

meadows red with roses; and before others spreads a great and flowery plain with trees which, though sterile, are abloom with varicoloured blossoms and cast a thick shade, and certain rivers attended by no sound of lamentation flow smoothly past, while those who dwell there pass their time together, recalling and speaking of the past and the present. But the third path is the way taken by those who have lived a life of impiety and crime; it thrusts their souls into a pit of darkness whence sluggish streams of murky night belch forth the dark that has no bourn, as they receive into their waters those sentenced to punishment and engulf them in obscurity and oblivion. For, no vultures tear forever at the liver of the wicked as they lie stretched on the ground----nor does the bearing of any heavy burden crush and wear out the bodies of those punished, for their senews no longer hold together fles and bone, and the dead have no remnant of the body that could sustain the weight of crushing punishment. No, there is in truth but one penalty for those who have lived ill - obscurity, oblivion, and utter effacement, which carries them off from Lethe to the joyless river and plunges them into a bottomless and yawning ocean, an ocean that sucks into one abyss all failure to serve or to take action and all that is inglorious and unknown.

With characteristic wit Plutarch puns on the name of the river (Lethe) and the first word of the Epicurean maxim (lathe). Lethe is no longer the ornate and fragrant chasm of the Thespesius Myth, but a river leading to a bottomless pit of obscurity and oblivion, reserved for those who lead an inactive and inglorious life, namely, the Epicureans. But whereas in the Thespesius Myth Plutarch maintained that wicked souls in the other world felt the pain of their torments more severely than when they were in their bodies, he here rejects the traditional picture of the underworld on the ground that it is incompatible with the immaterial nature of the soul as taught by Plato, his spiritual master. If there was an eternal punishment for the wicked, it would not be torment of the physical type; nor would it be total annihilation as the

Epicureans taught; it would be oblivion; their souls will be hurled into the "nameless and unseen", as he says in the Thespesius Myth.

However, Plutarch's major onslaught on punishment after death occurs in the De Superstitione ("On Superstition"). The purpose of this essay is to prove that superstition (deisidaimonia, literally, "fear of divine things") is worse than atheism. Both are extremes--the mean being piety. Among other things Plutarch denounces superstition for carrying the fear of evil beyond death into eternity. It makes fear last longer than life, connecting with death the thought of undying evils, and representing death, which is really the end of trouble, as the beginning of endless woes. He views with scorn the traditional picture of the underworld with its manifold horrors, pointing out that superstition brings about every sort of dread in its attempt to avoid everything suggestive of fear.⁸¹

What need to speak at length? "In death is the end of life for all men," but not the end of superstition; for superstition transcends the limits of life into the far beyond, making fear to endure longer than life, and connecting with death the thought of undying evils, and holding fast the opinion, at the moment of ceasing from trouble, that now is the beginning of those that never cease. The abysmal gates of the nether world swing open, rivers of fire and offshoots of the Styx are mingled together, darkness is crowded with spectres of many fantastic shapes which beset their victim with grim visages and piteous voices, and, besides these, judges and torturers and yawning gulfs and deep recesses teeming with unnumbered woes. Thus unhappy superstition, by its excess of caution in trying to avoid everything suggestive of dread, unwittingly subjects itself to every sort of dread.

⁸¹ Plutarch: De Superstitione 166f.

Superstition thus adds terror to death by its imagination of Hades and its horrors. Among these horrors Plutarch mentions the gates of hell, rivers of fire, the Styx, darkness, demons (as both judges and torturers) and chasms. All these, no doubt, figure in the Greek literary tradition, especially in what has come to be known as Orphic literature. Plutarch does in fact repeat phrases traditionally associated with such torments. But the passage cannot have been directed specifically against the Orphic tradition, according to which the most characteristic punishment for the uninitiated or the unclean was to lie in the mud. It should rather be seen as an attack on the traditional Greek concept of hell, which had found literary expression in many authors, beginning with Homer.

But was there any real need for Plutarch to attack this concept as inducing vain and harmful fear? Was it so seriously believed in the Graeco-Roman world of his time? Plutarch himself had dismissed it as a fabulous argument of mothers and nurses, influenced no doubt by the censures of Plato in the Republic. Cicero too had called it a monstrous invention of poets and painters, which no one in his senses would believe.⁸² It has therefore been argued that neither in the time of the Republic nor of the Empire was the fear of divine wrath or punishment after death all that widespread in the Roman world. "Such ideas rarely occur at all in traditional Roman religion. Rome had no mythology of the life after death; the picture of the underworld with its grim figures of Charon and Cerberus, its gloomy rivers, its judges and its punishments came from Greece, and came in the main through literature."⁸³ But the fact that men of culture needed to go on protesting is sufficient proof that the masses continued to entertain fear of punishment, torment, or a life of deprivation in the underworld. Not only Lucretius, but authors nearer the time of Plutarch, such as Seneca and

⁸² Cicero loc.cit.

⁸³ M.L. Clarke: The Roman Mind: Studies in the History of Thought from Cicero to Marcus Aurelius, London (1956) p. 22-23.

Juvenal, condemn such fears as childish;⁸⁴ but they were perpetuated through literature and education.

Under "superstition" Plutarch has included the belief in retribution in the hereafter. This does not reflect either the experience of the classical Greeks as embodied, for instance, in the "Superstitious Man" in Theophrastus' Characters, or of the Romans during the Empire. Theophrastus' "Superstitious Man" is hardly more than an old-fashioned observer of traditional taboos (of the type enjoined, for instance, by Hesiod and the Pythagoreans), which were not necessarily connected with guilt.⁸⁵ For the Roman imperial writers, on the other hand, superstitio had a legal connotation, and generally signified foreign religious cults which the Romans did not like. The worship of Isis and other Egyptian gods, or of the Phrygian Cybele, was superstitio. So, too, were various magical practices,⁸⁶ and the Younger Pliny could use the term for Christianity.⁸⁶

But Plutarch, while being apparently unaware of this Roman political point of view, goes well beyond Theophrastus' taboos and magical folk beliefs, and gives a picture of greater depravity covering a wider range of futile practices, including belief in punishment after death. In fact his deisidaimonia is closer to the religio of⁸⁷ Lucretius than to any Greek or Roman notion of superstition. But, whereas for

84 Lucretius: De Rerum Natura, esp. bk.III; Seneca, Ep. xxiv,18; Juvenal: sat. ii. 149; cf. J. Ferguson, The Religions of the Roman Empire, London (1970) p. 133.

