannounced shift of speakers implied by the punctuation... is improbable” (151). Donini (2011) follows Cherniss (232), while Lernould (2013) separates the speakers, both without comment.

<sup>181</sup> ὥσπερ ἡ παρ’ ἡμῖν ἔχει γῆ κόλπους βαθεῖς καὶ μεγάλους, ἓνα μὲν ἐνταῦθα διὰ στηλῶν Ἡρακλείων ἀναχέομενον εἶσω πρὸς ἡμᾶς, ἔξω δὲ τὸν Κάσπιον καὶ τοὺς περὶ τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν θάλατταν, οὕτως βάθη ταῦτα τῆς σελήνης ἐστὶ καὶ κοιλάματα. καλοῦσι δ’ αὐτῶν τὸ μὲν μέγιστον Ἐκάτης μυχόν, ὅπου καὶ δίκας διδόναι αἱ ψυχαὶ καὶ λαμβάνουσι ὧν ἂν ἦδη γεγενημένοι δαίμονες ἢ πάθωσι ἢ δρᾶσωσι, τὰς δὲ δύο μακρὰ <τὰς Πύλας>· περαιοῦνται γὰρ αἱ ψυχαὶ δι’ αὐτῶν, νῦν μὲν εἰς τὰ πρὸς οὐρανὸν τῆς σελήνης, νῦν δὲ πάλιν εἰς τὰ πρὸς γῆν· ὀνομάζεσθαι δὲ τὰ μὲν πρὸς οὐρανὸν τῆς σελήνης Ἠλύσιον πεδίον, τὰ δ’ ἐνταῦθα Φερσεφόνης οἶκος ἀντίχθονος (944b-c). The emendations are taken from Cherniss; Pohlenz prints θερμ<ότητος, ἢ κατ>επείγει and τῶν ἀγαθῶν <τὰς ψυχὰς>, as well as τὰς δὲ δύο Μακράς and Φερσεφόνης † οὐκ ἀντίχθονος.

<sup>182</sup> The souls of the good can also become subsumed in the shadow of the earth (i.e. during an eclipse), according to the stranger. They cry out and hasten the moon quickly onward “because in the shadow they can no longer hear the harmony of the heavens” (οὐκέτι γὰρ ἐξακούουσιν ἐν τῇ σκιᾷ γενόμενοι τῆς περὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀρμονίας; 944a).

dwellings still more beautiful than these, which would be difficult to explain;”<sup>183</sup> but this central idea of the moon’s intermediacy is explicitly credited to Xenocrates:<sup>184</sup>

Xenocrates says that the stars and the sun are comprised of fire and first density, then the moon from second density and its own air, and the earth from water and the third of the densities. Nothing that is entirely dense in itself nor thin is able to receive soul. These things are true about the essence of the moon.<sup>185</sup>

The moon’s intermediate density between that of the sun and the earth serves the fundamental purpose of suitability for soul, which is described as a sort of intermediary between mind and body. The sun, moon, and earth all have properties that correspond to the parts of the human that pertain to their domain, meaning that the soul is a microcosm of the moon.<sup>186</sup> The moon too, as the stranger describes, is itself ensouled.<sup>187</sup> The stranger’s speech ends, moreover, with a comparison between the moon and the soul that explicates their connection in intermediacy:

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<sup>183</sup> τούτων δὲ αὐτῶν οἱ φιλοσοφία ἱκανῶς καθηράμενοι ἄνευ τε σωμάτων ζῶσι τὸ παράπαν εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον, καὶ εἰς οἰκίσεις ἔτι τούτων καλλίους ἀφικνοῦνται, ἃς οὔτε ῥάδιον δηλῶσαι (114b). Socrates concludes with dramatic irony: “nor is there time left at the present” (οὔτε ὁ χρόνος ἱκανὸς ἐν τῷ παρόντι).

<sup>184</sup> Dillon 2003a does not attribute the other attribute, however, to Xenocrates as well: “he allows the Stranger to reveal a triadic division of the individual human being, which, although it shows no signs of being influenced by Xenocrates, provides a microcosmic analogue to this division of the universe” (308). Similarly, Dillon (1977): “The threefold division of the individual has its equivalent on the cosmic level, in the form of a threefold division of the universe. ... An essentially solar theology has taken over, perhaps already a development of that of Xenocrates” (214, 216). There is evidence that Xenocrates postulated a sort of literary microcosm, however, in the shield of Agamemnon in *Il.* XI: “Xenocrates says that it is an imitation of the world” (ταύτην δὲ Ξενοκράτης μίμημα τοῦ κόσμου φησὶν εἶναι; fig. 55 Heinze). On the text and attribution, cf. Dillon (1977: 38n1). On the metaphysical debates within the Early Academy, see especially Tarán (1981: 12-29).

<sup>185</sup> ὁ δὲ Ξενοκράτης (fig. 56 Heinze) τὰ μὲν ἄστρα καὶ τὸν ἥλιον ἐκ πυρός φησι καὶ τοῦ πρώτου πυκνοῦ συγκεῖσθαι, τὴν δὲ σελήνην ἐκ τοῦ δευτέρου πυκνοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἰδίου ἀέρος, τὴν δὲ γῆν ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ τοῦ τρίτου τῶν πυκνῶν· ὅπως δὲ μήτε τὸ πυκνὸν αὐτὸ καθ’ αὐτὸ μήτε τὸ μανὸν εἶναι ψυχῆς δεκτικόν. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν περὶ οὐσίας σελήνης (943f-4a). The text of the passage describing the construction of the earth presents problems. Heinze (1892) prints γῆν ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πυρός, while Pohlenz (1955) prints ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ ἀέρος. Cf. Cherniss (1951: 152). See also *De Is.* 370f.

<sup>186</sup> After initially assigning the generation of the mind to the sun, the soul to the moon, and the body to the earth, the stranger quips: “it is thus fitting to the nature of each” (συντυγχάνει δ’ οὕτως κατὰ φύσιν ἐκάτερον; 943a).

<sup>187</sup> “First, they see the magnitude, beauty, and nature of the moon itself: it is neither simple nor unmixed, but a mixture, that is to say, of star and earth. For as the earth, mixed with air and <moisture>, becomes soft and blood, mixed with flesh, provides sense-perception, thus they say that the moon mixed with aether down to its depths is ensouled and fertile, just as it is in equipoise and has symmetry between lightness and heaviness. Indeed, the world itself thus has been made in harmony between the things borne above and below, freed entirely from motion regarding place.” (ἐφορῶσι δὲ πρῶτον μὲν αὐτῆς σελήνης τὸ μέγεθος καὶ τὸ κάλλος καὶ τὴν φύσιν οὐχ ἀπλήν οὐδ’ ἄμικτον, ἀλλ’ οἷον ἄστρου σύγκραμα καὶ γῆς οὔσαν. ὡς γὰρ ἡ γῆ πνεύματι μεμιγμένη καὶ ὑγρό<τητι> μαλακῆ γέγονε καὶ τὸ αἷμα τῆ σαρκὶ παρέχει τὴν αἴσθησιν ἐγκεκραμένον, οὕτως τῷ αἰθέρι λέγουσι τὴν σελήνην ἀνακεκραμένην διὰ βάθους ἅμα μὲν ἔμψυχον εἶναι καὶ γόνιμον, ἅμα δ’ ἰσόρροπον ἔχειν τὴν πρὸς τὸ βαρὺ συμμετρίαν τῆς κορυφότητος. καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸν οὕτως τὸν κόσμον ἐκ τῶν ἄνω καὶ τῶν κάτω φύσει φερομένων

What is soulless is itself powerless and susceptible to other things, while the mind is impassive and autonomous. But the soul is mixed and intermediate, just as the moon comes to be at the hands of the god as a mixture and combination of things above and below, bearing a relationship towards the sun as the earth does towards the moon.<sup>188</sup>

According to this account, the soul, as a microcosm of the moon, shares in its qualities, such as an intermediate position between physical materiality and immaterial intelligence. They are described as aetherial like the material around the moon and, like the moon in Lamprias' cosmology, are said to receive exhalations from the earth.<sup>189</sup>

In *De virtute morali*, Plutarch argued that the Platonic soul was divided between a rational and an irrational part.<sup>190</sup> The stranger's speech similarly depicts the human soul as essentially bipartite. The stranger declares that all souls spend some amount of time between the earth and the moon, because they all seem to require some degree of purification, but some of them, depending on the state of the irrational part of the soul, finally ascend to the moon.<sup>191</sup>

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συνηρμοσμένον ἀπηλλάχθαι παντάπασι τῆς κατὰ τόπον κινήσεως (943e-f). Although the *De facie* is not organized as a clear narrative, unlike Plutarch's other myths, the stranger describes the moon through the perspective of souls rising to her.

<sup>188</sup> τὸ γὰρ ἄψυχον ἄκυρον αὐτὸ καὶ παθητὸν ὑπ' ἄλλων, ὁ δὲ νοῦς ἀπαθὴς καὶ αὐτοκράτωρ, μικτὸν δὲ καὶ μέσον ἢ ψυχὴ καθάπερ ἢ σελήνη τῶν ἄνω καὶ κάτω σύμμικτα καὶ μετακέρασμα ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ γέγονε, τοῦτον ἄρα πρὸς ἥλιον ἔχουσα τὸν λόγον ὃν ἔχει γῆ πρὸς σελήνην (945c-d).

<sup>189</sup> “Then they appear in sight to be like a ray, but, accordingly with their nature, being light in the aether around the moon as here, they bear tension and strength from it, as much as tempered things bear an edge, because what is thin and dispersed becomes strengthened and stable and translucent, such that they are nourished by whatever exhalations come. For Heraclitus said beautifully that ‘souls have the sense of smell in Hades’” (δεύτερον <δ’> ἀκτῖνι τὴν ὄψιν εἰκοῦϊα, περὶ δὲ τὴν φύσιν ἄνω κουφιζομένην ὡσπερ ἐνταῦθα, τῷ περὶ τὴν σελήνην αἰθέρι καὶ τόνον ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ δύναμιν, οἷον τὰ στομούμενα βαφὴν, ἴσχουσι· τὸ γὰρ ἀραιὸν ἔτι καὶ διακεχυμένον ῥώννυται καὶ γίνεται σταθερὸν καὶ διαυγές, ὥσθ’ ὑπὸ τῆς τυχούσης ἀναθυμιάσεως τρέφεσθαι· καὶ καλῶς Ἡράκλειτος εἶπεν [B98 Diels] ὅτι “αἱ ψυχαὶ ὀσμῶνται καθ’ Ἄϊδην” (943c-e). For Pohlenz's *πυρὶ δὲ τὴν ψυχὴν*, I adopt Sandbach's *περὶ δὲ τὴν φύσιν*, which is followed by Cherniss (1957) and Donini (2011); cf. Lernould (2013). Scholars tend to identify this passage in particular as Stoic.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Teodorsson (1994).

