

Plutarch's *Erotikos*: The Drag Down Pulled Up

FREDERICK E. BRENK, S.J.

Plutarch's dialogue on love, or Love, the *Erotikos*—better known to most readers as the *Amatorius*—in spite of its obvious Platonic inspiration advocates heterosexual married love as the ideal.¹ But focus on this aspect seems to have obscured the real novelty of the essay. At least, this study will try to demonstrate that Plutarch's originality consists not so much in the aspect of reciprocal egalitarian love, as the incorporation of this type of love into the Platonic goal of the vision of the Beautiful, and a new concept of what the Form of the Beautiful is.

In the course of the *Erotikos* Plutarch cites Euripides' *Hippolytos* (193–95) as a starting point for an understanding of the true nature of love:

δυσέρωτες δὴ φαίνομεθ' ὄντες
 τοῦδ' ὅτι τοῦτο στίλβει κατὰ γῆν,
 δι' ἀπειροσύνην ἄλλου βίотου . . .

Ill-starred lovers we seem to be
 Of this, whatever gleams upon the earth,
 Through inexperience of another life . . .²

Plutarch's context is *lethe* (forgetfulness), which cancels the vision of the Beautiful once seen in another world.³ The words are of Phaidra's nurse in a powerful Greek drama centered on resistance to Eros. In Euripides' play, apparently a classic revision of an earlier *Hippolytos*, Phaidra dies nobly to

¹ Text of R. Flacelière, in R. Flacelière and M. Cuvigny, *Plutarque. Oeuvres Morales X* (Paris 1980). A. Barigazzi is preparing an edition with translation and commentary—cf. I. Gallo, "Una nuova iniziativa scientifica ed editoriale: il *Corpus Plutarci Moralium*," in F. E. Brenk and I. Gallo, eds., *Miscellanea Plutarchea* (Ferrara 1986) 143–45; "Note critiche ed esegetiche all'*Eroticos* di Plutarco," *Prometheus* 12 (1986) 97–122; idem 245–66. J. Irigoín's study of the manuscript tradition has now appeared in R. Flacelière, J. Irigoín, J. Sirinelli, A. Philippon, *Plutarque. Oeuvres Morales I.1* (Paris 1987) ccxxvii–cccxxiv; and that of M. Manfredini, "Sulla tradizione manoscritta dei 'Moralia' 70–77," in A. Garzya, G. Giangrande, M. Manfredini (I. Gallo, ed.), *Sulla tradizione manoscritta dei "Moralia" di Plutarco* (Salemo 1988) 123–38.

² 764E. Flacelière, 149; Y. Vernière, *Symboles et mythes dans la pensée de Plutarque* (Paris 1977) 208–13. Euripides' text (anapests of nurse): J. Diggle, *Euripidis Fabulae I* (Oxford 1984) 215, with Plutarch's better reading (195 ἀπειροσύνην VΔ et Plut. 764: -ναν).

³ Treated by H. Martin, "Plutarch, Plato, and Eros," *CB* 60 (1984) 82–88; 86.

save her *aidos* (shame, respect, chastity—linked with fidelity to her marriage vows) rather than surrender to an Eros steeped in the perverted bestiality of her maternal inheritance and dragging her soul downward. She commits suicide rather than attempt to seduce Hippolytos. The quotation, then, is not haphazard. Rather it points to the contrast between the drag down, symbolized by Phaidra's sexual drive, and the pull up—in Platonic philosophy the positive evaluation of Eros which leads to the Beautiful in Itself.⁴ The dramatist who offered to the world Phaidra, also created Medeia, Helena, Kanake, Stheneboia, Laodameia, and many other women whose relationship to life centered around a destructive Eros.

There can be no doubt that Euripides enormously influenced subsequent Hellenistic literature. The negative treatment of Eros is exemplified in Hellenistic literature by Apollonios of Rhodes' *Argonautika*, dealing with the destructive love of Medeia for Iason. Undoubtedly he drew on Euripides' brilliant exposition of the power of love. But in the *Hippolytos* the two major characters, though doomed to die, wrench a moral victory from Aphrodite.⁵ Medeia submits. Apollonios' shadow fell upon the Dido of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Her passion for Aeneas causes her suicide, and eternal enmity between Carthaginians and Romans. Ovid's generally positive attitude toward *amor* is also influenced by Euripides and Hellenistic writing. However, his is a poetic development paralleling Plutarch's literary-philosophical exposition. Still, the *Erotikos* is remarkable for its clarity in extolling heterosexual married love, and for its striking frame—the love of Ismenodora for Bacchon. The essay seems, then, at first sight an intellectual milestone.

Literature on the *Erotikos* concentrates on the positive evaluation of *eros*, heterosexual reciprocity, and the equal status of the partners. Three distinct approaches to the *Erotikos* can be noted: the anti-Epicurean, the Platonic and the "unitary"—the integration of the sexual and non-sexual aspects of love. The first characterizes to a large extent Robert Flacelière, whose interest in the Greek concept of *eros* can be detected in an article on the anti-Epicurean thrust of the *Erotikos*, his book *L'Amour en Grèce*, and his separate edition of the *Erotikos*—later incorporated into the Budé *Plutarque*.⁶ The outstanding love for his own wife seems reflected in his

⁴ See the excellent treatments of C. P. Segal, "The Tragedy of the *Hippolytos*: The Waters of Ocean and the Untouched Meadow," *HSCP* 70 (1965) 117–69 and J. M. Bremer, "The Meadow of Love and Two Passages in Euripides' *Hippolytus*," *Mnemosyne* 28 (1975) 268–80; also F. E. Brenk, "Phaidra's Risky Horsemanship: Euripides' *Hippolytos* 232–38," *Mnemosyne* 39 (1986) 385–87.

⁵ The theme is elaborated in G. Paduano, *Studi su Apollonio Rodio* (Rome 1972), esp. 120–23.