85 Theophrastus: Characters 16; cf. Brenk: op.cit. p. 59.

86 Pliny: Ep. x.96; cf. D. Grotzynski: "Superstitio" R.E.A. vol. lxxvi (1974) p. 36-60.

87 The De Superstitione also resembles the work of Lucretius in advocating an Epicurean piety. The gods exist, and men should believe in them; but they are indifferent to human opinion and do not harm anyone. They are benevolent and devoid of wrath, and there is no need to fear them. (contd.)

Lucretius fear of punishment in the after-life is a major constituent of religio, Plutarch regards it only as just one aspect of superstition among many others.⁸⁸

This vehement attack on punishment after death strongly contrasts with Plutarch's own eschatological myths, containing some of the very details here denounced as products of fantasy. The myths are themselves products of fantasy, and Plutarch would have been the last to deny it. But, unlike what is denounced here, the myths belong to the celestial eschatology, whose connection with the mysteries and potential for moral edification must have recommended it to Plutarch.

However, divergences of attitude between the De Superstitio and Plutarch's other works are not confined to the matter of chastisement after death. One immediately thinks of the importance given in his Lives to divine warnings in the form of oracles, dreams and omens. There are also differences in his attitude to myths, to Apollo, and to Egyptian religions. These divergences have been much discussed in recent times, and various solutions have been proposed.

It has been argued, for instance, that the De Superstitione is not a genuine work of Plutarch. It is not mentioned in Lamprias' catalogue and first occurs in the

The notion that they can harm is the result of ignorance and fundamental error. That they are affected by anger, evil or blasphemy is proved false by the impunity of the myth-makers. Again, the proverbial saying "Death is the end of life for all men", instead of being a sigh of resignation, is given an Epicurean interpretation as an assurance of safety. As human life ends with death, there is nothing to fear thereafter. Cf. Morton Smith: "De Superstitione" in H.D. Betz ed: op.cit. p. 1-35, esp. p.4 and 18. Smith feels that Plutarch could not have been responsible for this basically Epicurean attitude.

⁸⁸ It has even been argued that these superstitious practices are only incidental to the treatise, whose real theme is the fear of supernatural beings. "The (contd.)

Planudean collection of the 14th century. "The style has many parallels with Plutarch's other works, but the content is not what one would expect from Plutarch."⁸⁹ It is sometimes maintained also that what we have is a compilation from various sources, and that Plutarch (if he was really the compiler) was not aware that the result involved him in contradictions with his views elsewhere.

Another suggestion is that Plutarch must have developed in stages from the rationalism of the academy (where he studied as a young man) to a deepened faith in the power of the supernatural as life went on. The De Superstitione would then represent "the heady cynicism of youth," when he might have been over influenced by his rhetorical training and the rationalism of the academy, while the religious dialogues would represent his mature years, when his religious fervour took him even as far as the tenure of a priesthood at Delphi.⁹⁰

As Russell has pointed out,⁹¹ there is no independent argument to support this suggestion, and it is circular to deduce differences of doctrine from differences of date. Moreover, there are difficulties in accepting the suggestion that Plutarch turned from scepticism and rationalism in youth to mysticism and deep religious piety in later life. Some of his early works, such as the De Esu Carnium cited above, reveal his interest⁹² in Pythagoreanism and the mystic doctrines associated with it.

tractate touches only occasionally and incidentally on what are commonly called superstitious practices. They are among the evil consequences of the fear of the gods, but are not even the major consequences, let alone the fear itself." Morton Smith: op.cit. p.3.

⁸⁹ Morton Smith: op.cit. p. 1 ff.

⁹⁰ Cf. Brenk: op.cit. p.12.

⁹¹ Russel: op.cit. p. 80.

⁹² Brenk: op.cit. p. 65-84.

A different explanation goes back to J.P. Mahaffy⁹³, who maintained that the De Superstitione was "one of those sophistical exercises practised by everyone in that age. I mean the defence of a paradox with subtlety and ingenuity taking little account of sober truth in comparison with dialectical plausibility." Those who adopt this view believe that the work cannot be treated seriously, but should rather be understood as a non-sided debate or rhetorical piece, in which Plutarch makes use of traditional anti-superstitious material. It represents one side of the debate, where the opponent is showered with contrary arguments without any attempt at balance. Just as in abusing superstition Plutarch is prepared to present it as worse than atheism, so in abusing atheism he would tip the scales to the other side and give an equally damning account. In either case he would say nothing of modifying factors, especially if he had the further moral objective of dissuading his readers from the vice he was attacking. Thus writing on the side of atheism he would have been more than usually favourable to it, and would have exhausted all arguments against superstition. He cannot therefore be laid down to every argument produced in his work, and the inconsistencies in this case cannot be taken as seriously as those in strictly philosophical dialogues. According to this argument, then, the De Superstitione cannot be taken as a definite indication of serious disbelief in retribution after death.

⁹³ J.P. Mahaffy: The Greek World Under Roman Sway: From Polybius To Plutarch, London 1890, p. 317, The Silver Age Of The Greek World, Chicago and London 1906, p. 367. Regarding Plutarch's picture of the Superstitious Man, Mahaffy has observed: "The exaggerations and understatements with which the tract on superstition abounds, the brief and sketchy nature of the argument, the highly coloured picture of the terrors of superstition compared with the calmness and ease of atheism, the total absence of all mention either of the special cults which promote the former vice or of the special sects which have always been subject to it - these and many other details make me regard it as a picture suggested perhaps by the popular play of Menander ('The Superstitious Man'), but not as describing any prevalent type (contd.)"

The opinions expressed in the De Superstitione are really not all that different from those in the Lives and other works, but in fact there are striking similarities. His denunciation of human sacrifice, the Jews' refusal to fight on the sabbath, punishment after death, etc., can be⁹⁴ paralleled in other works belonging mostly to his later years. Brenk's opinion is that the De Superstitione is an early work, which is probably not as important for the development of Plutarch's thought as is sometimes believed. There is as much continuity as discontinuity between it and his later writings, which share many of its sentiments. Brenk feels that the sceptical and atheistic side of the essay has been exaggerated, and that Plutarch's attitude in the de Superstitione⁹⁵ is not so far removed from that in the rest of his writings.

In the Non Posse Suaviter Vivi Secundum Epicurum, to which reference has already been made, Theon, the speaker in the last section, adopts the position that God cannot be personally responsible for retribution, since this would imply that he is subject to passion. God is not subject to anger (although the notion that he is might help to prevent the masses from doing more evil), but he is by nature philanthropic and beneficent. The real punishment for the wicked is the deprivation of the joy and pleasure of communication with God.⁹⁶ Brenk thinks that this was Plutarch's official stand on the matter, although it did not prevent him from taking a⁹⁷ surprising amount of relish in the punishment of evil-doers.

in the society of his day.... All our other evidence tells us that men, at least in those days, were very free from the grovelling fears and miseries here attributed to them by Plutarch." ibid.