<sup>191</sup> “Every soul, both lacking mind and possessing it, is fated to spend time wandering in the space between the earth and the moon when it falls out of the body—but not an equal amount of time. Unjust and unrepentant souls pay the penalties for their unjust deeds, while noble souls—to the extent that they purify their impurities from the body, as if airing out a foul stench—they must dwell for some appointed time in the gentlest part of the air, which they call the meadows of Hades. When they return back here, as coming home from exile abroad, they taste joy, just what initiates experience—great confusion and tumult mixed with sweet hope” (πάσαν ψυχὴν, ἄνουν τε καὶ σὺν νόῳ, σώματος ἐκπεσοῦσαν εἰμαρμένον ἐστὶν <ἐν> τῷ μεταξύ γῆς καὶ σελήνης χωρίῳ πλανηθῆναι χρόνον—οὐκ ἴσον, ἀλλ’ αἱ μὲν ἄδικοι καὶ ἀκόλαστοι δίκας τῶν ἀδικημάτων τίνουσι, τὰς δ’ ἐπιεικεῖς, ὅσον ἀφαγνεῦσαι καὶ ἀποπνεῦσαι <τοὺς> ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ὡσπερ ἀτμοῦ πονηροῦ μiasμους, ἐν τῷ πραοτάτῳ τοῦ ἀέρος, ὃν λειμῶνας Ἄϊδου καλοῦσι,

For she repels and drives back many of those that strive for the moon, and they see some of those there turning downward and sinking down, as if into a pit. But those who arrive with sure footing rise up at first, like athletes, binding themselves with feathery wreaths, so to speak, for their constancy, because they rendered in life the irrational and passionate part of their soul suitably ordered and obedient to reason.<sup>192</sup>

The soul's intermediary function between the mind and the body, it seems, requires that it have two aspects, like the moon—one involved in matter, the other in intelligence. Yet reaching the moon is not the end of its trials. While the mind is still present in the soul, they serve as *daemones*, “descending here to take care over oracles, they stand beside and celebrate the mysteries together with those above, and they become punishers and bulwarks against injustice and shine as saviors both in war and on the sea.”<sup>193</sup> If they execute their tasks badly, letting themselves be overcome by passions such as envy and desire for pleasure, they are forced back into another body;<sup>194</sup> but if they execute their tasks well, eventually the mind might be drawn to the sun by longing for the image of the form of the good. With the mind, the soul seems to be deprived of its rational part as well, leaving only the irrational. The mind, however, is said to leave a sort of ghostly shape on the soul that is left on the moon, however, like the image or

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δεῖ γίνεσθαι χρόνον τινὰ τεταγμένον. <ἐνθ’> οἷον ἐξ ἀποδημίας ἀνακομιζόμεναι φυγαδικῆς εἰς πατρίδα γεύονται χαρᾶς, οἷαν οἱ τελοῦμενοι μάλιστα θορύβῳ καὶ ποίησει συγκεκραμένην μετ’ ἐλπίδος ἡδείας ἔχουσι; 943c). Vernière (1977) prefers the MSS ἰδίας over Xylander’s ἡδείας (68n1). The punishments are said to take place in the “hollows and depths of the moon” (βάθη ταῦτα τῆς σελήνης ἐστὶ καὶ κοιώματα), of which the greatest is the “pit of Hecate” (Ἐκάτης μυχόν; 944c); people on earth are said to hear the wails of punished souls during eclipses (944b).

<sup>192</sup> πολλὰς γὰρ ἐξωθεῖ καὶ ἀποκυματίζει γλιχομένας ἤδη τῆς σελήνης, ἐνίας δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐκεῖ περικάτω τρεπομένας οἷον εἰς βυθὸν αὐθις ὀρῶσι καταδυόμενας. αἱ δ’ ἄνω γενόμεναι καὶ βεβαίως ἰδρυθεῖσαι πρῶτον μὲν, ὥσπερ οἱ νικηφόροι, περιίασιν ἀναδούμεναι στεφάνοις πτερῶν εὐσταθείας λεγομένοις, ὅτι τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ ἄλογον καὶ τὸ παθητικὸν εὐήνιον ἐπιεικῶς τῷ λόγῳ καὶ κεκοσμημένον ἐν τῷ βίῳ παρέσχοντο (943c-d). The stranger also mentions a “unstable and easily affected part” (τὸ ἄστατον καὶ τὸ εὐπαθὲς) that can drag the ghostly soul, bereft of both body and mind, back into generation. Although the moon attempts to prevent it through incantations (καταθέλγει), he explains monsters such as Typhon as this sort of soul “devoid of reason and under the sway of the enflamed passions” (ἐρήμων λόγου καὶ τύφῳ πλανηθέντι τῷ παθητικῷ χρησαμένων; 945c). On the pun on Typhon, cf. Pl. *Phdr.* 230a.

<sup>193</sup> οὐκ αἰεὶ δὲ διατρίβουσιν ἐπ’ αὐτὴν οἱ δαίμονες, ἀλλὰ χρηστηρίων δεῦρο κατῆσιν ἐπιμελησόμενοι, καὶ ταῖς ἀνωτάτω συμπάρεισι καὶ συνοργιάζουσι τῶν τελετῶν, κολασταὶ τε γίνονται καὶ φύλακες ἀδικημάτων καὶ σωτήρες ἔν τε πολέμοις καὶ κατὰ θάλατταν ἐπιλάμπουσιν (944c-d).

<sup>194</sup> “But if they should not perform their duties nobly but are rather overcome by anger or unjust desire for pleasure or envy, they incur a penalty: they are shoved back here to earth and confined inside human bodies” (ὅ τι δ’ ἂν μὴ καλῶς περὶ ταῦτα πράξωσιν ἀλλ’ ὑπ’ ὀργῆς ἢ πρὸς ἄδικον χάριν ἢ φθόνῳ, δίκην τίνουσιν· ὠθοῦντα γὰρ αὐθις ἐπὶ γῆν συνειργνύμενοι σώμασιν ἀνθρωπίνοισι; 944d).

ghost of Heracles in Odysseus' *nekya*.<sup>195</sup> The soul is like the body in this regard—a corpse also resembles the living person it used to belong to—and the mindless soul also eventually dissolves back into the moon:

The moon is the element of souls, as has been said. Just as the bodies of the dead are dissolved into the earth, so are souls are dissolved into her. The temperate, who desired the philosophical life of leisure separated from public affairs, are dissolved quickly, because they no longer experience their passions once they are released by the mind. But the souls of those who love honor and public affairs and passions and desires for bodily things continue on, experiencing the memories of their life as if dreams in sleep, such as the soul of Endymion.<sup>196</sup>

The eschatological distinction here is reminiscent of the central myth of the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates divides good souls into two classes: philosophers who can control their appetites entirely and abstain from sexual desire, such that their souls regain the wings they lost through incarnation, and those who are not philosophical but nevertheless honor-loving (φιλοτίμω δὲ χρήσονται), who might give into sexual desire occasionally but do not judge it to be entirely

<sup>195</sup> “The nature of the soul is left upon the moon, maintaining some traces of life as if dreams. It has been said correctly that ‘the soul flutters and takes flight like a dream.’ But it does not experience this not immediately once the soul is removed from the body, but later when the soul becomes alone and destitute of the mind. Homer seems to speak of this with the greatest of inspiration regarding the things in Hades: ‘after him I saw the life-force of Hercules, a ghost—the man himself is among the deathless gods.’ For each of us is neither spirit nor fear nor desire, just as it is not flesh nor humors, but that by which we think and reason. For each of us is neither spirit nor fear nor desire, just as it is not flesh nor humors, but that by which we think and reason. The soul receives an impression from the mind and impresses upon the body, enfolding it from every side and molding its form. Consequently, whenever the soul comes apart from each, it maintains its similarity and impress for much time, rightly called a ghost” (λείπεται δ’ ἡ τῆς ψυχῆς φύσις ἐπὶ τὴν σελήνην, οἷον ἔχῃ τινὰ βίου καὶ ὄνειρατα διαφυλάττουσα· καὶ περὶ ταύτης ὀρθῶς ἡγοῦ λελέχθαι τὸ “ψυχὴ δ’ ἡὐτ’ ὄνειρος ἀποπταμένη πεπότηται” (Hom. *Od.* XI.222). οὐδὲ γὰρ εὐθὺς οὐδὲ τοῦ σώματος ἀπαλλαγεῖσα τοῦτο πέπονθεν ἀλλ’ ὕστερον, ὅταν ἔρημος καὶ μόνη τοῦ νοῦ ἀπαλλαττομένη γένηται. καὶ Ὅμηρος ὃν εἶπε πάντων μάλιστα δὴ κατὰ θεὸν εἰπεῖν ἔοικε περὶ τῶν καθ’ Αἴδου (Hom. *Od.* XI.601-2) “τὸν δὲ μετ’ εἰσενόησα βίην Ἡρακλεῖην, / εἰδῶλον· αὐτὸς δὲ μετ’ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν.” αὐτὸς τε γὰρ ἕκαστος ἡμῶν οὐ θυμὸς ἐστὶν οὐδὲ φόβος οὐδ’ ἐπιθυμία, καθάπερ οὐδὲ σάρκες οὐδ’ ὑγρότητες, ἀλλ’ ὃ διανοούμεθα καὶ φρονοῦμεν, ἧ τε ψυχὴ τυπούμενη μὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦ τυπούσα δὲ τὸ σῶμα καὶ περιπτύσσουσα πανταχόθεν ἐκμάττεται τὸ εἶδος· ὥστε κἂν χωρὶς ἑκατέρου γένηται, πολὺν χρόνον διατηροῦσα τὴν ὁμοίότητα καὶ τὸν τύπον εἰδῶλον ὀρθῶς ὀνομάζεται; 944e-5a).

<sup>196</sup> τούτων δ’ ἡ σελήνη, καθάπερ εἴρηται, στοιχειῶν ἐστὶν. ἀναλύονται γὰρ εἰς ταύτην, ὥσπερ εἰς τὴν γῆν τὰ σώματα τῶν νεκρῶν, ταχὺ μὲν αἱ σφύρονες, μετὰ σχολῆς ἀπράγμονα καὶ φιλόσοφον στέρξασαι βίον (ἀφεθεῖσαι γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦ καὶ πρὸς οὐθὲν ἔτι χρώμεναι τοῖς πάθεσιν ἀπομαραίνονται)· τῶν δὲ φιλοτίμων καὶ πρακτικῶν ἐρωτικῶν τε περὶ σώματα καὶ θυμοειδῶν αἱ μὲν οἷον ἐν ὕπνῳ ταῖς τοῦ βίου μνημοσύναις ὄνειρασι χρώμεναι διαφέρονται, καθάπερ ἡ τοῦ Ἐνδυμῖωνος (945a-b). The reference to the dream of Endymion is apparently obscure, but Bos (1989) characteristically detects a reference to Aristotle.

good, whose wings have at least begun to grow back.<sup>197</sup> In Sulla's myth, both the ideal philosopher and the noble statesman, a sort of second best, may obtain the same fate, although the relatively disorderly impression of the latter sort constitutes a source of peril.<sup>198</sup>

The myth is much less explicit, however, about the fate of the ascendant mind.<sup>199</sup> If Socrates' myth in the *Phaedo* meant the better place as an escape from the world of becoming entirely, perhaps that is what Plutarch means as well.<sup>200</sup> Could it also mean that the sun reabsorbs the material of the mind, such that its material will be reused again eventually, but to create a new mind?<sup>201</sup> Scholars are generally insistent that the mind is meaningfully immortal for Plutarch, yet Theon, in another dialogue, distinguishes two opinions about the fate of the soul after death, each of which would be superior to the Epicurean opinion:<sup>202</sup>

In time, they consider many noble, weighty, and divine things and think that souls are indestructible and imperishable, or that there are long cycles of time journeying around the earth and the heavens until they are dissipated into the universe, consumed in the intellectual fire with sun and moon.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> 256a-d; cf. 248c-9a.