⁶ *L'Amour en Grèce* (Paris 1971) 163–88—noting Aristotelian, Stoic, and Epicurean influence on Plutarch; "Les épicuriens et l'amour," *REG* 67 (1954) 69–81; *Plutarque. Dialogue sur L'Amour (Eroticos)* (Paris 1953), reworked for *Plutarque. Oeuvres Morales X* (Paris 1980), esp. 20–31. R. Laurenti, *Aristotele, I frammenti dei dialoghi* (Naples 1987), has recently edited the

ardor for certain ideas found in Plutarch.⁷ Recently Adelmo Barigazzi has deepened the anti-Epicurean dimension of Flacelière's work.⁸

Next, there is the Platonic approach, followed to some extent by Flacelière and elaborated recently by Hubert Martin.⁹ Finally, Michel Foucault's chapter on Plutarch in his *L'histoire de la sexualité* focuses on the "unitary aspect" of Plutarch's Eros.¹⁰

Flacelière and Barigazzi note Epikouros' negative attitude toward *eros* in the following texts:

ἐρασθήσεσθαι τὸν σοφὸν οὐ δοκεῖ αὐτοῖς.

The Epicureans hold that the *sophos* should not fall in love.

οὐδὲ θεόπεμπτον εἶναι τὸν ἔρωτα, . . .

Nor does *eros* have a divine origin, . . .

καὶ μὴν καὶ γαμήσειν καὶ τεκνοποιήσειν τὸν σοφόν, ὡς Ἐπίκουρος ἐν ταῖς Διαφοραῖς καὶ ἐν ταῖς Περί φύσεως.

In his *Problems* and *On Nature* Epikouros says that the sage (*sophos*) should <not> marry or beget children.

(DL 10. 118; 119 = I 118. 8–10; 119. 12).¹¹

Barigazzi admirably illuminates the long philosophical tradition before and after Epikouros in opposition to the fundamentals of the Epicurean position—revealing Plutarch as much less an innovator than usually

fragments of Aristotle's *Eratikos*. A. Lesky, *Vom Eros der Hellenen* (Göttingen 1976) 146–50, suggests strong Stoic influence on Plutarch. C. W. Chilton, "Did Epicurus Approve of Marriage? A Study of Diogenes Laertius X, 119," *Phronesis* 5 (1960) 71–74, argues convincingly that Epikouros recommended against marriage. Recent bibliography on Greek *eros* can be found in A. Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton 1986).

⁷ See P. Demargne, "Notice sur la vie et les travaux de Robert Flacelière," *CRAI* (1984, 3) 3–12.

⁸ *Plutarco contro Epicuro* (Florence 1978); "Il tema dell'amore: Plutarco contro Epicuro," I. Gallo, ed., *Temi e aspetti dello stoicismo e dell'epicureismo in Plutarco*. (*Quaderni del Giornale Filologico Ferrarese* 9 [Ferrara 1988]) 89–108.

⁹ Martin above, note 3. For recent discussion and bibliography on Plato, see K. J. Dover, *Plato. Symposium* (Cambridge 1980), esp. 1–5, 13–14; D. Wender, "Plato: Misogynist, Paedophile, and Feminist," in J. Peradotto and J. P. Sullivan, eds., *Women in the Ancient World* (Albany 1984) 213–29; C. J. Rowe, *Plato* (Brighton 1984) 171–73; D. M. Halperin, "Plato and Erotic Reciprocity," *CIAnt* 5 (1986) 60–80. The fundamental study is F. W. Cornford, "The Doctrine of Eros in Plato's *Symposium*," in W. K. C. Guthrie, ed., F. M. Cornford, *The Unwritten Philosophy and Other Essays* (Cambridge 1950) 119–31—reprint in G. Vlastos, ed., *Plato. A Collection of Critical Essays II* (South Bend, Indiana 1971) 119–31.

¹⁰ *Histoire de la sexualité III. Le souci de soi* (Paris 1984) 224–42, esp. 241–42; reviewed critically by A. Cameron, "Redrawing the Map: Early Christian Territory after Foucault," *JRS* 76 (1986) 265–71; and very severely by M. R. Lefkowitz, "Sex and Civilization," *Partisan Review* 52 (1985) 460–66, who questions his methodology and use of evidence.

¹¹ Second numbering that of G. Arrighetti, *Epicuro, Opere* (Torino 1960) 27. Arrighetti in the last passage prints the mss.' μὴν, where a negative is required; see Chilton (73) who would read in place of καὶ μὴν καὶ either οὐδὲ or οὐδὲ μὴν.

imagined.¹² Martin detects two distinct Platonic strands: the first (758D–59B) treating love as a madness (*mania*—not psychic disorder but divine inspiration), the second (764E–66B) extolling Eros as the divine guide to recollection of the Form of the Beautiful (*to kalon*).

Foucault's treatment of the unitary aspect of Plutarch's *Erotikos* is more theoretical and speculative. Greeks before Plutarch conceived Eros in terms of antitheses: noble-vulgar, *eros-philía*, active-passive. Altruistic and elevating love or friendship is contrasted with lustful satisfaction. Active or passive defines the relationship to the other partner. However, in the excellent unitary view of Plutarch—according to Foucault—the partners, considered as spouses, are joined as active subjects rather than as objects of love: "Better to love than be loved." Moreover, their sexuality contributes to, rather than distracts from, the higher aspects of love. The principle of reciprocity thus becomes the principle of fidelity: love frustrates the cloying and deforming effects of cohabitation and sexual routine. The opposition between *philía* and *aphrodisía* collapses, since, united with grace (*charis*), both elements contribute to the desired goal. Pederasty, in contrast, which is frustrated in its attempt at perfect integration, is exposed as a horrible failure. Plutarch's stand, then, is both traditional and revolutionary—traditional in its eulogy of Eros, so fundamental to Greek religion and culture, revolutionary in shattering the barrier between "vulgar" love oriented toward sexual pleasure and "spiritual" love meant for the tendance of souls. Plutarch's Eros is monistic, based on reciprocity and *charis*.¹³

Before beginning his discourse, Plutarch prayed to the god of love. With a devout prayer let us, too, return to the shrine of Eros, confident that, though the threshold is worn, its mysteries have not been totally divulged. Fundamental to a proper evaluation of the essay is a thorough study of the massive and complex influences of women and sexuality in the early Empire.¹⁴ Such a vast subject, even if containable in a few pages, requires

¹² See F. Lasserre, "Ἐρωτικοὶ λόγοι," *MH* 1 (1944) 169–78, esp. 177. D. Babut, "Les Stoïciens et l'amour," *REG* 76 (1963) 55–63, esp. 62, and C. E. Manning, "Seneca and the Stoics on the Equality of the Sexes," *Mnemosyne* 26 (1973) 170–77, show that the Stoics by no means believed in equality. Flacelière, "Caton d'Utique et les femmes," in A. Balland et al., eds., *L'Italie préromaine et la Rome républicaine* (Paris 1976) 293–302, notes how the Stoic Cato "lent out" his wife Marcia to a childless friend (296).