⁹⁴ H. Erbse: "De Superstitione" Hermes vol. lxx (1952) p. 206-314.

⁹⁵ Brenk: op.cit. p. 27.

⁹⁶ Plutarch: Non Posse Suaviter Vivi... 1102e-1103c; cf. also 1101e.

⁹⁷ Brenk, op.cit. p. 259.

It is thus evident that while Plutarch was convinced of the soul's survival after death, and perhaps of transmigration, retribution received in the main a symbolic status resulting from its pragmatic value for spiritual and moral edification. It is not very clear whether he believed in the soul's immortality, as distinct from its survival after death, although we may reasonably assume that he was convinced by Plato's arguments for it.

IV. The Myth of Timarchus⁹⁸

The theory of the soul which the Myth of Thespesius presupposes is developed more specifically and in greater detail in the Myth of Timarchus and the Myth of Sulla. The view of the soul and after-life presented in these myths is generally similar; but the differences are sufficiently significant to have given rise to debate. In particular, Von Arnim's theory that the Myth of Timarchus is an arbitrary compilation of two incompatible doctrines from different sources has been successfully vindicated by W. Hamilton.⁹⁹

It is generally agreed that the structure of the De Genio Socratis is modelled on that of Plato's Phaedo. The two dialogues even have a character in common, Simmias the Pythagorean. The De Genio Socratis is a dramatic representation of the events and conversations which took place on the eve of the revolution of Thebes in December of 379 B.C. and an account of the formation and execution of the conspiracy. The narrative is frequently interrupted by elaborate discussions of philosophical and spiritual matters. The most striking instance is the lively debate on the divine sign of Socrates on which the conspirators embark while awaiting news of the execution of their plans. This debate which has given the dialogue its title, thus occurs at a moment of high dramatic tension.

⁹⁸ Plutarch: De Genio Socratis 590b ff.

⁹⁹ W. Hamilton: "The Myth in Plutarch's De Genio cit.supra.

Various opinions are expressed regarding the true nature of Socrates's sign. Galaxiodorus suggests that it is nothing but ordinary divination; Polymnis, that it is a sneeze; Simmias, that it is Socrates' power to understand the language of daemons; Theanor, that it is a special favour of the gods. It is interesting to note that the myth is not placed either at the end of the discussion or in the mouth of the last speaker, but is used to support the contribution of Simmias.

According to Simmias,¹⁰⁰ Socrates' sign is an inner voice understood without the aid of a bodily organ. It is a communication received from superior beings, an illumination of the soul by the thoughts of the daemons. Most men receive this experience only in their sleep¹⁰¹, when the soul is free from the turmoil of the passions and from having to attend to the needs of everyday life. But Socrates' mind was pure and its contact with the body was limited to what was absolutely necessary. He, therefore, could receive these communications even while he was awake.

The myth describes the experiences of a certain Timarchus, a young philosopher and friend of Socrates' son, Lamprocles. This man, wishing to ascertain the real nature of Socrates' daemon visited the cave of Trophonius at Lebadeia in order to consult the oracle there. During his incubation, which lasted for two nights and a day, he received from an invisible spirit, a daemon, much information concerning the other world and the beings who dwelt in it.

We are told that he lay down in the oracular cave and felt his soul leaving his body through the sutures of his skull and ascending into the heavens. When he looked up, he saw the stars in the form of islands, with the milky way in their midst, and heard the harmony of the heavens. But below

¹⁰⁰ Plutarch: op.cit. 588c ff.

¹⁰¹ At 580d, however, Plutarch seems to suggest that a revelation comes more naturally to a man when he is awake than when he is asleep. Those who think otherwise are compared to those who imagine that the musician, who plays an untuned lyre, does not play it when it is in tune.

him he saw a dark pit from which, in contrast to the music from above, there emerged the groans of animals, the wailing of infants, the mingled lamentations of men and women, and noise and uproar of every kind.¹⁰²

But looking down he saw a great abyss, round, as though a sphere had been cut away; most terrible and deep it was, and filled with a mass of darkness that did not remain at rest, but was agitated and often welled up. From it could be heard innumerable roars and groans of animals, the wailing of innumerable babes, the mingled lamentations of men and women, and noise and uproar of every kind, coming faintly from far down in the depths, all of which startled him not a little.

This abyss is usually identified with the Styx, which, according to the myth, is the shadow of the earth. Cumont¹⁰³ believed that it was the lower hemisphere of the universe. However, it is more likely that what we have here is a description of Hades, or, more probably, of the earth itself, which, according to Orphico-Pythagorean teaching, is the real Hades, the dark place of punishment, opposed to the world of light. The Styx, on the other hand, represents the force which drags the soul toward the earth, that is to say, toward a new incarnation. Timarchus is told that it is "the route which leads to Hades". Its function would thus be similar to the chasm of Lethe in the Myth of Thespesius. The Myth of Timarchus also mentions a chasm. But, whereas Lethe in the Myth of Thespesius is essentially a one-way passage (at least as far as human beings are concerned), according to the Myth of Timarchus souls are able to move both upwards and downwards, in other words, both to and from earthly life.

¹⁰² Plutarch: op.cit. 590f.

¹⁰³ Cf. Loeb ed. vol. vii, p. 467, note F.

The noises which Timarchus heard includes the wailing of infants. Cumont¹⁰⁴ has suggested that Plutarch is here following an old Pythagorean belief to which Plato alludes in the Myth of Er "concerning infants who died as soon as they were born, or had lived but a short time".¹⁰⁵ Virgil too describes the throng of infants, snatched by death at the threshold of life, giving vent to their sorrow at the gate of hell through protracted groans.¹⁰⁶ Like Virgil, Plutarch must have felt for the pitiful fate of those who die in infancy and are denied entrance to heaven; for he too makes them produce an eternal lament. However, there is this difference. In Plutarch's myth Timarchus hears not only the cry of infants, but also the groans of animals and of men and women.

Nevertheless, it is not difficult to discern here the influence of the Pythagoreans, for whom the weeping of children represented the sorrow of souls obliged to take bodies again. Empedocles expressed this sentiment poetically and powerfully: "I wept and wailed when I saw the strange place."¹⁰⁷ However, Plutarch, while accepting this Pythagorean teaching, still appears to have been able to adopt a more resigned and even optimistic attitude when faced with a personal tragedy, as we shall see in the last section of this paper.¹⁰⁸

104 Cumont: op.cit. p. 329.

105 Plato: Republic x, 615c.

106 Virgil: Aeneid vi. 425 ff:

Continuo auditae voces vagitus et ingens
Infantumque animae flentes, in limine primo
Quos dulcis vitae exsortis et ab ubere raptos
Abstulit atra dies et funere morsit acerbo.