<sup>198</sup> In *Max. cum princ.*, Plutarch describes the recipient as “loving what is noble, politically-minded, and loving humanity” (φιλοκάλων ἐστὶ καὶ πολιτικῶν καὶ φιλανθρώπων; 776b).

<sup>199</sup> Cf. Del Corno (1991): “Un incessante processo di ricambio si svolge fra sole, luna, e terra; e una continua vicenda produce e riassorbe l'intelletto, l'anima e il corpo dell'individuo, nei modi e secondo le prerogative che a ciascuna parte sono pertinenti” (24).

<sup>200</sup> Hamilton (1934) finds in the “the return of mind to the sun in the *de facie*” a correspondence to the “promise that those who live well shall return each to his own star” in the *Ti*. See also Roig Lanzillotta (2015): “... the moon is the most appealing subject, not only for its influence on the processes of generation and corruption in the sublunary region, but also and especially due to it being a turning point in the destiny of the intellect, either finally freed from the accretions of soul and body or forced to return to an earthly existence” (192). This befits what he takes to be Plutarch's “contempt” for the body (184); Brenk (2017): “Suddenly we drift upwards in a sea of Middle Platonic transcendentalism, as spiritual voyeurs of a universe of lunar souls and nous stripped of psyche. Even Plato of the *Timaios* would be embarrassed. But having reached the top of the visible world and learned of the separation of the soul through love of the ‘Desirable, Beautiful, Divine, and Blessed,’ for us the myth... suddenly rolls backwards to a vision, not of the few entering into glory but to the pessimistic spectacle of the cycle of rebirth beginning again for the multitude” (65); Helmig (2008: 251-2). Flacelière (1976) deems this ascent “ce qui équivaut à un déification” (193).

<sup>201</sup> This seems to be what Lamberton (2001) means with the argument that souls “ascend as pure mind to union with the sun, into which they are absorbed” (178). See also Jones (1932: 120) *contra* Reinhardt (1926).

<sup>202</sup> E.g. Donini (1988): “Obviously, Plutarch does not at all intend to abandon the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul. For in addition to a body and a mortal soul, man has nous or intelligence” (142).

<sup>203</sup> ἐν ᾧ χρόνῳ πολλὰ καλὰ καὶ μεγάλα καὶ θεῖα προσδοκῶσιν οἱ τὰς ψυχὰς ἀνωλέθρους εἶναι διανοούμενοι καὶ ἀφθάρτους ἢ μακρὰς τινὰς χρόνων περιόδους νῦν μὲν ἐν γῆ νῦν δὲ ἐν οὐρανῷ περιπολούσας, ἄχρι οὗ συνδιαλυθῶσι τῷ κόσμῳ, μετὰ ἡλίου καὶ σελήνης εἰς πῦρ νοερὸν ἀναφθεῖσθαι (1107b).

Plutarch would presumably agree with Theon that the Stoic option would be better than the Epicurean, but would the *De facie* myth allow this as an interpretation? When the stranger describes the sun’s role in the return—characteristically, in a threefold comparison of the earth, moon, sun, and their respective human parts—neither option seems to fit the text:

The [earth] gives nothing after death in giving back what she takes for generation, but the sun takes nothing in taking back the mind that it gives, while the moon takes and gives and compounds and divides in virtue of each power—the one named Ilithyia compounds and Artemis divides.<sup>204</sup>

The earth, it seems, absorbs bodies back into itself entirely, and only gives in the sense that it will be ensouled again: nothing else is left. “Giving back,” then, seems to mean “taking,” or at least entering a state with the potential to “take” again whenever it accepts the next soul. The sun, conversely, does not seem to absorb minds back into itself, since its characteristic action is giving. “Taking back,” then, seems to mean “giving,” or at least entering a state of being able to “give” the next time it is fitting to instill a mind into moon-stuff.<sup>205</sup> The moon fittingly does both. It seems that the mind, then, neither perishes nor transcends, but maintains its individuality and remains until its next descent into a soul. The mind is immortal and, evidently, subject to a continuous cycle of ensoulment and the possibility of reincarnation, not unlike how the *Amatorius*’ Plutarch describes the fate of good, beauty-loving souls.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> οὐδὲν γὰρ αὕτη δίδωσι μετὰ θάνατον ὅσα λαμβάνει πρὸς γένεσιν <ἀποδιδούσα,> ἥλιος δὲ λαμβάνει μὲν οὐδὲν ἀπολαμβάνει δὲ τὸν νοῦν διδούς, σελήνη δὲ καὶ λαμβάνει καὶ δίδωσι καὶ συντίθησι καὶ διαίρει [καὶ] κατ’ ἄλλην καὶ ἄλλην δύναμιν, ὣν Εἰλείθυια μὲν ἢ συντίθησιν Ἄρτεμις δ’ ἢ διαίρει καλεῖται (945c). I follow Cherniss’ translation closely on this passage. Donini reads <ἀλλ’ ἀποδίδωσιν> immediately following δίδωσι.

<sup>205</sup> To break it down further, if there is a binary of opposition of x and y, the logic of the passage seems to be that ἀπο-x indicates y. The LSJ includes a relevant entry for ἀπο- (D.6): “almost = ἀ- priv.; sts. with Verbs... more freq. with Adjectives.” The passage does not usually receive much comment, except for the reason for identifying one side of the moon’s power with each goddess, such as Cherniss (1957: 220na) and Lermould (2013: 87n468).

<sup>206</sup> “The true lover reaches the world there and joins beautiful things in a pious way... until he goes again to the meadows of Selene and Aphrodite, sleeps, and begins another process of generation” (ὁ γὰρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐρωτικὸς ἐκεῖ γενόμενος καὶ τοῖς καλοῖς ὁμιλήσας ἢ θέμις... ἄχρι οὗ πάλιν εἰς τοὺς Σελήνης καὶ Ἀφροδίτης λειμῶνας ἐλθὼν καὶ καταδαρθὼν ἐτέρας ἄρχεται γενέσεως; 766b).



Perhaps a non-mythic account, such as Lamprias', could have fulfilled Theon's teleological requirement, as Sulla's interruption seems to imply. In this case, however, the myth does serve to fulfill this role through sketching a vision of the cosmos—not just the moon, but the sun and the earth as well—that explains the various parts in relation to cosmic ascent and descent. This, like the eschatological systems sketched in Plutarch's other myths, as well as Plato's, illustrates how the universe is ordered toward an essentially ethical end, a cosmic cycle of descent and ascent. W. Hamilton argued that Plutarch means the cosmological-anthropological content of the myth to be understood literally. The stranger's speech does not make it clear to what extent this could be true, but some critical details seem to hint that this is not the case. Surely it is not the *image* of the good in the sun that our minds are truly drawn towards, but the good itself beyond the physical world. In *De Pythiae oraculis*, the main speaker Philinus argues, perhaps as a correction to traditional Greek thought, that Apollo differs from the sun "just as the moon from the sun."<sup>207</sup> This leads him to distinguish the moon, which does not draw attention away from the sun, and the solar body: "the sun has made many ignorant in some respect of Apollo by diverting the intelligence, through sense-perception, from the really existent to the apparent."<sup>208</sup> There is a similar danger that the image of the sense-perceptible sun in *De facie* should divert the reader's intelligence away from the truly existent form of the good. The myth as a whole, it seems, is an imitation, an image based on but separated from reality. The literal interpretation of its details should not be insisted upon as if it is revelation of doctrine.

<sup>207</sup> "σὺ γὰ... οὐχ οὕτω νομίζεις, ἀλλ' οἶε τὸν ἥλιον διαφέρειν τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος;" "ἔγωγ'... ὡς τοῦ ἡλίου τὴν σελήνην" (400d). Cf. *De E* 386e.

<sup>208</sup> ὁ δ' ἥλιος ὁμοῦ τι πάντα ἀγνοεῖν τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα πεποίηκεν ἀποστρέφων τῇ αἰσθήσει τὴν διάνοιαν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄντος ἐπὶ τὸ φαινόμενον (400d). The dialogue shifts immediately after this remark back to the artefacts of Delphi. Cf. *Quaest. Rom.* LXXVII: "it is necessary to not simply think that they are icons of these things, but that Zeus is the sun in material, and that Hera is the moon in material" (282c).

Nevertheless, the cosmological system that Sulla's stranger lays out in the myth of *De facie* is apparently broadly coherent with similar passages elsewhere in the Plutarchan corpus.

Many of its details, for instance, cohere with the broad cosmological sketch at the beginning of the *De genio* myth:<sup>209</sup>

There are four principles of all things: the first is of life, the second of motion, the third of becoming, the final of decay. The monad binds the first to the second at the invisible, mind binds the second to the third at the sun, nature binds the third to the last at the moon. There is a Fate, a daughter of Necessity, placed as a keyholder with charge of each of the links: Atropos of the first, Clotho of the second, and Lachesis over the bond in the moon, around which is the turning point of generation.<sup>210</sup>

The system in Simmias' myth is more complicated than Sulla's, in that it extends beyond the world of becoming, but the latter includes the same three fates in the same exact order as those of the three connections here—Atropos to the sun, Clotho to the moon, and Lachesis to the earth.<sup>211</sup>

Broad but important details such as in the descent of souls from the moon, moreover, appear

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<sup>209</sup> In the dialogue *De genio Socratis* the philosophical issues entailed in communication with the divine is interwoven into a tyrannicide narrative. In a weighty speech, Simmias includes a myth cosmic journey and *daemonic* revelation to the extraordinary experience of a young man. Timarchus desires to understand “from whence Socrates bears this daemonian power” and so visits the oracle of Trophonius, an antique and strange oracle of the dead: “He therefore desired to learn what power the *daimonion* of Socrates holds, because he was a boy not ignoble and just had his first taste of philosophy, he confided in me and Kebes alone, and went down to the shrine of Trophonius and doing the things accustomed for the oracle” (οὗτος οὖν ποθῶν γνῶναι τὸ Σωκράτους δαιμόνιον ἦν ἔχει δύναμιν, ἄτε δὴ νέος οὐκ ἀγεννῆς ἄρτι γεγευμένος φιλοσοφίας, ἐμοὶ καὶ Κέβητι κοινωσάμενος μόνοις εἰς Τροφωνίου κατήλθε δράσας τὰ νομιζόμενα περὶ τὸ μαντεῖον; 590a). Aguilar (1996), however, considers the frame of this myth “más simple en su planteamiento” compared to the others, although she only mentions the “extranjero de Cartago” and none of the intricate details about his origins (286).