Prof. Whittaker, whose Budé *Didaskalikos* should appear soon, suggests a Middle Platonic comparison with Alkinoos, *Didaskalikos* XXXII. 7–XXXIII. 4 (187–88); cf. G. Invernizzi, *Il Didaskalikos di Albino e il medioplatonismo* II (Rome 1976) 205–07; Apuleius, *De Platone et eius Dogmate* II. 13–14 (238–40); J. Beaujeu, *Apulée. Opuscules philosophiques* (Paris 1972) 91–92, and M. Giusta, *I dossografi di etica* (Torino 1974–1975) II, 194–99. Whittaker sees a general absence of emphasis, or no mention at all, of heterosexual or conjugal love in other Middle Platonists or in the Neoplatonists.

¹³ Foucault, 224–42, esp. 241–42.

¹⁴ R. Macmullen, "Women's Power in the Principate," *Klio* 68 (1986) 434–43, esp. 437, notes high local offices held by Greek women. For treatment of the subject and bibliography,

great specialized competence, and risks betrayal in male hands.¹⁵ But two elements can be explored here. The first is the importance of the literary "frame" of Ismenodora's "rape" of Bacchon. The second is a clue dropped by Plutarch toward the end of the dialogue that "Egyptian mythology" is the key to the correct Platonic interpretation of Eros.

A brief resumé of the dialogue is in order. The *Erotikos* begins with an event which startles the *dialogi personae* and is intended to shock the reader. The beginning is typical of the more baroque style of Plutarch with its contrasts, movement, and theatricality differentiating it from the mostly static settings of Plato's dialogues on love, the *Phaidros* and *Symposion*.¹⁶ In Ovid's story of Procris and Cephalus, the aged Cephalus recounts to two youths how he loved his beautiful young wife but tragically slew her while hunting, mistakenly thinking her some beast. The time-frame emphasizes the contrast between youth and age, erotic passion and mature wisdom—a mood suggesting reflection and universalizing on a momentary experience of mutual happiness in the bloom of life.¹⁷

In the dialogue recounted by Plutarch's son, the author himself, now in advanced age, is, unusually, the principal character. He has brought his young bride to the festival of Eros, the *Erotideia*, at Thespiæ, a town not far from his home, to offer prayers and sacrifice to the god—an event occasioned by her parents' bitter rift. The *mise en scène*, however, is the

much of it mentioning Plutarch's *Erotikos* in passing, see, for example, E. Cantarella (trans., M. Fant), *Pandora's Daughters. The Role and Status of Women in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Baltimore 1987); and reviews of recent literature: M. B. Skinner, "Des bonnes dames et méchantes," *CJ* 83 (1987) 69–74 and G. Casadio, "La donna nel mondo antico . . ." *StudPat* 34 (1987) 73–90.

¹⁵ For Plutarch's feminism see P. A. Stadter, *Plutarch's Historical Methods. An Analysis of the Mulierum Virtutes* (Cambridge, Mass. 1965), esp. 1–12; R. Flacelière, "Caton d'Utique et les femmes;" H. Martin, "Amatorius (*Moralia* 748E–71E)," in H. D. Betz, ed., *Plutarch's Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden 1978) 442–537; K. O'Brien Wicker, "Mulierum Virtutes (*Moralia* 242E–63C)," in Betz, 106–34; idem, "First Century Marriage Ethics: A Comparative Study of the Household Codes and Plutarch's Conjugal Precepts," in J. W. Flanagan and A. W. Robinson, *No Famine in the Land* (Missoula, Montana 1975) 141–53; L. Goessler, *Plutarch's Gedanken über die Ehe* (Zürich 1962), esp. 15–43; M. Pinnoy, "Plutarchus' Consolatio ad Uxorem," *Klio* 9 (1979) 65–86; W. L. Odom, *A Study of Plutarch. The Position of Greek Women in the First Century after Christ* (unpubl. diss. Virginia 1961); V. Longoni (introd., D. Del Como), *Plutarcho. Sull'amore* (Milano 1986); A. Borghini, "Per una semiologia del comportamento: strutture di scambio amoroso (Plut. *Erot.* 766C–D)," in *Scritti in Ricordo di G. Buratti* (Pisa 1981) 11–39; F. Le Corsu, *Plutarque et les femmes dans les "Vies Parallèles"* (Paris 1981).

¹⁶ The *Erotikos*, like Petronius' Banquet in the *Satyricon*, seems influenced by Xenophon's *Symposion*. On Xenophon, see Foucault, II, 116, 167, 248, 256; Goessler, 22. Xenophon, 8. 3, praises conjugal love. Kallimachos' *Epigram* 1 advises a youth not to marry above his status.

¹⁷ Beautifully interpreted by C. Segal, "Ovid's Cephalus and Procris: Myth and Tragedy," *GB* 7 (1978) 175–205, esp. 177, 183. For a less idealistic interpretation see F. E. Brenk, "Tumulo Solacia or Foedera Lecti: The Myth of Cephalus and Procris in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," *AugAge* 2 (1982/1983) 9–22.

nearby shrine of the Muses on Mount Helicon, where Plutarch and his friends have retired for more tranquillity.¹⁸ For a clamorous event had broken the traditional somnolence of Thespiiai. Bacchon, the town's celebrated love (*eromenos*), had been contemplating marriage with a young and wealthy widow, Ismenodora. But being a minor he had asked for more experienced advice. The two referees, though, deadlocked, have entrusted the decision to Plutarch and his friends. A debate now ensues over the superiority of homosexual or heterosexual love—for boys or women—with each side denigrating the other, and over the relative merits of marrying above one's status. At that moment a friend gallops up to relate that not only has Ismenodora kidnapped the apparently willing Bacchon from the *palaistra* but her female friends have already dressed him in a wedding gown (*himation*) (754E–55A).¹⁹

The second important consideration is the assertion—in regard to the Platonic doctrine of love—that “dim, faint effluvia of the truth” are scattered about in Egyptian mythology (762A). This is not an isolated cadence, for at 764A Soklaros asks Plutarch to return to the Egyptian material:

But as for your hint that Egyptian myth is in accord with the Platonic doctrine of Eros, you can no longer keep from revealing and explaining your meaning. We would love to hear even only a small bit of matters so great.