107 Empedocles: fr. 118 (Diels).

108 See below, part VI.

Compared with the Myth of Thespesius, the Myth of Timarchus has a more fully developed eschatological geography. The moon is now the place of rebirth and the home of earthly daemons, while the gods dwell in the stars. The Styx, which is the road to Hades, is either the earth's shadow or the side of the moon away from the sun. The moon is said to pass over the Styx, from which the better souls are rescued, as they manage to cling to it; but the unjust souls slip off in fear and turmoil. For the wicked and impure souls cannot approach the moon because she repels them by her brilliance and terrible groans, and thus they are hurled back to reincarnation on earth. While the Styx thus draws the souls towards earth and reincarnation, the moon, by her benign influence, brings up from below those whose life ends at a favourable moment.

It is therefore apparent that, according to this myth, some moments are more favourable for dying than others, because at those moments the moon communicates her influence to the soul and helps it to avoid reincarnation. Plutarch does not tell us what these moments are. However, the ancient Indians, who held a similar belief, have given more definite indications. The Upanishads teach that those who are enlightened ascetics rise up from death in the cremation fire and the light of the waxing moon and the northern course of the sun, and eventually arrive at the world of the gods, from which there is no return. But those who adhere to rituals and works pass up in the cremation smoke the dark half of the moon and the southern course of the sun, into the ancestral worlds. There they work out the consequence of their actions and then return through space; they come down in cloud and rain and are born on earth as plants, and if they are eaten as food and emitted in semen they can find continued life in a new womb. ¹⁰⁹

109 Brihadaranyaka Upanishad vi.6.35, p. 363 (tr. R.E.Hume); Chandogya Upanishad v.30.1 ff, p.232-3 (*ibid.*); cf. Parrinder: op.cit. p. 82-83. The idea is repeated in the Bhagavat Geeta viii. 23 ff, p. 235 (Radhakrishna), and it is these verses that are alluded to by G. Meautis, op.cit. p. 209.

Plutarch too may have believed in a similar influence of the moon, during its waxing period, towards helping souls to escape from reincarnation.

The spirit explains to Timarchus the four principles of all things:¹¹⁰

Four principles there are of all things: the first is of life, the second of motion, the third of birth, and the last of decay; the first is linked to the second by Unity at the invisible, the second to the third by Mind at the sun, and the third to the fourth by Nature at the moon. A Fate, daughter of Necessity, holds the keys and presides over each link; over the first Atropos, over the second Clotho, and over the link at the moon Lachesis. The turning point of birth is at the moon.

This significant passage will be compared later with a similar account of generation in the Myth Of Sulla.¹¹¹ Timarchus inquiries about the stars which are seen darting about the chasm, some going down into its depths, others coming up from it. He is told that these are daemons who are incarnate in mankind. Some are completely dominated by bodily passions and desires, while others enter the body only partly, retaining the purest portion of their substance, undefiled by physical contact:¹¹²

I will explain: every soul partakes of understanding; none is irrational or unintelligent. But the portion of the soul that mingles with flesh and passions suffers alteration and becomes in the pleasures and pains it undergoes irrational. Not every soul mingles to the same extent: some sink entirely into the body, and becoming disordered

110 Plutarch: op.cit. 591b.

111 See below, part V.

112 Plutarch: op.cit. 591f.

throughout, are during their life wholly distracted by passions; others mingle in part, but leave outside what is purest in them. This is not dragged in with the rest, but is like a buoy attached to the top, floating on the surface in contrast with the man's head, while he is, as it were, submerged in the depths; and it supports as much of the soul, which is held upright about it, as is obedient and not overpowered by the passions. Now the part carried submerged in the body is called the soul, whereas the part left free from corruption is called by the multitude the understanding, who take it to be within themselves, as they take reflected objects to be in the mirrors that reflect them; but those who conceive the matter rightly call it daemon, as being external.

Thus, intelligence is common to all souls, but some are so deeply attached to the body that their intelligence is totally submerged and they become irrational. Others are partly liberated from the body, and this liberated part is the daemon. The soul is torn in strife between the irrational and the daemon. One tries to subjugate it to passion and error by rebellious behaviour arising from lack of training, while the other pulls it back by applying remorse. Which party succeeds and whether the soul will be saved depends on one's nurture and upbringing. In vivid and colourful language Plutarch describes how the daemon brings the soul under control until it is easy to guide like a domesticated animal.

The spirit tells Timarchus that the various motions of the stars are due to the different degrees of the souls' submission to the mind or daemon. The souls of seers and divine men have most fully submitted themselves to their daemon. Hermoidorous (i.e. Hermotimus) of Clazomenae¹¹³ is

¹¹³ Hermotimus occurs in Heraclides of Pontus (Diogenes Laertius, vii, 4 = Heracl. Pont. fr. 89 W.) as one of Pythagoras' previous incarnations: Aethalides (supposedly a son of Hermes), Euphorbus (who fought at Troy), Hermotimus, Pyrrhus (a Delian Fisherman) and Pythagoras. He was (contd.)

cited as an example of a man who gave his daemon full play so that it could see and report to him things in the world beyond. Plutarch rejects the popular view that Hermodorus' soul left the body in favour of the view that his soul had the experiences while staying within the body through its close association with the daemon. We are to understand that Socrates too had fully submitted himself to his daemon, which is in fact his sign.

When Plutarch calls mind a daemon outside the body, he is no doubt building on a Platonic foundation. Plato distinguishes between the mortal and immortal parts of the soul. In the Timaeus¹¹⁴ he says: "We must conceive of the form of soul which is most dominant among us as if God gave to each man a daemon. This, which we say inhabits the topmost

accredited with the singular ability of deserting his body "for many years" and returning to it from such psychic excursions with much mantic lore and knowledge of the future. (Apollodorus: Mirab. 3; Pliny: N.H. vii,174; Lucian: Enc.Musc.7, etc.; cf.E.Rohde: Psyche English ed., p. 331 n. 112.) According to Pherecydes (fr.7) Aethalides received as a gift from Hermes the privilege that at death his soul would spend part of its time in Hades and part of it on earth. According to Heraclides, (loc.cit.), the gift was one of remembrance, both in life and in death, of his experiences: "that during life he remembered every thing and when he died he preserved the same memory". (Cf. also Appolonius Rhodius: Argonautica i. 643-648.) Thus, in the variant from 'Hermodorus', which is adopted by Plutarch in the present passage, we have an interesting attempt to link Hermodotus with Aethalides. Cf. M. Peris: Greek Teachings of Reincarnation Ph.D. Thesis, University of London 1963, unpubl. revised ms., p. 371-378. For a parallel to the story of Hermodorus from Indian literature, cf. Panchatantra tr. A.W. Ryder, Bombay 1949, p. 150-155.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Plato: Timaeus 90a; Hamilton: op.cit. p. 182.

part of our body and, in virtue of its kinship in heaven, raises it from the earth, since we are not an earthly but a heavenly growth, and suspending our root keeps the whole body upright." Like Plato, Plutarch speaks of the mind as a daemon, assigning to it the function of elevating man and keeping him in touch with the higher world to which he is related.