<sup>210</sup> τέσσαρες δ' εἰσὶν ἀρχαὶ πάντων, ζωῆς μὲν ἢ πρώτη κινήσεως δ' ἢ δευτέρα γενέσεως δ' ἢ τρίτη φθορᾶς δ' ἢ τελευταία· συνδεῖ δὲ τῇ μὲν δευτέρᾳ τὴν πρώτην Μονὰς κατὰ τὸ ἀόρατον, τὴν δὲ δευτέραν τῇ τρίτῃ Νοῦς καθ' ἥλιον, τὴν δὲ τρίτην πρὸς τετάρτην Φύσις κατὰ σελήνην. τῶν δὲ συνδέσμων ἐκάστου Μοῖρα κλειδοῦχος Ἀνάγκης θυγάτηρ κάθηται, τοῦ μὲν πρώτου Ἄτροπος τοῦ δὲ δευτέρου Κλωθῶ, τοῦ δὲ πρὸς σελήνην Λάχεσις, περὶ ἣν ἢ καμπὴ τῆς γενέσεως (591b). The names of the divinities harken back to the myth of Er. Cf. Pl. *Leg.* XII.960c-d. Russell in Nesselrath (2010) suggests *Phd.* 72b as the inspiration for the “turning point” image (95). Dörrie (1954) detects a sort of foreshadowing of the Plotinian hypostases in this passage (332-3).

<sup>211</sup> καὶ τριῶν Μοιρῶν ἢ μὲν Ἄτροπος περὶ τὸν ἥλιον ἰδρυμένη τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐνδίδωσι τῆς γενέσεως, ἢ δὲ Κλωθῶ περὶ τὴν σελήνην φερομένη συνδεῖ καὶ μίγνυσιν, ἐσχάτη δὲ συνεφέπεται περὶ γῆν ἢ Λάχεσις ἢ πλείστον τύχης μέτεστι (945c). The order is different than that of the myth of Er (X.617c), although, as Cherniss (1957) points out, the opposite does appear in *Leg.* XII.960c-d. Cf. Xenocrates frg. 5 Heinze. On the relationship between the systems, Dillon (1977): “In its firm separation of Mind and Soul, which are connected with the Sun and Moon respectively, this scheme is in accord with that of the *De Facie*. The three Fates also play analogous roles in both myths... What is new is the level of ‘Life,’ and the Monad which links it (*syndei*) to the level of motion” (215). Cf. Deuse (2010: 194-7).

elsewhere in Plutarch’s corpus, such as in the conclusion of *De exilio*.<sup>212</sup> Plutarch’s dialogues, however, present divergent and contradictory positions on the nature of *daemones*, a topic which spurs much of the interest in his philosophy.<sup>213</sup> At times they are conceived of as intermediate beings between the divine and the human, drawing on Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium*; but at other times it is the highest part of a human, identified with the mind, like at the end of the *Timaeus*. Yet in *De defectu*, Cleombrotus raises the possibility of evil *daemones* to explain the recipients of horrific sacrifices.<sup>214</sup> In Theanor’s speech in *De genio*, they seem to be the spirits of the dead. But above all, whether conceived of as a dead human or not, Plutarch associates them with divination and the mysteries, communication with the divine and temporary participation in it. This myth bears some tensions with the others, such as in the claim that “every soul partakes in mind, and no soul is unintelligent or mindless”—Sulla’s myth includes a dichotomy of souls with mind and mindless souls.<sup>215</sup> Each myth, however, is only a “likely account,” so it should not be surprising if they differ even in important details, because they serve different functions in different dialogues.<sup>216</sup> The elaborate frame and the affinities with the *Phaedo* and the *Timaeus*

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<sup>212</sup> “It leaves not Sardis for Athens, nor Corinth for Lemnos or Scyros, but rather exchanges the heavens and the moon for earth and life upon earth” (μεθέστηκεν, οὐ Σάρδεων Αθήνας, οὐδὲ Κορίνθου Λήμινον ἢ Σκυῖρος, ἀλλ’ οὐρανοῦ καὶ σελήνης γῆν ἀμειψαμένη καὶ τὸν ἐπὶ γῆς βίον; 607e). Slightly earlier, Plutarch invokes Empedocles for the idea that the body is “earthborn and mortal” (γηγενὲς καὶ θνητόν; 607d).

<sup>213</sup> Deuse (2010) points out various contradicting details, such as the identification of the *daemon* with the intellect in *De gen.* and of *daemones* with souls in the *De fac.* (182), and eventually concludes: “the myths must not be taken as doctrinal treatises; they are a play of the philosophical and theological imagination, but at the same time a proclamation of the effort and seriousness of inquiry and research” (182). Lamberton (2010) seems to delight in this *aporia*: “As Montaigne, perhaps the most sensitive and appreciative of Plutarch’s readers, emphasized, the scholar of Chaeronea provides models of the ‘inquiring style,’ rather than the dogmatic.” Roig Lanzillotta (2015), on the other hand, seems to see the assumption of potential contradiction as perversion compared to the “decades of confidence that a consistent body of thought or system would be found behind the multifarious themes dealt with in Plutarch’s abundant literary production” (179). Cf. Russell (1972): “It must, I think, be wrong to attribute any firm system of ‘demonology’ to Plutarch. Literary and philosophical tradition, the wisdom of the East, the popular beliefs of Hellas, were all known to him. They provided material for conjecture and adaptation. If he ever came to a definite approval or rejection, it was on the ground of moral ‘probabilities’” (78).

<sup>214</sup> 417c-e.

<sup>215</sup> ψυχὴ πᾶσα νοῦ μετέσχευ, ἄλογος δὲ καὶ ἄνους οὐκ ἔστιν (591d); πᾶσαν ψυχὴν, ἄνουν τε καὶ σὺν νοῦ (943c).

<sup>216</sup> Neither contradicts Plutarch’s most deeply held principles—neither attributes evil to divine providence, for instance—but they nevertheless are different sorts of inquiries.

emphasizes this status by undercutting the verisimilitude of the *De facie* myth and emphasize the hypothetical status of the stranger's teleological explanation: this or something like it might well be true, but about the physical world there can be no certainty. This form of myth, as well as elements such as the over-exoticism of the frame, emphasizes this critical epistemological distance.

### *Platonic models and the search for "sources" behind Sulla's myth*

In the previous sections, I argued that the formulation of a teleological account and the construction of the human as a microcosm are both drawn essentially from Plato. In this section, I argue that Plutarch considers the Xenocratean use of intermediaries also essentially Platonic, and that other details in the *De facie* myth are drawn from elsewhere in Plato. Sulla's stranger describes the embodied human as composed of three parts, with each part corresponding to a different part of the cosmos. The sun is the origin of the mind, and the agent that sows reason into soul-stuff on the moon; the moon in turn ensouls bodies made of earth. The latter two reabsorb the material after death, while the mind, when it sheds the soul, desires to return to the image of the good in the sun. There are aspects of this system that seem clearly taken from the *Timaeus*. As W. Hamilton already argued, this includes the division of humans into three parts: Timaeus describes the demiurge "reasoning and discovering that of the things that are visible by nature nothing mindless will be a more beautiful work than something with a mind, and in turn that it is impossible for mind to belong to anything, apart from a soul."<sup>217</sup> Towards the end of the dialogue, moreover, Timaeus describes this part, a dispensation from the demiurge, as a *daemon*,

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<sup>217</sup> λογισάμενος οὖν ἠϋρίσκειν ἐκ τῶν κατὰ φύσιν ὀρατῶν οὐδὲν ἀνόητον τοῦ νοῦν ἔχοντος ὅλον ὅλου κάλλιον ἔσεσθαι ποτε ἔργον, νοῦν δ' αὖ χωρὶς ψυχῆς ἀδύνατον παραγενέσθαι τῷ (30b). See also Thévenaz (1938: 70-1).

something divine that has authority over the rest of the soul.<sup>218</sup> The sun and moon of the *De facie* myth, however, are rather different from the *Timaeus*, where they are differentiated neither from each other nor from the other planets: human souls are sown into each of these and the eschatological schema rewards the souls of men who live well with the ability to return to their “native star.”<sup>219</sup>

These divergences from Plato have attracted a surprisingly vast body of scholarship that seeks out the ultimate “sources” behind the stranger’s speech.<sup>220</sup> Although Johannes Muhl already identified Sulla as a “Platoniker” in 1885, the Stoic Posidonius has proven to be a particularly popular candidate for the source lying behind the myth.<sup>221</sup> Maximilian Adler, for example, painstakingly attempts to connect every part of the myth to Posidonius, even when he must argue based on something as vague as Posidonius’ proclivity for geography.<sup>222</sup> Through this attribution, Franz Cumont argues that the myth contains the essential core of the “théologie

<sup>218</sup> “It is necessary to think about the most authoritative part of our souls in this sort of way, that god gave it to each as a *daemon*. We say that this dwells in the highest part of your body and raises us—as if a plant, not of earth but of the heavens—from earth towards the kindred in the heavens” (τὸ δὲ δὴ περὶ τοῦ κυριωτάτου παρ’ ἡμῶν ψυχῆς εἶδους διανοεῖσθαι δεῖ τῆδε, ὡς ἄρα αὐτὸ δαίμονα θεὸς ἐκάστῳ δέδωκεν, τοῦτο ὃ δὴ φαμεν οἰκεῖν μὲν ἡμῶν ἐπ’ ἄκρῳ τῷ σώματι, πρὸς δὲ τὴν ἐν οὐρανῷ συγγένειαν ἀπὸ γῆς ἡμᾶς αἴρειν ὡς ὄντας φυτὸν οὐκ ἐγγεῖον ἀλλὰ οὐράνιον; 90a).

<sup>219</sup> ... πάλιν εἰς τὴν τοῦ συννόμου πορευθεὶς οἴκησιν ἄστρου... (42b). Cf. Cornford (1937): “If we were right in supposing that the annual motion of the Sun actually is the motion of the Different, unmodified in the sun’s case and variously retarded or accelerated by the other planets, Aristotle’s explanation fits Plato’s scheme” (141).

<sup>220</sup> See also the survey in Bos (1989: 55-70). Some more recent scholars vaguely point to ‘eclectic’ sources: e.g. Del Corno (1991): “... e pure nel consueto rimpasto eclettico di altri fonti” (23); Russell (1972): “The elements of this fantasy come from many places. They include Platonic reminiscences, traces of astrology, much literary as well as popular tradition. The synthesis is Plutarch’s; he did not find the scheme as it is in earlier writers” (74). Plutarch’s system differs also, however, from the formulations of Hellenistic astrology, e.g. Vettius Valens: “sun signifies the things of the soul, while moon those of the body” (ἀπὸ Ἡλίου, ὃς δηλοῖ τὰ ψυχικά· ἀπὸ Σελήνης, ἣ δηλοῖ τὰ σωματικά...; 205.26-7). Macrobius attributes a similar distinction to “the Egyptians”: *Aegyptii protendunt... sol, auctor spiritus... luna corporum* (*Sat.* I.19.17). Cf. Cumont (1913): “Quand on distinguait dans l’âme diverses facultés ou parties, on rapportait à lui l’origine de la plus élevée, de celle qui gouverne notre être comme l’astre-roi règne sur le monde” (463). The astrologers he cites (463n1-3), however, only ascribe authority over souls to the sun and over bodies to the moon, not an origin or a source. Cf. Martianus Capella’s epithets, cited by Cumont (1913: 463n3): *fomes sensificus, mentis fons, lucis origo* (II.185).