Plutarch at this point, as in his essay *On Isis and Osiris*, alludes to one Egyptian myth identifying Eros with the sun and another identifying Aphrodite with the moon. He continues with his own explanation of the philosophical distinction between the sun, which belongs to the visible (*horaton*) and Eros, part of the intelligible sphere (*noeton*).

The matter is dropped there, but it suggests Plutarch's reinterpretation of the Eros of Plato's “middle” period (*Symposion*, *Phaidros*, *Politeia* [*Republic*], and *Phaidon*).²⁰ Moreover, Plutarch seems to “sign” his work. He apparently is referring here to the final speech of *On the E at Delphi*—which explains the distinction between the visible sun and the true Apollon—

¹⁸ The feminism of Plutarch's dialogues is limited: women—even his wife and Ismenodora—should be heard (about) but not seen (or talk).

¹⁹ Goessler (27) discusses the dramatic techniques here.

²⁰ See J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London 1977) 184–230, esp. 201; “The Academy in the Middle Platonic Period,” *Dionysius* 3 (1979) 63–78, esp. 65–68; “Plutarch and Second Century Platonism,” in A. H. Armstrong, ed., *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality* (London 1986) 214–29, esp. 223–25; J. Glucker, *Antiochus and the Late Academy* (Göttingen 1978) 96–97, 207–71; P. L. Donini, *Le scuole, l'anima, l'impero: la filosofia antica da Antioco a Plotino* (Torino 1982) 117–21, and “Plutarco, Ammonio e l'Academia,” in *Miscellanea plutarcea*, 97–110; J. Barthelmeß, “Recent Work on the *Moralia*,” *idem* 61–81, esp. 72–74; C. Froidefond, “Plutarque et le platonisme,” *ANRW* II. 36. 1 (1987) 185–233; J. Whitaker, “Platonic Philosophy in the Early Centuries of the Empire,” *idem* 81–123, esp. 117–21; F. E. Brenk, “An Imperial Heritage: The Religious Spirit of Plutarch of Chaironeia,” *idem* 248–349, esp. 262–75 (“Indices,” *ANRW* II. 36. 2 [1987] 1300–22).

Helios, the one and unchangeable God, whose image is the sun. He also seems to publicize a future *Isis and Osiris*, his treatise on Egyptian Isis religion. The vocabulary of the *Erotikos* and the tentative manner of broaching the subject appear to exclude an already issued *Peri Isidos kai Osiridos*.

The reference reinforces the chronological relationship between the *Erotikos* and the *Peri Isidos*—dialogues most likely belonging to Plutarch's latest period of literary activity.²¹ We are only beginning to understand the status of women in the Early Empire. But Plutarch, with some ambivalence, certainly succumbed to the epoch's fascination for Isis. In his essay on the Isiac religion he transformed the central myth, the goddess Isis' search for the dead Osiris and resuscitation of her husband's body, into a Platonic allegory of the soul's ascent toward the Form of the Beautiful. But in his desire to metamorphosize the myth into a Middle Platonic allegory with Osiris symbolizing the Form of the Beautiful and Isis as his lover, he redirected the main thrust of Isis religion, which is centered on the power and omnipotence of Isis.

In the light of *On Isis and Osiris* some of the more radical developments of the *Erotikos* receive sharper contours. Plutarch's most spectacular achievement—contrasting with Plato's *Symposion* and *Phaidros*—might appear to be the eulogy of heterosexual married love and, in particular, the element of reciprocity between male and female. But such a view was actually current in philosophical circles long before Plutarch. Such love was a popular theme in Roman literature—though often patronizing, humorous, or pathetic—for example, in Ovid. Plutarch's greatest achievement, then, was not the glorification of heterosexual—and especially married—love over homosexual or pederastic love but rather the introduction of heterosexual love into the Platonist's study—namely the ascent of the soul to the Beautiful in Itself, and a new anthropomorphic conception of the Beautiful as the final goal (*telos*) of the soul. Thus the calling card of the Middle Platonists, "assimilation to God" (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ) acquires a very literal meaning.²²

²¹ See Flacelière, 7–11; C. P. Jones, "Towards a Chronology of Plutarch's Works," *JRS* 56 (1966) 61–74 (66), and *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford 1971) 34. Froidefond, 211–12, accepts Flacelière's arguments. On *Peri Isidos* see G. W. Bowersock, "Some Persons in Plutarch's *Moralia*," *CQ* 15 (1965) 267–70; discussion in F. E. Brenk, *In Mist Apparelled. Religious Themes in Plutarch's Moral and Lives* (Leiden 1977) 5–6.

The *Markos Antonios*, one of the last, or the last, *Lives* of Plutarch, also uses the Isis motif. See Brenk, "Imperial Heritage," 319—citing F. Le Corsu, "Cléopâtre-Isis," *Bull. Soc. Franç. d'Égyptolog.* 82 (1978) 22–23, and *Isis. Son mythe et ses mystères* (Paris 1977) 86–91, *Plutarque et les femmes dans les "Vies Parallèles"* (Paris 1981) 220–23. The matter is treated in C. B. R. Pelling's commentary, *Plutarch, Life of Antony* (Cambridge 1988) 251–52, 319.

²² Froidefond treats Plutarch's *daimon* (with the rejection of Plato's *Eros-daimon*), the twist on ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, and the close relationship between the *Erotikos* and *Peri Isidos* (206–12). See also, D. Babut, "Sur quelques énigmes du 'Phèdre,'" *BAGB* (1987, 3) 260–84; 277.