Plutarch's description of the fate of souls, which become irrational by being totally submerged by the body, is also suggested by the Timæus, where we read: "When a man has consistently concerned himself with his passions or ambitions, his opinions must all of necessity become mortal; and he must in every respect, as far as possible, become mortal, and not fall short of this, since he has promoted such a state."

It has also been demonstrated that Plutarch's description of the movement of stars is indebted to Plato's account of the procession of gods and other souls in their soul-chariots in the Phaedrus.¹¹⁵ Plato's description is as follows: "As for the other souls, the one that best follows God and is like him raises the head of the charioteer to the region beyond, and is carried around along with him, confused by the horses and the difficulty of seeing things that exist. Another at times rises and at another time sinks and, because of the violence of the horses, it sees some things but not others. The other souls all hanker for what is above and follow, but are carried around, feeble and submerged."

The charioteer in this passage is the rational part of the soul, while the two horses are the emotional and appetitive parts. It is these last two parts that Plutarch classes together as "soul", distinguishing it from "mind". Thus, the spirit tells Timarchus:

'In the stars that are apparently extinguished you must understand that you see the souls that sink entirely into the body. In the stars that are

¹¹⁵ Plato: Phaedrus 248a.

lighted again, as it were, and reappear from below, you must understand that you see the souls that float back from the body after death, shaking off a sort of dimness and darkness as one might shake off mud; while the stars that move about on high are the daemons of men said to 'possess understanding' (noun echein)."

Both Plato and Plutarch specify three classes. Those whose head is raised to the region beyond in the Phaedrus correspond to those who, according to Plutarch, move on high and possess understanding; those who rise and fall correspond to those who float back from the body after death, shaking off a sort of dimness and darkness; those who are carried around, feeble and submerged, correspond to the souls that sink entirely into the body. Apart from this general similarity of scheme, Plutarch's language in the Myth of Timarchus is strongly reminiscent of the Phaedrus myth.

It has been observed that the main purpose of the Timarchus Myth is "to establish and elucidate the ethical value of the doctrine of daemonology."¹¹⁶ This ethical value is re-emphasized in the speech of Theanor, which follows the myth. Theanor maintains that the gods favour certain people and communicate directly with them by symbols, while helping others indirectly. These few privileged men, whose souls are liberated from the rule of passion and earthly desires, reach the end of their cycle. They offer help to other souls which strive after goodness, but desert those who refuse to obey them. They are compared to former athletes who run along urging the souls to the finishing line and to swimmers who, having escaped from the sea and reached the shore, shout and stretch their hands to those still struggling to reach it.

In contrast to the decidedly dark and pessimistic tone of the myth, (and this is true of all Plutarch's eschatological myths), Theanor's discourse is optimistic and presents the brighter aspect of life. However, it is noteworthy that neither he nor Epaminondas is prepared to speak about the

¹¹⁶ Oakesmith: op.cit. p. 173.

meaning of the myth, which is represented as something sacrosanct. Like Simmias, these two men are Pythagoreans; and it has been suggested that their reluctance should be attributed to their Pythagorean persuasion which expected from them the quality of discretion.¹¹⁷

Plutarch's concept of the divine man has been described as elitist.¹¹⁸ This is only to be expected from someone with his aristocratic orientation. He believes that only the few divine men share the privilege of direct communication with God. They are especially taught to recognize divine orders from signs.

However, this divine calling and education carries with it an ethical injunction of service to other deserving human beings. "With the Plutarchean doctrine of daemons is also involved the sublimely moral notion of eternal endeavour after higher and more perfect goodness. The human being who earnestly strives to be good within the limits of his present opportunities will have a larger sphere of activity thrown open to him as a daemon in the after-world. The human soul, transfigured into the strength and splendour of this higher nature, has work to perform which may develop such qualities as will bring their owner into closer proximity with the highest divine. The doctrine of daemons as expounded by Plutarch involves the profound moral truth that there is no limit to the perfectability of human nature."¹¹⁹

But daemonhood is not the highest point of man's upward journey. Plutarch evidently believed that some could even become gods. In the De Defectu Oraculorum ("The Failure of Oracles") Plutarch mentions the view that, "just as water is perceived to be produced from earth, from water air, and from air fire in a constantly ascending process, so also the better

¹¹⁷ Mautis: op.cit. p. 204-205.

¹¹⁸ D.A. Stoike: "De Genio Socratis" in Betz, ed.: op.cit. p. 236-285.

¹¹⁹ Oakesmith: op.cit. p. 173.

souls undergo a transformation from men to heroes, from heroes to daemons, and from daemons some few souls, being purified through prolonged practice of virtue, are brought to a participation in the divine nature itself.¹²⁰

Similarly, in the Life Of Romulus, Plutarch describes the progress of good souls towards reunion with the divine, not in the flesh, but when most completely separated and liberated from the body and become altogether pure, fleshless and undefiled:¹²¹

We must not therefore, violate nature by sending the bodies of good men with their souls to heaven, but implicitly believe that their virtues and their souls, in accordance with nature and divine justice, ascend from men to heroes, from heroes to demigods and from demigods [after they have been made pure and holy, as in the final rites of initiation, and have freed themselves from mortality and sense] to gods, not by civic law, but in very truth and according to right reason, thus achieving the fairest and most blessed consummation."

In the Myth of Timarchus we have a more explicit statement of the distinction between soul and mind, which was suggested in the Myth of Thespesius. This distinction finds complete expression in the Myth of Sulla, which, like the present myth, conceives the moon as the place of combination and separation of the two.

V. The Myth Of Sulla¹²²

Plutarch's dialogue De Facie Quae In Orbe Lunae Apparet ("On The Face Of The Moon") seeks to establish the importance

¹²⁰ Plutarch: De Defectu Oraculorum 415b-c.

¹²¹ Plutarch: Romulus xxviii-xxix; cf. Giankaris: op.cit. p. 118.