<sup>221</sup> Muhl (1885: 36). Cf. Hirzel (1895: 185n4). Hirzel further distinguishes Lamprias, whom he also sees as an adherent of “die akademische Skepsis,” from Plutarch by his “angeborenen Uebermuthe” and his adherence to Lebadaea, “welcher Ort für ihn bedeutete was für Plutarch Delphi” (185).

<sup>222</sup> 1910. Cf. Jones (1916: 54-6). Against Adler’s attribution of the geographical portion to Posidonius: Hamilton (1934: 24-5n1). On the history of Posidonian scholarship, see Edelstein (1936: 286-8).

solaire” which he argues to be the secret doctrine revealed in the Mithraic and other “mystères exotiques.”<sup>223</sup> Although initially aporetic about Posidonius’ eschatology, Karl Reinhardt shifts to attribute the entirety of the myth in *De facie* to the shadowy Stoic.<sup>224</sup> There has also been a search for Pythagorean sources, particularly through Xenocrates—who is cited during at length stranger’s speech but is accredited with far more of it. Richard Heinze argued in his 1892 collection of the Early Academic’s fragments that the *De facie* myth is, in fact, from both sources: only part of the speech is Xenocratic, while part has been interpolated from Posidonius,

<sup>223</sup> 1913: 476-8. Cumont sees solar religion as the final stage in ancient worship of nature—“l’aboutissement logique du paganisme... divinisant la nature” (448)—which, in his view, developed alongside “les progrès de la connaissance” in natural sciences (450). He summarizes the eschatological schema of *De facie* (464), attributes it to Posidonius (464n3, 473-4)—a crucial link in the argument because of his association with the Syrian city of Apamea (hence he speaks of “un Syrien comme Posidonius, Jamblique de Chalcis;” 477)—and finally describes it as the advancement of old ‘oriental’ ideas: “luminaires célestes le séjour des défunts avaient été transformées et systématisées par les théologiens” (464-5). Cf. Campbell (1898: 368-9). Plutarch does not, in his account, draw directly on Posidonius, however, but received the myth through “le clergé païen,” who kept the Stoic doctrine alive for the intervening century and a half (475). This development, evidently, paves the way for Christianity: “La même race sémitique qui a provoqué la chute du paganisme est aussi celle qui fit l’effort le plus puissant pour le sauver” (479). Cf. Brenk (1977: 142-3n33). Cumont has a long legacy among historians of religion, however. Bousset (1960) for instance analyzes the sources of the *De fac.* myth based a reconstruction of Iranian religion that Cumont created out of the *De fac.* myth (71-2). Campbell’s (1968) reconstruction of the “ideology” behind certain aspects of Mithraic eschatology, such as the “threefold genesis,” is still based almost entirely on the myths of Plato and Plutarch (374-6). Jaeger (1948 [1923]) more sensibly attributes the creation of “cosmic” or “stellar” religion to Aristotle’s critique of the Platonic forms in the dialogue *De philosophia*, although allowing a simultaneous derivation by “that other pupil of Plato’s, Philip of Opus, in the *Epinomis*” (138).

<sup>224</sup> 1921: “Man pflegt gleichwohl Poseidonios als die Quelle beinahe aller späteren Eschatologien zu betrachten. Man findet ihn bei Cicero im *Somnium Scipionis*, bei Plutarch z. B. In der schrift ‘Über das Gesicht im Monde,’ ... Aber irgendetwas wahrhaft Wesentliches an diesen so mancherlei, untereinander wieder so ganz und gar verschiedenen Gebilden ausfindig zu machen, woraus eine bestimmte, so beschaffene Lehre oder Schrift sich abziehen ließe, ist uns nicht gelungen, möchten auch nicht wünschen, daß es gelänge” (473-4). He even warns that one could mistakenly “die gesamte Dämonologie und Eschatologie Plutarchs dem Poseidonios zuzuschreiben” (201n3). Scarcely half a decade later, he attributes most of *De fac.* to Posidonius (1926: 313-53), on the assumption that it must have a pre-Plutarchan source: “und wenn man noch immer leugnen will, daß dies die Eschatologie des Poseidonios sei, so frage ich, von wem ist sie sonst?” (353). He does, however, allow for some “Platon-Imitation” and “Platonstil,” such as with the fates (317). Jones (1932) responds point-by-point to his later arguments, particularly emphasizing that the separation of mind from soul in *De fac.* contradicts Posidonius’ position, explicitly cited by Galen (*De plac. Hippoc. Et Pl.* VI.2 = frg. 146 Edelstein & Kidd), that the mind if a faculty (δυνάμεις) rather than a part (εἶδη μὲν ἢ μέρος) of the soul (as for Aristotle)—and so certainly not a distinct, separable entity within a human (118). See also Hamilton (1934: 28n1); Edelstein (1936: 297n45). Reinhardt is, nevertheless, supported by Boyancé (1963: 104 with n2). Babut (2003 [1969]) considers this line of argument in his systematic treatment of Plutarch’s relationship with Stoicism (140-50), but concludes: “E poichè, d’altro canto, non c’è ragione di sottrargli questi meriti a beneficio di Posidonio o di qualche altra fonte congetturata per il dialogo – visto che l’originalità di Plutarco, almeno nella concezione dell’opera e nella sistemazione degli argomenti, pare incontestabile – bisogna concludere che il *De facie*, ancora più del *De Stoicorum repugnantiis* o anche del *De communibus notitiis*, deve spingerci a rivedere il giudizio sfavorevole troppo spesso formulato contro gli scritti antistoici dei *Moralia*” (150). Cf. Froidefond (1987: 200-1).

whom Heinze takes to be Plutarch's ultimate source for Xenocrates as well.<sup>225</sup> Roger Miller Jones, however, attacks the attributions to both Xenocrates and Posidonius at length and in multiple works, but nevertheless concludes, modifying Heinze's position, that there is a tension between a "thoroughly" Stoic part and the surrounding "Platonic" part.<sup>226</sup> Harold Cherniss similarly identifies specifically Stoic technical language in the same section—what Heinze argued to be the Posidonian interpolation—and notes Aristotelian ideas, such as the yearning of all things for the divine—but defends the claim that "Plato was Plutarch's inspiration throughout the dialogue."<sup>227</sup> Abraham Bos wildly expands the claim of Aristotelian influence in *De facie*,

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<sup>225</sup> 1892. He argues, among other contentions (123-4), that the moon and earth are initially said to desire one another (as the "ersehnte Vereinigung von Mutter und Tochter") in 942e, while the moon passes through the shadow of the earth as quickly as possible ("der offenbar als Ort des Schreckens gedacht ist") in 944a (124). He postulates an interpolation starting in 943a and continuing onto 944c; the rest, he argues, goes back to Xenocrates. This division, interestingly, requires him to explain the only part explicitly citing Xenocrates (943f-4a) as a quotation from Posidonius. Cf. Von Arnim (1921: 1, 24-6). Heinze's attributions to Xenocrates are taken up again by Jensen (1966): "Xenocrates explicitly states that there is a second death, which liberates the νοῦς from the ψυχή. ... the doctrine of the 'second death' and the existence of evil demons are both demonstrably Xenocratic teaching... It is only reasonable, therefore, to conclude that Xenocrates's teachings on the nature of the demons comprised both aspects of the demonology found in Plutarchus" (106-7). While Posidonius is often seen as a source of Near-Eastern thought, Xenocrates is associated with Greek Pythagoreanism. E.g. Zeller (1889): "Mit Speusippus theilt Xenokrates die Vorliebe für den Pythagoreismus und die Ueberschätzung der Mathematik; auch er verfolgte die Richtung, welche Plato in seinem höheren Alter genommen hatte, noch weiter, als dieser" (1010-1). Similarly, on Plutarch, Zeller (1881): "Schon der ursprüngliche Platonismus hatte sich vielfach an alt pythagoreische Vorstellungen angeschlossen" (159). He traces Plutarch's daemonology onto both Xenocrates and Posidonius (1955: 309); see also Jaeger (1948 [1923]: 459n1). Cf. Bousset (1960): "vielleicht aus Xenokrates und Posidonius" (60).

<sup>226</sup> Jones (1916) responded, "passing the fact that it assumes a method of composition decidedly improbable," that Heinze's division attributes onto Posidonius distinctively Platonistic ideas that contradict his secure testimonies elsewhere, and that the attributions onto Xenocrates are based on "inconclusive" evidence (53-4). Against the attributions to Posidonius, he argued more extensively later: "to assume that Posidonius was the only channel through which the commonplaces of poets and philosophers flowed down to later antiquity is preposterous. Further, we find that those who have busied themselves with compiling lists of these commonplaces have frequently paid little attention to the immediate contexts in which they occur" (1926: 98). On the attribution of 943d-e to Stoic thought, see also Cherniss (1957: 203ne). The position of Préaux (1973) is similar: "Plusieurs de ces pistes se rejoignent précisément dans l'éclectisme de Plutarque et se confondent dans une inspiration fondamentalement mais non exclusivement platonicienne" (144). She identifies elements such as "la dissolution de l'âme" as Stoic (150).

<sup>227</sup> 1957: 25; "... the notion that all nature strives towards the good and the term ἐφ' ἑρτόν itself are drawn from Aristotle" (213ng); "These last sentences of chapter 28 show several definitely Stoic traits, especially the conception of 'tension,' nourishment of the soul by the exhalations, and the use of the quotation from Heraclitus. It has long been customary to compare..." (203ne). Cherniss' general conclusion, however, is that "while Plutarch combined various eschatological notions which were current and some of which were probably held in common by different philosophers, his myth is in the main an interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus*" (24). See also Thévenaz (1938). The choice of the term *eros* for the desire that leads minds to the sun, however, is thoroughly Platonic.

particularly citing fragments of Aristotle’s lost dialogues such as the *Eudemus*.<sup>228</sup> Yvonne Vernière presents a more complicated account and finds different parts of the myth to be drawn from different sources: she allows that the tripartition of the human into mind, soul, and body is taken from the *Timaeus*, claims Stoic sympathy for the nature of the moon as an intermediary, and emphasizes what she finds to be the “Iranian” character of the “eschatology,” drawing especially on Cumont.<sup>229</sup> Like many French scholars, she is also influenced by Guy Soury, who claims that Plutarch is influenced by Plato, but that both were influenced by the Eleusinian mysteries.<sup>230</sup> One could add Heraclides Ponticus—a fourth century B.C.E. figure associated with

<sup>228</sup> 1989. The crux of Bos’ argument is Tertullian’s mention of a “dreaming Cronus” in Aristotle (1-4). See further 71-82. Cf. Michalewski (2014: 88n109). In that the *Eudemus*, Aristotle evidently argues for the immortality of the mind in particular. According to Themistius (*In De an.* 106.29-7.4 = frg. 38 Rose), Aristotle clarifies in the *Eudemus* (τῶν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους ἐξεργασμένων ἐν τῷ Εὐδήμῳ) that Plato also understood the mind as immortal (καὶ Πλάτων τὸν νοῦν ἀθάνατον μόνον ὑπολαμβάνει), while Aristotle distinguishes a mortal, passive mind (φθαρτὰ δὲ τὰ πάθη καὶ τὸν τούτοις ἐνόητα λόγον, ὃν Ἀριστοτέλης παθητικὸν νοῦν ὀνομάζει). The other fragments just mention the soul (frg. 39-41, 45-6), but Themistius’ testimony does cohere with Aristotle’s description of the active intellect in *De an.* III.5: “and it is this alone that is separated just as it is, and it alone is immortal and invisible—although we do not remember because it is impassive, while the passive intellect is destructible—and without it nothing thinks” (χωρισθεὶς δ’ ἐστὶ μόνον τοῦθ’ ὅπερ ἐστὶ, καὶ τοῦτο μόνον ἀθάνατον καὶ αἰδίου (οὐ μνημονεύομεν δέ, ὅτι τοῦτο μὲν ἀπαθές, ὃ δὲ παθητικὸς νοῦς φθαρτός)· καὶ ἄνευ τούτου οὐθὲν νοεῖ). Roig Lanzillotta (2015) takes this to be the source for the tripartition in the *De fac.* myth (180n9, cf. 182 with n24). Vernière (1977) considers this position, with Xenocrates as a mediating source (130), but ultimately concludes that Posidonius is “le chaîon essentiel entre le *Timée* et le mythe du *De facie*” (131). Chroust (1977) detects polemic against the lost Aristotelian dialogue *De philosophia* in Plut.’s polemic against the Stoic theory of “natural location.”