Plutarch's allegorization of the Isis myth combines—or confuses—the fundamentals of Platonism. Such confusion has enormous consequences for the conception of three fundamentals of Middle Platonism: matter, God (*Demiourgos* or *Nous*), and the model (*paradeigma* or Form).²³ In Plutarch's allegorical interpretation of the Isis myth, reflected in the *Erotikos*, these elements become terribly confused. Platonic matter (receptacle, potency, etc.) refuses to sit quietly at home while the Form of the Beautiful delights in its (his, His) new-found mind (*logos*, or *nous*). A corollary—not fully developed by Plutarch but with a great future—is the divine love for the soul, a love going far beyond the mere paternal or providential love of gods or God in Greek religion or philosophy. The Form of the Beautiful, once only an object, rejoices not only in its new-found mind but also in its power to return or initiate love. But Osiris, who is identified with the Form, also has *nous* and is responsible for the creation of the world. Thus, Osiris is assimilated somewhat to the *Demiourgos*. Isis, who is matter, also has *nous* and as the object of Osiris' love assumes something of the function of the Form.

The Platonic ascent toward the Form of the Beautiful as a passive intellectual object has been transformed by Plutarch into the reciprocal love of the soul and its *telos*, conceived of as both the Form of the Beautiful and a divine person. First, speaking of Eros as the soul's guide to the Beautiful he compares the god to the sun—in Plato and in Plutarch an image of the Form of the Beautiful. In the ever fluid and slippery allegorical interpretations of *Peri Isidos*, Osiris, too, like Eros, is the guide to the *telos*, or vision, and is compared to the sun. This Platonic aspect of the allegorical interpretation of the myth is also traditional.

Once the inner dynamic of the Isis religion enters, the goddess becomes a very active element, analogous to the supreme divinity of the aretalogies. Even in Plutarch's minimalizing account, she is the driving force which discovers and reanimates Osiris' dismembered body, in love overcoming all obstacles, even the death of the beloved. The terminology for the divine union is that of Plato's homosexual or pederastic lovers. But we should not forget that even Plato treated Alkestis, who died for her husband, Admetos, as a supreme example of dedicated love, nor that her love, like that of Isis, overcame death (nor, perhaps, that it was Euripides who immortalized her). Isis, like the pederast, must be the active element; for the quest for the beloved precedes that for the Beautiful. Osiris corresponds first to the beloved boy, then to the Form of the Beautiful in the Platonic works. For the strikingly erotic union of the soul with the Form, Plato again was Plutarch's inspiration, but, as so often, the pupil outstripped the master.

²³ Elaborated by S. M. Chiodi, "Tematica ierogamica nel *De Iside*," *Miscellanea plutarcea*, 121–26, and "Demiurgia e ierogamia nel *De Iside* plutarceo. Un'esegesi platonica del mito egiziano," *SMSR* 52 (1986) 33–51. See also Brenk, "Imperial Heritage," 301–03; Froidefond, 224–25, 231.

Subtle, perhaps unconscious, transformations occur in the elaboration of the philosophical myth as Plutarch replaces Plato's primarily homosexual model with a heterosexual one. Osiris (Form of the Beautiful) must according to the myth also be an active element, the eternal lover of Isis (receptacle, *chora*, matter, potency, etc.). Isis' ardent lover Osiris thus replaces the inanimate object—the passive, though divine and intelligible but not rational, Platonic Form. Reciprocity is extolled. Plutarch has not only betrayed Plato by creating a different function for the Form but has planted a time-bomb in Platonism, the acceptance by future Platonists of an equivalence between God and the Form.

We can begin to discern the creeping metamorphosis of Platonic terminology. "Lovely" (*erasmion*, *Erotikos* 765D, F) reflects *erasmiotaton* used in *Phaidros* (250E) for the Form of the Beautiful, but "beloved" (*agapetos*, 765D) is an intruder. Also somewhat unusual is "dear" (*philion*, 765D). Combined, we find this remarkable description of the soul's reaction to the Beautiful: ". . . courting . . . the truly lovable and blessed and beloved of all and dear" (τὸ ἐράσμιον ἀληθῶς καὶ μακάριον καὶ φίλιον ἅπασι καὶ ἀγαπητόν, 765D), echoed at 765F: "produces a refraction of memory from that appearing beautiful here, toward the divine and lovable and in all truth blessed and marvelous Beauty" (. . . τὸ θεῖον καὶ ἐράσμιον καὶ μακάριον ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐκεῖνο καὶ θαυμάσιον καλόν).²⁴ In the *Phaidros* we find "the desire and mystery of true lovers" (προθυμία μὲν οὖν τῶν ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐρώντων καὶ τελετή, 253C) but this is applied to human love.²⁵ We do find, though, in relationship to "the divine Beautiful in itself, unique in form" (αὐτὸ τὸ θεῖον καλὸν μονοειδές) the ambiguous word "consorting with" (συνεῖναι, συνόντος αὐτῷ, *Symposion* 211D, 212A), and following upon a pederastic context "yearn for Being" (ὀρέγεται τοῦ ὄντος, *Phaidon* 65C), "love the truth [the true] (ἐρᾶν τε τοῦ ἀληθοῦς, *Philebos* 58D).²⁶ *Makarion*, which has divine, eschatological, and erotic connotations in Plutarch, in Plato is applied to the vision rather than to the Form itself: "the blessed vision ("beatific vision") and sight" (μακαρίαν ὄψιν τε καὶ θέαν, *Phaidros* 250B), "of mysteries most blessed, . . . happy, straightforward appearances" (τελετῶν . . . μακαριωτάτην . . . ἀπλᾶ . . .