¹²² Plutarch: De Facie Quae In Orbe Lunae Apparet 940g-945d.

of the moon in the universe by explaining its nature and function. Contrary to the received opinion of the time that the moon was a heavenly body, Plutarch maintains that it is composed of the same substance as the earth. Throughout its history this dialogue, with its peculiarly modern ring, has attracted the attention of prominent men of science. Kepler, the great 18th century astronomer, studied it with enthusiasm, and published at Frankfurt in 1734, a Latin translation with commentary.

The dialogue falls into three main parts. The first (chs. 2-23) is a report (with discussion) on the physics and astronomy of the moon. The second (chs. 24-25) takes up the question whether the moon is inhabitable, providing an easy transition to the last section (chs. 26-30) which is the myth about the moon's role in the cycle of life and death.

The myth is narrated by a certain Sulla, a man from Carthage, who is one of the participants in the dialogue. But the entire dialogue is narrated by its chief speaker, Lamprias, who quotes the myth in Sulla's own words. Sulla has heard the myth from a stranger, who in turn had heard its eschatological part from "the chamberlains and servitors of Kronos." Thus the reader, who hears the tale from Lamprias, gets the narrative at third hand and the eschatological details at fourth hand.¹²³

The myth consists of two parts. The second part, which contains the eschatological details, is the myth proper. The first part is a narrative which serves as an introduction or frame story. In the frame story, Sulla relates how at Carthage he met a stranger from the mainland, which surrounds the great ocean and which is said to be inhabited by a race of Greeks who especially worship Heracles and Kronos. Every thirty years they send a deputation to the island where Kronos is imprisoned. This stranger, having served on such a deputation and having come to the end of his term of duty, decided to visit our world, which is known to them as the "Great Island".

¹²³ See Loeb ed. vol. xii, p. 14.

Having crossed many lands and having been initiated into several mysteries, he came to Carthage, where he discovered certain holy parchments and told his tale to Sulla. One cannot fail to see the impact of Plato's story of Atlantis on this narrative.²⁴

The eschatological part of the myth teaches that the moon is inhabited by souls that have left bodies after death on earth, or that have not yet entered terrestrial bodies through birth. A human being is made up of three parts: body, soul and mind. Those who consider mind as part of soul are in as much error as those who consider soul as part of body. The body comes from the earth, soul from the moon, mind from the sun.

The good undergo two deaths. In the first, which takes place upon the earth, the soul is separated from the body. In the second, which takes place on the moon, mind is separated from soul. The first death here on earth is sudden and violent; it belongs to Demeter and is associated with the terrestrial Hermes. The second death on the moon is slow and gentle; it belongs to Persephone and is associated with the celestial Hermes.

Hades is not simply the earth, as taught by the Orphics, but also includes its shadow. Hades is "the boundary of the earth", as Homer has aptly called it.¹²⁵ This is where the souls find themselves after death, and how high they can climb up depends on the degree of their purity. Those who reach the highest, i.e. the purest souls, experience the joy of initiates; but this is not the goal of their journey. For, the best among them reach the moon, where they undergo a change of nature and become daemons. They are no longer attached to the pleasures of the body, and would therefore need no incarnation.

¹²⁴ Plato: Timaeus 24e-25e; cf. W. Hamilton: "The Myth in Plutarch's De Facie" cit. supra.

¹²⁵ Plutarch: op.cit. 942f; cf. Homer: Odyssey iv, 564; Porphyry: apud Stobaeus: eclog. Phys. 41,61.

However, they are far from being completely immune to danger. For, there is a moment when they cease to hear the harmony of the heavens and pass through a kind of obscure night.¹²⁶ This occurs at each eclipse of the moon, when the earth's shadow (which is part of Hades) hastens towards the moon. Then they run the risk of being drawn towards a fresh incarnation. But those who resist to the end receive the crown of steadfastness.¹²⁷ All these motifs--Hades as the earth and its shadow, moon as the abode of daemons, connection between eclipses and reincarnation, harmony of the heavens, athlete's crown etc.--reveal Plutarch's debt to Orphico-Pythagorean teachings, coming to him mainly through Plato.

Under normal circumstances, the two deaths do not follow each other immediately. Every soul, whether rational or irrational, must wander for a time in the region between the earth and the moon. How long a soul remains in the "meadows of Hades" before being subjected to the second death depends on its moral condition. Until the occurrence of this second death, the life of the soul is said to be easy, but not particularly blessed or divine. The souls are said to suffer and exact penalties for whatever they have committed or endured since they became spirits. This they do in the largest hollow of the moon, known as "Hecate's Recess".¹²⁸

All soul, whether without mind or with it, when it has issued from the body, is destined to wander (in) the region between earth and moon, but not for an

¹²⁶ Plutarch: op.cit. 944a-b.

¹²⁷ ibid. 943d; cf. Pindar: Pyth. ix.125, Ol. xiv.27. It was the opinion of C.W. King (Plutarch's Morales: Theological Essays, London (1882) p. 252 n.f) that the feathers of the crown were suggested perhaps by the plumed cap "the badge of the Egyptian priesthood". But the idea could be traced back to the myth in Plato's Phaedrus.

¹²⁸ Plutarch: op.cit. 943c-d.

equal time. Unjust and licentious souls pay penalties for their offences; but the good souls must in the gentlest parts of the air, which they call "the meads of Hades," pass a certain set time sufficient to purge and blow away (the pollutions contracted from the body as from an evil odour. (Then), as if brought home from banishment abroad, they savour joy most like that of initiates, which attended by glad expectation, is mingled with confusion and excitement. For many, even as they are in the act of clinging to the moon, she thrusts off and sweeps away; and some of those souls too that are on the moon they see turning upside down as if sinking again into the deep. Those that have got up, however, and have found a firm footing first go about like victors crowned with wreaths of feathers called wreaths of steadfastness, because in life they had made the irrational or affective element of the soul orderly and tolerably tractable to reason; secondly, in appearance resembling a ray of light but in respect of their nature, which in the upper region is buoyant as it is here in ours, resembling the ether about the moon, they get from it both tension and strength as edged instruments get a temper, for what laxness and diffuseness they still have is strengthened and becomes firm and translucent. In consequence they are nourished by any exhalation that reaches them, and Heraclitus was right in saying: "Souls employ the sense of smell in Hades."

Much of the colour of the above passage comes, no doubt, from the language and symbolism of the mysteries. Plutarch had already associated the first and second deaths with Demeter and Persephone, the two great goddesses of Eleusis.¹²⁹ Here the joy of the purified souls is explicitly likened to that of initiates. A well-known passage from the fragmentary

129 ibid. 943b.