<sup>229</sup> 1986: 104 (Plato and Stoicism); 1977: 158 (Iranian religion). Cf. 1977: “Ansi malgré sa fidélité à Platon souvent et sincèrement proclamée, Plutarque offre fréquemment dans ses mythes l’ébauche de doctrines qui trouveront chez les penseurs postérieurs un développement plus hardi” (267). There are also claims of a Hermetic source for the content of the *De fac.* myth, such as Bull (2018): “This teaching of Plutarch, who it will be recalled knew books of Hermes, lends some support to the possibility that the soul during the Hermetic rebirth is thought to ascend to the level of the moon, where it encounters the divine powers descending from above” (328-9, citing *De Is.* 375f). Cf. Vernière (1977: 267). See also Bos (1989: 29-41). Beardslee (1975) broadly compares Gnosticism.

<sup>230</sup> 1940. Soury fittingly focuses on the description of Demeter and Persephone (943c-d) and finds parallel elements in the fragments of Plut.’s *De anima*, such as meadows (53-4). His argument is especially based, however, on what he takes to be an explicit reference to initiation in 943b, a very fragmentary sentence that is supposed to explain why the first death takes place in Demeter (καὶ ὁ μὲν ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ <γη> τῆς Δήμητρος): <διὸ τελευτᾶν λέγεται τὸν βίον αὐτῇ τελεῖν καὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς Ἀθηναῖοι Δημητρεῖους ὠνόμαζον τὸ παλαιόν. Regardless of the specifics of Cherniss’ reconstruction, the issue is how τελεῖν is to be understood: Soury takes it to be a reference to the mysteries, “initier” (53), but, as Cherniss (1951) points out, “τελεῖν in the ritual sense is active only, ‘to initiate,’ not passive, and that... τελευτᾶν could be equated only with τελεῖσθαι” (151). I would translate, following Cherniss, “And the former is in the <earth> and belongs to Demeter—<wherefore to end life is said> to be a service to her and the Athenians long ago named the dead Demeterians.” The urge to defend Soury’s reading is such, however, that Lernould (2013) adopts Cherniss’ suggestion for the lacuna but emends τελεῖσθαι for τελεῖν (80n403). Soury takes the main Platonic parallel to be the *Phdr.*, but argues this reflects the same ultimate source: “Les Mystères n’y perdent rien et leur influence se renforce plutôt de celle qu’ils exercèrent déjà sur Platon, ce qui rend parfois le départ assez délicat”



both Plato and Aristotle—for the idea that the material of souls is light or aether, as well as whatever details may have been in his lost dialogues that evidently included narratives of the soul’s journey through the heavens.<sup>231</sup>

Perluigi Donini, however, emphasizes the predominance of Plato in the stranger’s speech, and argues that whatever Stoic or Aristotelian elements Plutarch may have drawn upon are ultimately subordinated to a Platonic purpose.<sup>232</sup> In this vein, I argue that Plutarch is drawing not only many details from Platonic images and myths, but more significantly adopting a model he finds in the *Timaeus*, although he adopts Xenocrates’ elaboration of the theory of intermediates, as discussed in the previous section.<sup>233</sup> Plutarch presents Xenocrates, however, as elaborating a central conception from the *Timaeus*:

Xenocrates seems to have had these things in mind also, through some divine reasoning, but taking his start from Plato. For Plato is the one who declared that each of the stars has been harmonized from earth and fire through the natures bound by proportion in the two—nothing becomes sense-perceptible unless there is something of earth and light mixed into it.<sup>234</sup>

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(58). He (1949) explains some other elements, such as the shared material between moon and soul, by reference to Posidonius, however (324-325). See also Pérez Jiménez (2010).

<sup>231</sup> “Heraclitus calls (the soul) a fiery substance (πυρώδη), Heraclides a substance of light (φωτοειδή)” (frg. 98 Wehrli); “there are those who have said that it is an aetherial body, that is to say ‘heavenly,’ such as Heraclides Ponticus” (οἱ μὲν εἰρήκασιν αἰθέριον εἶναι σῶμα, ταῦτόν δέ ἐστιν εἰπεῖν οὐράνιον, ὥσπερ Ἡρακλείδης ὁ Ποντικός; frg. 99). See further Dillon (2003: 212-5). Plutarch mentions the former view in *De lat. viv.* but does not specifically name Heraclides: “there are some philosophers who think that soul is, in its essence, light” (ψυχὴν ἔνιοι τῶν φιλοσόφων φῶς εἶναι τῇ οὐσίᾳ νομίζουσιν 1130b = frg. 100). Hirzel (1895) compares the style of Heraclides’ dialogues (187).

<sup>232</sup> 2011: “l’inspiratore fondamentale è Platone e tutto ciò che Plutarco eventualmente prenda dagli Stoici è sempre piegato e subordinato a una significazione platonica” (350).

<sup>233</sup> E.g. Lincoln (1999): “Plutarch spelled out a set of eschatological ideas, following Plato...” (166). The search for the ultimate source of Plato’s myths, however, constitutes another mass of scholarship. Bousset (1960), for instance, finds in the myth of Er “eranschen Eschatologie” (66). Relatively recently, West (1971) renews the argument for Eastern sources, specifically the “magi” (242), for fundamental Platonic ideas, by way of Heraclitus and Pythagoras (161-2). Jaeger (1948 [1923]) emphasizes three elements: “the Academy’s admiration for Chaldaean and ‘Syrian’ astronomy,” “the religious dualism of the Parsees,” and a sort of antiquarian interest in Zoroaster (132)—“The Academy’s enthusiasm for Zarathustra amounted to intoxication, like the rediscovery of Indian philosophy through Schopenhauer” (133-4). Cf. Arist. frg. 6 Rose (= Diog. Laert. I.8).

<sup>234</sup> ταῦτα δὲ καὶ Ξενοκράτης (frg. 56 Heinze) ἔοικεν ἐννοῆσαι θεῖω τινὶ λογισμῷ, τὴν ἀρχὴν λαβὼν παρὰ Πλάτωνος. Πλάτων γάρ ἐστιν ὁ καὶ τῶν ἀστέρων ἕκαστον ἐκ γῆς καὶ πῦρὸς συνηρμόσθαι διὰ τῶν <δυσῶν> μεταξὺ φύσεων ἀναλογία δεθεισῶν ἀποφηνάμενος· οὐδὲν γὰρ εἰς αἴσθησιν ἐξικνεῖσθαι, ὃ μὴ τι γῆς ἐμμέμικται καὶ φωτός (943f). Cf. Dillon (2003): “there seems little enough in the dialogues to justify this triad level of reality, with its three degrees of *pyknon*. And yet, with a little imagination, the impulse to such a scheme might be discerned in certain

Xenocrates evidently went beyond Plato in postulating three densities and distinguishing the moon from the sun and the other stars, but his consequent cosmological system is presented as an elaboration of the account in the *Timaeus*. The stars are visible and consequently, according to Plato’s argument, must partake in *some* amount of earth: “Nothing would be able to be bodily or visible without fire, nor tangible nor solid without earth, so god composed the body of the world in the beginning from fire and earth, but two things are not able to be beautifully composed without a third: so there was a need for some bond that is uniting to both.”<sup>235</sup> Xenocrates, it seems, is not just expanding this conception of an intermediate, but drawing out density as a requirement of corporeality and visibility, even for the sun.

This sort of postulation of intermediaries, moreover, is characteristic of Xenocrates broader thought, including his conception of *daemones*, as Plutarch elsewhere preserves. John Dillon plausibly suggests that there he is applying Diotima’s theory of *daemones* in the *Symposium*.<sup>236</sup> Because Eros moves toward something external, it must lack things, she argues, and therefore not be a god.<sup>237</sup> Rather, it is “something between mortal and immortal... a great

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hints dropped by Plato in the *Timaeus*” (127). On θείῳ τινὶ λογισμῶ, see Dillon (1999: 308). See also Dancy (2017): “he appears to have been at least as concerned to carry on the thought of Plato as to promulgate ideas of his own.” Cf. Isnardi Parente & Dorandi (2012: 12-33). Proclus similarly depicts Xenocrates as a faithful interpreter formulating a conception of Plato’s idea “in agreement with the founder” (ὡς ἀρέσκοντα τῷ καθηγεμόνι τὸν ὄρον τῆς ιδέας ἀνέγραψε; frg. 30 Heinze = *In Parm.* 889).

<sup>235</sup> σωματοειδὲς δὲ δὴ καὶ ὀρατὸν ἀπτὸν τε δεῖ τὸ γενόμενον εἶναι, χωρισθὲν δὲ πυρὸς οὐδὲν ἂν ποτε ὀρατὸν γένοιτο, οὐδὲ ἀπτὸν ἄνευ τινὸς στερεοῦ, στερεὸν δὲ οὐκ ἄνευ γῆς· ὅθεν ἐκ πυρὸς καὶ γῆς τὸ τοῦ παντὸς ἀρχόμενος συνιστάναι σῶμα ὁ θεὸς ἐποίησε. δύο δὲ μόνω καλῶς συνίστασθαι τρίτου χωρὶς οὐ δυνατόν· δεσμὸν γὰρ ἐν μέσῳ δεῖ τινα ἀμφοῖν συναγωγὸν γίγνεσθαι (31b-c). See further 31c-2c.

<sup>236</sup> Dillon (1999) deems it “mathematical expression” of the explanation of *daemones* in *Symp.* 202d-e. He contends, “... the theme of triadic division of the universe, since that appears to be the salient feature of Xenocrates’ philosophy which attracted Plutarch, and for which he is, in consequence, our chief witness” (311). See also Plutarch’s summary in *De Is.* 361b-c.