²⁴ See Martin, "Amatorius," 521. 765D is paralleled in *Symposion* 204C, where τὸ ἐραστόν = τὸ τῷ ὄντι καλὸν καὶ ἄβρὸν καὶ τέλειον καὶ μακαριστόν; cf. Alkinoos, *Didaskalikos* XXVII. 2 (180. 6–8) (perhaps influenced by Plato, *Timaios* 87C). See Whitaker, "Platonic Philosophy," 92, and "Proclus and the Middle Platonists," in J. Pépin, ed., *Proclus. Lecteur et interprète des Anciens* (Paris 1987) 287–89. This was a key text in Middle Platonism, with a notable parallel in Alkinoos X (165. 27) and Plutarch, *Peri Isidos* 374D: τοῦ πρώτως ἐραστοῦ καὶ ἐφετοῦ καὶ τελείου καὶ αὐτάρκου (8 πρώτως V: πρώτου O [hiatus] ἐρατοῦ Markl. at cf. Platonis loc. cit. / ἐφετοῦ] ἀφετοῦ m).

²⁵ 253C 3 τελετή corr. Par. 1808: τελευτή BT. OCT texts and apparatus used for the Platonic quotations. On τελετή over τελευτή, see C. J. Rowe, *Plato: Phaedrus* (Warminster 1986) 187; Brenk, *JHS* 107 (1987) 206.

²⁶ So A. J. Festugière, *Contemplation et vie contemplative selon Platon* (Paris 1950) 352–53—with some exaggeration.

καὶ εὐδαίμονα φάσματα, *Phaidros* 250B–C), and at 256A–B the better life in this world is called “most blessed and harmonious” (μακάριον μὲν καὶ ὁμοιοητικόν).²⁷

Since Plato was more concerned with presenting an intellectual vision of the Form, he continually stresses direct vision, sight, an intellectual knowledge or grasp when he comes to speak directly of the Form. The erotic association of Isis with the Form of the Beautiful (Osiris) in the *Peri Isidos* comes from Plato's description of the passion of homosexual love, the prelude to real love—which in the *Phaidros* is reciprocal. At times this vocabulary, when used for the Form, is startling—even though it is more traditional than one might expect. For example we find “associating in beautiful things” (τοῖς καλοῖς ὁμιλήσας, *Erotikos* 766B) and “this goddess also who participates always with the first god and is associated with Him in the love of the fair and lovely things about him . . . in love . . . consorts with him . . . yearns for him . . . and being importunate over him . . . (συνουῶσαν ἔρωτι τῶν περὶ ἐκείνον ἀγαθῶν καὶ καλῶν . . . ἐρᾶν . . . συνουῶσαν . . . ποθεῖν . . . γλιχομένην ἐκείνου, *Peri Isidos* 374F–75A), “loving always and pursuing and consorting in love with” (ἐρῶσαν ἀεὶ καὶ διώκουσαν καὶ συνουῶσαν, 383A) for Isis' love of the Beautiful (*kallos*) as a model for the soul's intellectual vision.²⁸

As elsewhere in Plutarch we find him somewhat reluctant to directly identify God with the Form of the Beautiful. Here, for Isis' love of Osiris he employs the phrase “the beautiful and fair things about him” (συνουῶσαν ἔρωτι τῶν περὶ ἐκείνον ἀγαθῶν καὶ καλῶν, 374F–75A), where in the Greek of his period, for example, “those about Epikouros” can simply mean “Epikouros.” Similarly the conduct of Osiris, who is equivalent to the supreme God and the Form of the Beautiful, is described in ambiguous language: “. . . of which end (*telos*) is the knowledge of the first and lord—whom the goddess encourages us to seek—beside her and with her living and consorting” (. . . παρ' αὐτῇ καὶ μετ' αὐτῆς ὄντα καὶ συνόντα, 352A).

Makarion also takes on an erotic context. The soul's desire for the Platonic Form at *Erotikos* 765F is for “the divine and lovable and dear and

²⁷ See C. Riedweg, *Mysterienterminologie bei Platon, Philon und Klemens von Alexandrien* (Berlin 1987), with reference to gold plates, epigraphy etc., esp. 334.

²⁸ Text of *Peri Isidos*, J. G. Griffiths, *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride* (Cambridge 1970); see in particular, 71–74, 563–65; and J. Hani, *La religion égyptienne dans la pensée de Plutarque* (Paris 1976) 20–21.

Professor Donini believes the *Erotikos* presupposes, and was chronologically close to, Plutarch's *De Facie in Orbe Lunae*—especially evident at *Erotikos* 764D. In his view, Plutarch in *De Facie* 939E, 944E, and 945C already toys with sexual distinctions and erotic language for the female moon and male sun (as the image of the Good [*Politeia*] and supreme God and Father-Beggetter of the Kosmos [*Timaios*]); but he discovered in the Egyptian myth more fertile possibilities for sexual and reciprocal symbolism.

Plutarch's allegorical interpretation was aided by virtually limiting himself to pre- or early Hellenistic sources (Griffiths, 75–100, esp. 84–85), where Osiris has more importance than Isis.

beloved . . . Beauty" (*theion, erasmion, makarion . . . kalon*)²⁹ The phrase is not unlike that in Plutarch's treatise *On the Face in the Moon*, the final part of which contains an eschatological myth. Here intellect sees an image of the Form reflected in the sun. Intellect (*nous*) is separated from soul (*psyche*) through love of "the desirable and beautiful and divine and blessed" (*epheton, kalon, theion, makarion*, 944E) "for which all nature in one way or another yearns" (*ὀρέγεται*—another ambiguous term).³⁰ Plato's impersonal descriptions of the Form—"the really real" (*to ontos on*), "of single form" (*monooides*)—tend to disappear. Plutarch's *hagnos* (pure, holy, inviolable) joins the Platonic *hieros* (holy) and *katharos* (pure) in the context of the Beautiful: "the holy and sacred (*hieros* and *hosios*) Osiris," "the invisible and the unseen, the dispassionate and pure (*hagnon*) kingdom of Osiris" (*Peri Isidos* 375E, 382–83A). In Plutarch's romantic context the intellectual vision is not only, as in Plato, a mystery (*telete*) but also a marriage made in heaven, a *hieros gamos*.³¹