De Anima comes to mind,¹³⁰ where the experience of death is compared to that of initiation into the great mysteries--gloom, weariness, perplexity and terror followed by the shining of a wondrous light, which beams on lovely meadows whose atmosphere resounds with sacred voices revealing all the secrets of the mystery, and whose paths are trod by pure and holy men.

Of course there are discrepancies in the two passages with regard to the arrangement of the details. An example might be the role of the meadows. In the De Anima the initiate enters the meadows and celebrates the mysteries only after experiencing the trials of gloom, weariness, perplexity and terror. According to the present passage, on the other hand, the meadows are a place of purification through which just souls must pass before being admitted to the joy of the initiates.¹³¹ But on the basic comparison the two passages are in agreement.

In the concept of the "Meadows of Hades" Plutarch is once more indebted to Plato.¹³² In the Myth of Er, the souls about to be judged and those about to undergo reincarnation assemble

¹³⁰ Plutarch: De Anima vi.2.5-7, apud Stobaeus: Anthologion Tit. 120,28,vol.vii. p. 23. 1-17 [Bernadakis]; Oakesmith: op.cit. p. 117,n.1.

¹³¹ G. Soury: 'Mort et Initiation: sur quelques sources de Plutarque, De Facie 943c-d' R.E.G. vol. liii (1940) p. 51-58. In the Non Posse Suaviter Vivere Plutarch refers to those who, having cleansed themselves with mystic ceremonies and rituals of purification, expect to pass their time in the other world in play and choral dancing in regions where there is radiance and a sweet breeze and the sound of voices.

¹³² Cf. Plato: Gorgias 524c. The idea is, doubtless, as old as Homer, if not older. Cf. Homer: Odyssey xi. 539 and 573; xxiv. 33-34.

in a meadow.¹³³ In later developments this meadow came to be given an astronomical setting in keeping with the celestial eschatology that became fashionable. The Neoplatonists placed it in the atmosphere under the moon,¹³⁴ and Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 160-c. 215) identified it with the sphere of the fixed stars.¹³⁵

In Plutarch's myth the meadows are located between the earth and the moon, being admittedly a place of purification rather than of judgment. However, some kind of prior judgment appears to be implied; for we are told that the unjust souls are punished, while only the just souls are admitted to the meadows, where they must remain for a time sufficient to get rid of any bodily pollution. Moreover, not every just soul succeeds in reaching the moon; some are hurled back, presumably to reincarnation.

Thus, although the nuances are different, both Plato and Plutarch refer to souls who receive their reward and souls who are sent back to life. In both passages the meadows are reached after an arduous journey, and an appointed period of time is spent in expiation. G. Soury is therefore inclined to see in Plutarch's description implications of a second judgment.³⁶ But the punishment of residual guilt need not imply any judgment at all. It is perfectly possible to conceive of post mortem retribution without a judgment. Plutarch's own Myth of Thespesius is a case in point.

133 Plato: Republic 614e and 616b.

134 Proclus: In Rem Publicam ii. p. 132.20-133.15 [Kroll]; Olympiodorus: In Gorgiam p. 237.10-13 [Norvin]; Hermias: In Phaedrum p. 163.3-9 [Couvreur].

135 Clement of Alexandria: Strom. v. 17, p. 395 ff. [Stahlin]; cf. Soury: op.cit. p. 176.

136 loc .cit.

Even the astronomical setting of Plutarch's meadows has its Platonic antecedent in the Phaedrus myth in which the plain of truth containing the meadow is located above heaven. The later Pythagoreans had transported the abode of the souls into the vicinity of the moon. Hell, the place of expiation, (Plutarch's "Meadows of Hades"), came to be located in the earth's atmosphere between the earth and the moon i.e. in the sub-lunary regions. But the earlier Orphic doctrines had identified Hades with the earth itself. Plutarch apparently tried to make the best of both worlds by taking the earth's shadow to be a part of Hades and by calling Hades "the boundary of the earth".

Orphic influence is also evident in the comparison of the purified souls to home-coming exiles. The idea that earthly life is a banishment is characteristic of many early religious teachings. Plutarch himself develops the idea in the final pages of his De Exilio ["On Exile"].¹³⁷ After recalling Empedocles' well-known fragment¹³⁸, where the philosopher-poet speaks of himself as an exile and a wanderer far from bliss, Plutarch adds that the philosopher is in fact thinking of all of us, for we are strangers and exiles. The body, he says, is "born of the earth and mortal". Now, "born of the earth" is an epithet with a decidedly Orphic colour, being an allusion to the Titanic origins of the human race. The lively picture in the De Exilio of the fugitive soul chased through the earth by the decrees of divine law is probably of similar origin. In the Myth of Sulla this concept of the exiled soul serves to confirm its main doctrine that the moon is the abode of the departed souls.

The moon, then, is inhabited by souls who have managed to reach it after undergoing purification and overcoming terror and bewilderment. Plutarch calls them daemons. As in the De Genio Socratis, so here too the daemons are assigned an important role as benefactors of mankind. They may be sent down to earth to look after oracles, punish wrongdoers, and

¹³⁷ Plutarch: De Exsilio 607c ff.

¹³⁸ Empedocles: fr. 115 [Diels].

protect men in battle or at sea, and they are subject to punishment if they commit any wrongs. Their punishment is reincarnation.

We are here transported in spirit to the golden age of Kronos when, as Plato says, daemons ruled over men.¹³⁹ Plutarch himself enhances this association by saying that good daemons are the souls of those who lived on earth during the reign of Kronos, and that they are still worshipped in many places.¹⁴⁰ Plato's daemons, however, are a class of divine and essentially superhuman beings, not spirits of dead men, as Plutarch presents them. Thus, while Platonic influence is obvious, Plutarch's description appears to be closer in spirit to Hesiod's daemones epichthonioi, the spirits of men of the golden age.¹⁴¹

The further release of these souls is procured by their second death, in which the mind is separated from the soul. "It is separated by love of the image in the sun, through which shines forth manifest the desirable and fair and divine and blessed, towards which all nature in one way or another yearns." Obviously, Plutarch has been influenced by Plato's account of the Form of the Good,¹⁴² for his "image in the sun" is the visible manifestation of that which is desired, namely, the Good. The mind then escapes to the sun, while the soul remains dreaming until it is assimilated by the moon. The

139 Plato: Laws iv. 713; Politicus 272.

140 According to Iamblichus (Life Of Pythagoras vi. 30, p.18.4 [Deubner]) Pythagoras was considered by some to be such a spirit from the moon.