<sup>237</sup> “But you conceded that Eros, through a lack of good and beautiful things, desires that which it lacks.” “I conceded it.” “How, then, can a god lack a share in beautiful and good things?” (“ἀλλὰ μὴν Ἐρωτά γε ὁμολόγηκας δι’ ἔνδειαν τῶν ἀγαθῶν καὶ καλῶν ἐπιθυμεῖν αὐτῶν τούτων ὧν ἐνδεής ἐστιν.” “ὁμολόγηκα γάρ.” “πῶς ἂν οὖν θεὸς εἴη ὁ γε τῶν καλῶν καὶ ἀγαθῶν ἄμοιρος;” 202d).

*daemon*, Socrates: everything *daemonian* is between both god and mortal.”<sup>238</sup> Xenocrates, we learn from the speech Plutarch assigns to Cleombrotus in *De defectu oraculorum*, further systematized this conception of a *daemon* as intermediary by comparing different sorts of souls to triangles:

Xenocrates, the companion of Plato, used the relationship of triangles as an example of this sort of relationship, likening the equilateral to the divine, the scalene to the mortal, and the isosceles to the *daemonic*. For the first is equal in every sense and the second is unequal in every sense, while as the last is in one sense equal and in one sense unequal, just as the nature of *daemones* possesses both the passivity of a mortal and the power of a god.<sup>239</sup>

Xenocrates interprets Plato’s *daemones* as bridging a gulf between the divine and the mortal by partaking in both of their natures. This interpretive move, positing intermediaries to explain metaphysical connections, could evidently be applied to explain other aspects of the world, such as the astrological bodies.<sup>240</sup> Cleombrotus, in fact, goes onto characterize the moon precisely as a “mixed body and *daemonic* imitation,” because it shares some characteristics with the heavens and some with the earth.<sup>241</sup>

Plato’s *Symposium*, however, also offers a more direct formulation of the idea that the moon is an intermediary, which Christian Lobeck contrasts with Aristophanes’ myth of ancient humanity. He describes a race of circular people that rolled instead of walked, composed to two conjoined humans, who were later split as punishment for their hubristic attack on Olympus.

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<sup>238</sup> μεταξὺ θνητοῦ καὶ ἀθανάτου. ... δαίμων μέγας, ὃ Σώκρατες· καὶ γὰρ πᾶν τὸ δαιμόνιον μεταξὺ ἐστὶ θεοῦ τε καὶ θνητοῦ (202d-e). Much of Diotima’s speech plays in intermediates, such as true belief (τὸ ὀρθὰ δοξάζειν) as the intermediate between ignorance and wisdom (μεταξὺ σοφίας καὶ ἀμαθίας; 202a). See also Plut. *De Is.* 361c.

<sup>239</sup> παράδειγμα δὲ τῷ λόγῳ Ξενοκράτης μὲν ὁ Πλάτωνος ἐταῖρος ἐποιήσατο τὸ τῶν τριγώνων, θείῳ μὲν ἀπεικάσας τὸ ἰσόπλευρον θνητῶ δὲ τὸ σκαληνόν τὸ δ’ ἰσοσκελὲς δαιμονίῳ· τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἴσον πάντη τὸ δ’ ἄνισον πάντη, τὸ δὲ πῆ μὲν ἴσον πῆ δ’ ἄνισον, ὡσπερ ἡ δαιμόνων φύσις ἔχουσα καὶ πάθος θνητοῦ καὶ θεοῦ δύναμιν (416c-d = frg. 23 Heinze). On Xenocrates’ theory of *daemones*, see also frgs. 24-5 Heinze (= Plut. *De Is.* 360d-e, 361b). Cf. Reinhardt (1926: 320n2).

<sup>240</sup> This sort of interpretation, the appeal to intermediary, proved extremely influential on later Neoplatonism: e.g. Proc. *In Alc.* 30.18-1.2.

<sup>241</sup> μεικτὸν δὲ σῶμα καὶ μίμημα δαιμόνιον ὄντως τὴν σελήνην (416e). His examples include the cycles of the moon and the consequences of discarding either the *daemon* or the moon as intermediaries (416e-f). Cf. *Sym.* 202e.

Each of the two parts of a circle-person is said to be either male or female, which leaves three possibilities: a combination of two men, of two women, or of one man and one woman.

Aristophanes describes this schema through a comparison with astrology: “There were three types of such sorts because of this, that the male was, in the beginning, the offspring of the sun, and the female of the earth, and the one partaking of both of the moon, because the moon partakes in both sorts.”<sup>242</sup> Whether Plutarch applied this sort of move to intermediaries, as Xenocrates did, or drew directly from Plato, Sulla’s myth presents a thoroughly Platonic system that takes its start from the *Timaeus*.

In that dialogue, however, human souls are sown into a variety of astral bodies and not just the moon, as in Plutarch. But the central importance of the sun is more reminiscent of the image of the sun in the *Respublica*, where it is Socrates’ example of what sort of thing the form of the good might be—just as things are visible insofar as they partake of the light of the sun, so too are they intelligible insofar as they partake in the form of the good.<sup>243</sup> In the eighth of the *Quaestiones Platonicae*, Plutarch indeed asks why the sun is treated in such a superlative manner in the latter but only as an “organ of time” in the *Timaeus*:

Someone might mistrust that the sun, improbably and strangely, is said to come into being with the moon and the planets for the demarcation of time. For it is accorded especially great honor by Plato in the *Respublica*, designated as the king and lord of the perceptible world, as the good is of the intelligible: for the sun is said to be the child of

<sup>242</sup> ἦν δὲ διὰ ταῦτα τρία τὰ γένη καὶ τοιαῦτα, ὅτι τὸ μὲν ἄρρεν ἦν τοῦ ἡλίου τὴν ἀρχὴν ἔκγονον, τὸ δὲ θῆλυ τῆς γῆς, τὸ δὲ ἀμφοτέρων μετέχον τῆς σελήνης, ὅτι καὶ ἡ σελήνη ἀμφοτέρων μετέχει (190b). Cf. Préaux (1973: 187). Evidently the Orphic hymn to Selene also attributes both genders to the moon (θῆλὺς τε καὶ ἄρσην; IX.4).

<sup>243</sup> “This is what I’m saying by calling it the child of the good, that which the good begot by analogy to itself: by just as much as the good relates to mind and what is known is in the intelligible realm, by that much is it (the sun) to sight and the seen in the visible realm” (τοῦτον τοίνυν... φάναι με λέγειν τὸν τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἔκγονον, ὃν τὰγαθὸν ἐγέννησεν ἀνάλογον ἑαυτῷ, ὅτιπερ αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ νοητῷ τόπῳ πρὸς τε νοῦν καὶ τὰ νοούμενα, τοῦτο τοῦτον ἐν τῷ ὁρατῷ πρὸς τε ὄψιν καὶ τὰ ὁρώμενα; VI.508b-c). Von Arnim (1921) suggests that this is Plutarch’s source for the sun in *De fac* (57). Cf. Reinhardt (1926: 318). In the *Amat.*, the character of Plutarch draws an analogy between Eros’ impact on the soul and the sun’s on bodies (764b-d). Plutarch seems to have also had this image from the *Resp.* in mind also in *De lat. viv.* 1129e-30b—see Roskam (2007: 138-9)—where he argues that “life itself—to be at all and to partake in generation—is given to a man by god so that he might be known” (τὸ ζῆν αὐτὸ καὶ ὄλως τὸ φῦναι καὶ μετασχεῖν ἀνθρώπῳ γενέσεως εἰς γνῶσιν ὑπὸ θεοῦ δοθῆναι; 1129e-f).

the good, providing the possibility to come to be through being shown to the visible things, just as through the other it is possible for intelligible things to be understood.<sup>244</sup>

It seems that the stranger's myth adjusts the schema in the *Timaeus* into a cosmic hierarchy to facilitate the status of the sun in the famous image from the *Respublica*. This corresponds to the hierarchical nature of humans, who are in the *De facie* myth, as in the *Timaeus*, composed of mind, soul, and body, while adopting the idea that the sun is the “child” of the form of the good, making it the source of order in the world of becoming.<sup>245</sup> While the standard accounts try to draw direct correspondences between single Platonic models and single Plutarchean myths, the reality is more complex—Plutarch draws from a variety of Platonic influences in each. In the *De facie* myth, for example, there are perhaps reminiscences of the palinode of the *Phaedrus*—such as the detail that the souls that rise to the moon “like athletes, bind themselves with feathery wreaths, so to speak, for their constancy,” recalling the Platonic wing imagery<sup>246</sup>—as well as the other dialogues cited in this chapter. This bricolage can be seen in these echoes of details, but

<sup>244</sup> ἐκεῖνο δὲ μᾶλλον ἂν τις ὑπίδοιτο, μὴ παρὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ὁ ἥλιος καὶ ἀτόπως λέγεται μετὰ τῆς σέληνης καὶ τῶν πλανήτων εἰς διορισμὸν χρόνου γεγονέναι. καὶ γὰρ ἄλλως μέγα τοῦ ἡλίου τὸ ἀξίωμα καὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ Πλάτωνος ἐν Πολιτεία βασιλεὺς ἀνηγόρευται παντὸς τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ καὶ κύριος, ὥσπερ τοῦ νοητοῦ τάγαθόν· ἐκείνου γὰρ ἔκγονος λέγεται, παρέχων τοῖς ὄρατοῖς μετὰ τοῦ φαίνεσθαι τὸ γίνεσθαι, καθάπερ ἀπ' ἐκείνου τὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ γινώσκεσθαι τοῖς νοητοῖς ὑπάρχει (1006f-7a). The initial question is: “how is it that Timaeus says that souls are sown into the earth and the moon and all the other organs of time?” (πῶς λέγει τὰς ψυχὰς ὁ Τιμαῖος εἰς τε γῆν καὶ σελήνην καὶ τᾶλλα ὅσα ὄργανα χρόνου σπαρήναι; 1006b, paraphrasing *Ti.* 42d).

<sup>245</sup> In the eighth of the *Quaestiones Platonicae*, he takes eventually argues that “time is not an accident or an attribute of motion but the cause and power and source of the symmetry and order encompassing everything in a state of becoming, through which the nature of all, being ensouled, moves” (οὐ γὰρ πάθος οὐδὲ συμβεβηκὸς ἢς ἔτυχε κινήσεως ὁ χρόνος ἐστίν, αἰτία δὲ καὶ δύναμις καὶ ἀρχὴ τῆς πάντα συνεχούσης τὰ γινόμενα συμμετρίας καὶ τάξεως, ἣν ἢ τοῦ ὅλου φύσις ἐμψυχος οὐσα κινεῖται; 1007b). As a result, the role of the sun is held to be a source of order, insofar as it gives time its order and intervals: “the sun, because it is the overseer and guardian, delimits and presides and displays and reveals changes and seasons, which Heraclitus says bring everything about; it is the fellow-worker of the chief and first god, not in paltry or small things, but in the greatest and most authoritative” (ἥλιος ἐπιστάτης ὢν καὶ σκοπὸς ὀρίζειν καὶ βραβεύειν καὶ ἀναδεικνύειν καὶ ἀναφαίνειν μεταβολὰς καὶ ὥρας “αἱ πάντα φέρουσι” καθ' Ἡράκλειτον [frg. B100], οὐ φαύλων οὐδὲ μικρῶν ἀλλὰ τῶν μεγίστων καὶ κυριωτάτων τῶ ἡγεμόνι καὶ πρώτῳ θεῷ γίνεται συνεργός; 1007d-e). This is a very different attitude towards the sun than Posidonius', who does not seem to have differentiated it from other moving astral bodies: Edelstein (1936: 297-8). Cf. [Pl.] *Epin.* 978c-9b.