The language in some respects echoes Philo, the Alexandrian philosopher of the Julio-Claudian period, who also equates God with the Form of the Beautiful. *On the Cherubim* speaks of God being the summit and the goal (*telos*) of happiness (*eudaimonia*)—"blessed, incorruptible, bestowing on all from the fountain of the beautiful (Beautiful? [*kalon*]); for the things of this world would not be beautiful, if they were not impressions from the archetype, in truth, the uncreated beautiful, blessed (*makarion*), imperishable" (86). Or, "God himself becomes our *hierophantes* causing us to see the hidden beauties (*kalle*), invisible to non-initiates . . . You souls, who have tasted the divine love(s) (*theioi erotēs*), hasten toward the vision, which draws all eyes to itself . . ." (*On Dreams* I. 164, 165); ". . . he entered into the darkness where God was, that is, into the unseen, invisible, incorporeal, and model essence (*paradeigmatike ousia*) of all existent things . . . revealing Himself a work like a painting, all beautiful and divine in form." (*Moses* I. 158). Some contemplate the "Uncreated, Divine, the First Good, and Beautiful and Happy (*eudaimon*) and Blessed (*makarion*), . . . that better than the Good and more beautiful than the Beautiful, and more blessed than blessedness, more happy, moreover, than happiness itself (. . . τὸ κρείττον μὲν ἀγαθοῦ, κάλλιον δὲ καλοῦ, καὶ μακαριότητος μὲν μακαριώτερον, εὐδαιμονίας δὲ αὐτῆς

²⁹ Martin, "Amatorius," 492–94, 522. Whittaker, "Platonic Philosophy," 92, notes that— influenced by *Timaios* 87C—the couplet *theion* and *erasmion* appears as well in Alkinoos, *Didaskalikos* XXVII. 2 (180. 6–8) and may have been popular in Middle Platonism.

³⁰ The term *epheton* is defined as Aristotelian in H. Cherniss and W. C. Helmbold, *Plutarch's Moralia* XII (Cambridge, Mass. 1968) 213, note g. But Whittaker, seeing its roots rather in *Philebos* 20D, observes that though Plutarch and Alkinoos—independently and alone among Middle Platonists—used it, it did not resurface until the Neoplatonists ("Proclus," 287–88).

³¹ Y. Vernière, "Initiation et eschatologie chez Plutarque," in J. Ries, ed., *Les rites d'initiation* (Louvain-La Neuve 1986) 335–52, esp. 338, 346, 349, treats the mystery aspect.

εὐδαμονέστερον. . .) and of anything else besides the above—should it exist—more perfect.” (*Embassy to Gaius* 5)³²

Plato's *Timaios*—on the nature of the universe—for which we have a long Plutarchan commentary, is responsible for some of the changes. Both extol *logos* and *noeton*. But though the Form of the Beautiful exists in the *noeton*, neither Plato nor Plutarch in his commentary attribute *logos* to the Form. *Logos* belongs *par excellence* to the Craftsman-Creator, the *Demiourgos*. Plato's own thought on creation was obviously obscure. The elusiveness of God in Plato elsewhere and the tendency of Platonic philosophy after him suggest that his *Demiourgos* belongs to an Einsteinian understanding of the intelligibility granted matter. The *kosmos* itself contains a kind of intelligence or power of evolution and self-organization—albeit, a rationality (*logos*), unlike that of the Stoics, physically separate from matter. But outstanding commentators on the *Timaios*, both ancient and modern, have interpreted the *Demiourgos* not merely as an allegorical representation of the intelligibility shaping matter but as a non-anthropomorphic mind (*nous*) responsible for the evolution of the cosmos.³³ In any case the line between the complex of Ideas, the intelligible universe (*kosmos noetos*), and *nous* had begun to wear thin by Plutarch's day. His simplifying approach to Plato, combining elements from disparate passages, though cautious in its terminology, radically transforms the impersonal *telos* of Plato into an anthropomorphic, even erotic God. The Isis myth may have led him whither he willed not, but the pretext of an allegorical interpretation allowed him more freedom in expressing his new concept of God than would a strictly philosophical exposition. At least, in the allegorical interpretation he appears more radical than elsewhere.

Heterosexual love, as in the old cosmogonic myths, begins the universe. The love of Isis and Osiris—who apparently had studied Plutarch's commentary on the *Timaios*—generates their child Horos, an allegory for the *kosmos*. Divine love becomes the paradigm for human love. Thus, human *aphrodisia* receive a new philosophical and religious dimension. Human love becomes a reflection of the quasi-eternal divine

³² Philo texts those of R. Amaldez et al., eds., *Les oeuvres de Philon* (Paris 1963–1972); see XXXII, A. Pelletier, *Legatio ad Caium* (1972) 64, note 2, for parallels here. J. Dillon, “The Transcendence of God in Philo: Some Possible Sources,” *Center for Hermeneutical Studies* 16 (1975) 1–8, with responses by G. E. Caspary, 9–18, and D. Winston, 19–22, is an excellent discussion of this knotty problem. Similar to Philo and Plutarch is Alkinoos (Albinos), *Didaskalikos* X. 3 (164); see Invernizzi, 26, and Whittaker, “Platonic Philosophy,” 102–10.

³³ Discussion in Brenk, “Imperial Heritage,” 262–75, esp. 263, 268–69; add J. B. Skemp, “The Spirituality of Socrates and Plato,” *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality*, 103–20 (116–19); and R. D. Mohr, *The Platonic Cosmology* (Leiden 1985) 39–41. See also J. P. Hershbell, “Plutarch's ‘De animae procreatione in Timaeo’: An Analysis of Structure and Content,” *ANRW* II. 36. 1 (1987) 234–47, esp. 235–38. In Middle Platonism the *Demiourgos* moved from supreme principle active in the world to a second God (*Nous*)—sometimes confused with the world-soul; see Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 7.

love which begot and continues to beget the world and all within. The *aphrodisia* are not simply the Epicurean sensual motions constituting sexual pleasure—so well described in the verses of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*—motions deprived of mystery and religious significance. Rather, they hint at the soul's eternal destiny. An image of the love which generated Plato's most perfect *kosmos*, they aid in the philosophical ascent. In marriage, though, as in Plato's myth of lovers, human love must deepen. With the passage of time the more sexual or sensual aspects of love should cede to a purer and more intellectual appreciation of the other's true beauty. Marriage, then, initiates Platonic love—conceived, however, not as a movement toward an impassive Form but for a responsive Lover.