<sup>246</sup> ὥσπερ οἱ νικηφόροι, περιάσιν ἀναδούμενοι στεφάνοις πτερῶν εὐσταθείας λεγομένοις (943d). Cf. e.g. *Phdr.* 256b; Flacelière (1976: 195n18). The use of the term “obedient to the rein” (εὐήνιον; 943d) to describe the irrational part of the soul also clearly recalls the image of the soul chariot. Plut. also quotes *Phdr.* 250c—the soul is in the body “like an oyster” (ὀστρέου τρόπον)—in *De exil.* 607e.

also in the similarity in overall structure: the myth *De facie* presents the human as a microcosm of the universe and shows how the moon fulfills a greater purpose in the manner required by Socrates in the *Phaedo*—namely through its role in both the ensoulment of bodies and the purification of disembodied souls.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I identified four significant points of similarity between the myths of Plutarch's *De facie* and, particularly, Plato's *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*. The over-determined exoticism of the frame of Sulla's story calls attention to the hypothetical status of the discourse, it fulfills the requirements of a teleological account as laid out by Socrates in the *Phaedo*, it gains its plausibility by utilizing the analogy of macrocosm and microcosm as exemplified by the *Timaeus*, and it explains the parts of both humans and the world through identifying part as an intermediary to build a sort of hierarchy, as evidently Xenocrates proposed, himself building upon the *Timaeus*. These attributes each contribute to the framing Sulla's myth as a "likely account" about the physical world, namely the nature of the moon and the teleological significance of its nature: just as the soul is an intermediary between mind and body, the moon is an intermediary between sun and earth, receiving mind from the sun and ensouling a body on the earth. This account is not certain, because it concerns the world of becoming, about which we cannot be certain. Rather, it explains how such an arrangement, if true, fulfills some greater purpose in the providential care of the world. In so doing, Plutarch, like Plato, subordinates physical inquiry to metaphysics, which perhaps gives it a greater sort of ethical significance: by studying the world, we learn about its intelligent arrangement and functioning, and so can order ourselves accordingly in pursuit of that Middle Platonic ideal, the imitation of god.

While in Sulla's myth the moon is the primary macrocosm for the human soul, the next chapter centers on Plutarch's interpretation of the Platonic world soul in his explicitly exegetical treatises, particularly *De animae procreatione*. The description of the human soul in Sulla's myth evidently shares salient qualities with the world soul, which suits the macrocosmic-microcosmic analogy identified in the *Timaeus*. In Sulla's myth, particularly pure minds eventually stop caring for the soul at all and travel to the sun, leaving the souls on the moon to maintain a sort of imprint left by the mind for a time, before either they disintegrate into the moon or the irrational part of the soul overpowers the rational. In Plutarch's exegesis of Plato's *Politicus*, the cosmic intellect does not always govern the world soul with the same degree of attention, but periodically exerts less control: at first the soul maintains its orderly motion, but eventually the irrational part of the world soul overpowers the rational part and makes its chaotic nature felt as a cosmic upheaval, before the intellect regains control and governs the world soul. The latter idea could, perhaps, illuminate a particularly strange part of Sulla's myth, the image of Cronus bound under Ogygia:

For Cronus dreams as many things as Zeus premeditates: the titanic passions and motions of his soul rouse him, <until> sleep once again <restores> his repose, and the kingly and divine royal part is, intrinsically, clean and pure.<sup>247</sup>

The image is strange, but it seems that Zeus represents the active intellect, while as Cronus' dreaming state is a passive one, like a sort of conduit.<sup>248</sup> His soul is pure during this sleeping state, but it is evidently liable to the same kinds of overwhelming passions as the world soul in

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<sup>247</sup> ὅσα γὰρ ὁ Ζεὺς προδιανοεῖται, ταῦτ' ὄνειροπολεῖν τὸν Κρόνον, εἶναι δ' ἀνάτασιν τὰ τιτανικὰ πάθη καὶ κινήματα τῆς ψυχῆς <ἕως> ἂν αὐτῷ πάλιν ἀνάπαυσιν ὁ ὕπνος <καταστήσῃ> καὶ γένηται τὸ βασιλικὸν καὶ θεῖον αὐτὸ καθ' ἑαυτὸ καθαρὸν καὶ ἀκήρατον (942a). Evidently there is a lacuna of 11 letters after Κρόνον; Pohlenz (1955) prints ἐπειδὴν στασιάσαντα, while Donini (2011) suggests ἔχειν δ' οὕτως ἴνα.

<sup>248</sup> In the myth of Plato's *Plt.*, Cronus and Zeus are both governors of the universe, but here they seem to be reduced into a hierarchy, not unlike the sun and the moon later in the myth.

Plutarch's exegesis.<sup>249</sup> The image is reversed, however: that sleep is what weakens the reason in the latter, while it is what quiets the passions in this passage of *De facie*.<sup>250</sup> Should this detail perhaps subtly suggest that the world soul is liable to disorder like human souls, or is it an extrinsic detail meant only to explain the prophetic power of the *daemones*?<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Bos (2004) also interprets Cronus in the *De fac.* myth as representing the “World Soul”—although in an ‘Aristotelian’ guise of the “World Archon,” rather than as a recognizably Platonic world soul (186)—but he does not explain the titanic passions interrupting sleep (although he mentions it in 175-6), this very detail which distinguishes this version of the myth from the other dialogue.

<sup>250</sup> Donini (2011), however, argues that there is *not* “un’alternanza di principi diversi alla guida dell’universo” in Plutarch’s “interpretazione della cosmologia platonica” based on *De def. or.*, *De Is.*, and “forse” *De an. proc.* (343). This consideration leads him to insert <μή> between Κρόνον and εἶναι (343-4), taking the latter from Cherniss.

<sup>251</sup> In the stranger’s speech, the world soul could be thought of, in a sense, as embodied in the moon, in the guise of Persephone. The demiurge’s creation in the *Timaeus* is deemed a “single-borne world” (μονογενής οὐρανός; 31b), and Persephone in the stranger’s myth is called by the same epithet (943b). In the Hesiodic *Theog.*, the epithet is applied to Hecate (427), which offers an identification that proves extremely influential in later Middle and Neoplatonism through the *Oracula Chaldaica*.



### *Summary. Myth, interpretation, and Platonism*

In this study, I have argued that Platonic interpretation and mythmaking are parallel forms of discourse, through which Plutarch builds a meticulously Platonic philosophy. Myth is for Plutarch, as for Plato, a way of forming images about the world that, although distinct from their models, can help the student of philosophy to at least grasp after the truth. Rather than a sort of *hieros logos* like that of the mysteries, each discourse allows him to create “likely accounts,” as Plato described them in the *Timaeus*, that provide sketches of how the cosmic governance of the divine might function. Myths, however, must be interpreted. The first chapter examined how Plutarch derives his central theological conceptions from the Platonic corpus. The definition of piety as an intermediary position between superstition and atheism seems to provide him with his central definition in both *De superstitione* and *De Iside et Osiride*. He approached traditional myths and rituals with care, but was not afraid to interpret them, sometimes with constrictive allegories, to reflect back on philosophical truths. He drew his definition of the aim (*telos*) of the good life, as many Platonists would, from the image of imitating god, insofar as possible for a human. Plutarch, both in his own grappling with tradition and in his polemic with the other schools, especially the Epicureans and Stoics, was a thorough-going Platonist. In the second chapter, I argued that Plutarch interprets Plato through consistent hermeneutical principles, in both interpretive works *in prima persona* and in his dialogical depictions of interpretive conversations. Just as the myths of tradition must be interpreted, so too those of Plato, particularly in the case of the difficult likely myth of the *Timaeus*. Plutarch assumes that Plato is consistent with himself, such that it is best to interpret a given difficulty through appealing to other parts of the corpus, rather than invoking competing figures such as Aristotle. As a result, he could take certain ideas or images from elsewhere in the corpus—such as the cosmic cycles of

the *Politicus* myth—and use them to explain the composition of the world soul in the *Timaeus*. He attempts to maintain the temporal distinctions implicit in the narrative ordering of Platonic myths, however, rather than recourse to the sort of allegorical interpretation he found among the Early Academics. This discourse of dialectical interpretation likewise enables Plutarch to form accounts about the world that are at least likely, although he does not always venture to speculate which meaning was actually intended by Plato, as long as each is plausible and coherent with what he takes to be Plato's central assumptions.

In the third and fourth chapters, I examined how Plutarch's myths serve functions particular to their form, however, such as the ethical exhortation inherent in the myth of *De sera numinis vindicta* and the teleological account of *De facie in orbe lunae*. In the former case, the philosophical myth allows Plutarch a second way of approaching Epicurus' assault on providence and so to reinforce the central ethical ideas of the dialogue. The myth complements the dialectic. It does not meaningfully transcend it. In Sulla's myth, however, Plutarch weaves together a teleological account with an ostentatiously fictive narrative of an exoticized expert from the far north, who had various divine and mundane sources. This fictive prelude, I argue, functions not unlike the pairing of the Atlantis myth with the likely myth of the *Timaeus*: it calls attention to the speech's status as hypothetical. Like religious and Platonic interpretation, Plutarch draws widely on Platonic models for his myths, such as afterlife punishments in the *Gorgias* and imagistic details from the "true world" in the *Phaedo*. This discourse of mythmaking provides another avenue of likely accounts for Plutarch, which complement those of his more straight-forwardly logical dialectics. The truth is difficult, if even possible for a human, to obtain, so Plutarch takes multiple tactics. Myth is a particularly useful avenue because it does not allow its careful reader to forget that it is only an image of the good in the sun.

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## *Vita*

Collin Miles Hilton was born in Los Angeles, California on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1990. He spent summers growing up in coastal Mississippi, but attended school in North Hollywood until 2009. He graduated from New York University in 2012 with a B.A. in Classics. While completing his undergraduate degree, he studied Greek and Latin at the City University of New York's Summer Intensive Institute. He worked briefly in information technology, then enrolled in the department of Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies at Bryn Mawr College, where he received an M.A. in 2015 under the guidance of Radcliffe Edmonds III. His thesis studied myth in Proclus' commentary on Hesiod's *Opera et dies*. In the Fall of 2018, he received the Berthe M. Marti fellowship to study at the American Academy in Rome, where he worked on his doctoral dissertation until the summer of 2019. He successfully defended his dissertation in the December of the same year, while teaching Latin at Bryn Mawr College and Villanova University. The final edits were made in the Spring of 2020, huddled in the spare bedroom of a dear friend, Luca D'Anselmi, while the world ground to a near-halt in uncertainty concerning a novel virus.