Ring composition, appropriate to this Greek setting, will hopefully swing us back where we began, to the tale of Ismenodora and Bacchon. In her love for Bacchon, Ismenodora, like Isis, is the driving force. Her name, though indicating force (*is, menos*), also suggests Isis. As beautiful and lovable, the boy Bacchon represents the Form of the Beautiful, the destiny of the true lover. His name—a form of Bacchos—suggests Dionysos, the Greek name for Osiris. Passive in receiving her love, once she has taken the initiative, he also actively returns it—becoming even more assimilated to Osiris, the god of reciprocal love.³⁴

A simultaneous plot, leaving the resolution in doubt until the last minute, parallels the denouement of the philosophical inquiry. The literary medium is that of *On the Daimonion of Sokrates*. The theme of this dialogue is the nature of Sokrates' *daimonion* ("the divine," or "supernatural"—not really "*genius*"), but through the dialogue the exciting events of the Theban insurrection under Epaminondas against Spartan rule are woven. The Ismenodora-Bacchon tale, commencing and finishing the dialogue, is not extraneous. The *Erotikos* is played out against a backdrop of the visible love of Ismenodora and Bacchon—the *horaton*, so to speak—while the *noeton*, the invisible *hierogamia* with the now personal Beautiful, embraces the *logos* of the participants. Such a *hierogamia* is the *telos* of each true lover. The female's aggressivity in the quest for the Form of the Beautiful (Bacchon, Osiris), then, is the underlying thread of the "phenomenal" romances which close the work.

As in the entire Plutarchan corpus, divided between philosophy (*Ethika*) and lives (*Bioi*), real events balance against theoretical speculation. Plutarch's examples of heroic women are notable too in not being limited, like those of Plato, to Athens or mythical Greece. Rather, geographically

³⁴ Professor Barigazzi notes the real etymology of the heroine's name—"gift of Ismenos," (the river of Thebes). Dionysiac associations may be intended; cf. Euripides, *Bacchai* 5: "I have arrived at Dirke's streams and Ismenos' water." Naturally such connotations add to the mystical-eschatological orientation of the *Erotikos*, besides linking "Ismenodora" to "Bacchon." Plutarch omits at this point the role of Bacchon as Eros-mystagogue, leading Ismenodora to the Idea (Form) of the Beautiful.

they reflect the universal breadth of the Graeco-Roman world. In tone, too, they breathe a realism not so evident in the world of Plato's dialogues. Camma, who avenges her husband by drinking a poisonous toast with his murderer, is from Gaul. So is Empona, who ostensibly mourning her dead husband, mates with him in his underground hiding place and bears him sons.³⁵ The quasifictional character, Semiramis—whose assassination of Ninus is related earlier in the dialogue—is Assyrian.

With the exception of the Semiramis story, the tales of female virtue or courage—of Camma and Empona and their husbands—are in fact traditional depictions of womanly virtue. Still they underscore the courage and tenacity of women dedicated to a beloved husband. Above all Ismenodora and Semiramis, who assume male roles, symbolize the new erotic dialectic.³⁶ One, in abducting Bacchon, assumes the role of Herakles—the epitome of masculinity and philandering. Semiramis, only the maid and concubine of a palace slave of Ninus, becomes through her intelligence a Klytimestra, not only contriving the execution of the king and ruling in his place but winning Plutarch's approbation. The other accounts, though, besides being illustrations of courage and nobility—demolishing the denigrations of pederasts—contain primary Isiac themes: a wife's search and mourning for her dead or assumed to be dead husband, the bearing of children to the "defunct" (Empona); revenge for murder (Camma), and undying, married love triumphing over death and the grave.

Essential to the dialogue is the counterpoint in themes of harmony and disharmony—not surprising where the Muses and Eros invisibly preside. The dialogue begins with the dissonance between the parents of Plutarch's wife, the event bringing the young couple to Thespias. There follows the strange resonance between Ismenodora and Bacchon, the disharmonious arguments deadlocking the referees, the *choros* of the friendly circle of Plutarch, the discord of their arguments, the harmony of Ismenodora and Bacchon, which turns abduction into marriage, the return to the disharmony of the arguments of homo- and heteroadvocates, the accord of Ptolemaios Philadelphos ("lover of his sister") and his concubine Belestiche, the sour note in the love story of Ninus, assassinated by Semiramis, the wedding preparations of Ismenodora and Bacchon soon to be celebrated in song, followed by the Roman Galba's resignation to his wife's strident infidelity, the sun's and moon's tuneful progression, and the harmonious finale, the undying loves of Camma and Sinatus, of Empona and Sabinus.³⁷

³⁵ Recounted in Plutarch's *Mulierum Virtutes* 257E–58C (Flacelière, 152); see also Stadter, *Plutarch's Historical Methods*, 103–06; on Empona, Flacelière, 154–55.

³⁶ Flacelière, 138; A. M. G. Capomacchia, *Semiramis. Una femminilità ribaltata* (Rome 1986), esp. 24–26, 29–31. The story appeared in a romance found in many versions. Other of Plutarch's heroines here are Abrotonon (Habrotonon?) of Thrace, Bacchis of Miletos, and Belestiche of Alexandria.

³⁷ And the reconciliation of all the participants (Longoni, 159–60).

In conclusion, the philosophical originality of the *Erotikos* consists not particularly in its egalitarian treatment of love and marriage. Rather the evaluation of marriage, including sexuality, in the ascent toward the Form, and the identification of the Form with a loving God are its revolutionary aspects. The powerful expression of the dialogue, however, emphasizing striking contrast with Plato's *Symposion* and *Phaidros* conceals the more radical philosophical message.³⁸

Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome

³⁸ Thanks are due to Professors Christopher J. Rowe of Bristol and John Whittaker of Memorial University, St. John's, Newfoundland, for carefully going over the manuscript and making many helpful corrections and suggestions—the first especially in the Platonic matter and the second in the Middle Platonic parallels. The author is grateful also to Professors John Dillon of Trinity College, Dublin, Adelmo Barigazzi of the University of Florence, and Pier-Luigi Donini of Torino, who also kindly looked over the text and suggested improvements.