141 Hesiod. Theogony 109 ff; Plato: Symposium 202d; Empedocles: fr. 24 [Diels]; Steward: op.cit. p. 435.

142 Cf. Plato: Republic 407-9. The reference is not to the sun's reflection on the moon, as Kepler believed. See Loeb vol.xii, p. 213, n.G.

philosophical type of soul is easily assimilated, but the undisciplined and ambitious, in their longing for the body, slip off and must be charmed back by the moon to herself. As examples of this later type are mentioned the Titans, Tiphon and the Python of Delphi.¹⁴³

What has been described so far is the process of death. But there is also a corresponding process of generation. The sun is said to "sow"¹⁴⁴ mind on the moon. The moon adds soul. The mind-soul combination then reaches the earth and receives a body. Thus, the moon is the only part of the universe that both gives and takes, and is the essential middle stage in the cycle of birth and death. The position of the moon between the sun and the earth corresponds to the position of the soul, which occupies a middle place between mind and body; and like the soul it is a mixture sharing in both the starry and the earthy natures.

In keeping with the moon's importance the entire eschatology of the myth concentrates on that heavenly body. The earth's shadow on the hither side of the moon, known as "house of counter-terrestrial Persephone", is part of Hades, while the side of the moon facing heaven is called Elysium. This corresponds to the account in the De Anima ["On the Soul"]¹⁴⁵, according to which the Elysian fields are located on the surface of the moon lit by the sun, which is called "the guardian of birth and death", while souls awaiting rebirth are said to wander in the celestial regions of airy space.

143 Plutarch: De Facie Quae In Orbe Lunae Apparet 945b.

144 For this metaphor, cf. Plato: Timaeus 42d, where the demiurge is said to have sowed in the earth, moon and other planets the souls that he had fashioned himself, i.e. minds. For more reminiscences of the Timaeus in the Myth of Sulla, cf. Hamilton: op.cit. p.27.

145 Soury: op.cit. p. 175.

In the myth of Sulla, the two long hollows through which souls pass to the heavenward or earthward side of the moon are called "gates". This idea too has been traced back to the pair of double openings in Plato's Myth of Er. Proclus of Byzantium, in his commentary on the Republic, notes Numenius' identification of the openings in the Platonic myth with the gates of the sun, which Homer mentions in the last book of the Odyssey, and identifies both with the signs of the zodiac, which were thought to be the gates of Heaven.¹⁴⁶ The two hollows would then represent Cancer and Capricorn respectively.

Commentators have not failed to detect eastern influence in the development of this idea. In Chaldean mythology, the chariot of Shamas, the sun-god, entered and left by two gates of the solid firmament. Later theologians thought that the sun passed through these gates, Cancer serving in the ascent and Capricorn in the descent. The sun came to be thought of as the guardian of these gates, hence its role as the guardian of birth and death in the De Anima.¹⁴⁷ Although the tradition of identifying the gates of Cancer and Capricorn with the openings in the Myth of Er is first mentioned by Numenius in late antiquity, it may have been already current in Plutarch's time. However, it must be noted that the gates in Plutarch's description are located on the moon itself.

The entire process of generation is controlled by the three Fates, Atropos, Clotho and Lachesis, stationed on the sun, moon and earth respectively. In the Myth of Er, too, the three Fates figure in connection with the destiny of souls, without, however, any definite association with individual heavenly bodies.¹⁴⁸ Plutarch has also made this association

¹⁴⁶ Proclus: In Rem Publicam ii, p. 170.5 [Kroll]; cf. also Homer: Iliad v. 246 and xxi.71.

¹⁴⁷ Soury: op.cit. p. 176.

¹⁴⁸ Plato: Republic x. 617c; cf. Laws 960c.

in the Myth of Timarchus, but with significant differences.¹⁴⁹ This raises the problem of the relative order of the two myths.

Hamilton has demonstrated that the scheme of the two myths is essentially the same, with the addition of the monad as the supreme power in the Myth of Timarchus and the further resolution of mind into life and motion.¹⁵⁰ In very similar terms the two myths describe a process which culminates in the creation of human beings.

The Myth of Timarchus divides the universe into four regions: (1) the invisible, presumably outside the firmament and ruled by Unity, to which belongs the principle of life; (2) the realm of mind, including the sun and everything above it in the visible universe, to which belongs life combined with motion; (3) the moon and the space between it and the sun, ruled by nature, to which belong life, motion and birth; (4) the earth and the sublunary region, ruled by Persephone, where destruction is added to the other three principles.¹⁵¹

According to the Myth of Sulla, the sun sows mind on the moon, the moon adds soul, and the earth adds body. Thus, there are only two combinations here, whereas there are three in the Myth of Timarchus. Moreover, the Myth of Sulla does not speak of a combination on earth. But, as Hamilton correctly points out, when the soul leaves the moon it is already inevitably destined for incarnation. What is described as the sowing of mind in the Myth of Sulla is the same as the addition of birth below the sun in the Myth of

¹⁴⁹ In Plutarch's De Genio Socratis 591f, Atropos is placed in the invisible, Clotho in the sun, and Lachesis in the moon. For a different order cf. Plutarch, De Fato 568 e; cf. also, Zenocrates fr. 5 [Heinze] for yet another order.

¹⁵⁰ W. Hamilton: 'The Myth in Plutarch's De Genio' cit. supra.

¹⁵¹ See note 112 above.

Timarchus; for the Myth of Timarchus expressly tells us that Atropos, established about the sun, gives the element of becoming.¹⁵² Similarly, the addition of destruction in the Myth of Timarchus, since, according to Plutarch, the soul, unlike the mind, is mortal.

Regarding the different positioning of the three Fates in the two myths, Hamilton has offered the following explanation: 'Since there were only two combinations (sc. in the Myth of Sulla) a Fate could be assigned to the sun, the moon and the earth, and Atropos, whose seat was in the sun was free to preside, not over a combination of two elements, but over the arche geneseos: the sowing of mind. As however, the number of Fates is fixed and we have here (i.e. in the Myth of Timarchus) a third combination in the unseen, the only way of introducing the Fates into the scheme is to push them all one stage upwards and make each preside over one of the processes of combination.'

This explanation appears to presume that the De Facie was written earlier than the De Genio Socratis. It is true that there are no definite clues with regard to the chronological order of these two dialogues. Hamilton himself, while challenging Von Arnin's assumption that the De Facie was the earlier work, nevertheless appears to favour that assumption implicitly when he speaks of the "addition of a monad" or the "addition of a third combination", and when he visualized Plutarch pushing the Fates upwards. I am inclined to take the De Facie as the later work, and to see in it a simplification and clarification of the rather obscure and complicated doctrine of the four principles presented earlier in the De Genio Socratis. As Hamilton himself has rightly observed,¹⁵³ the looseness with which Plutarch uses his terms in the De Genio Socratis, compared with the clear statements of the De Facie, might be taken to indicate that the latter is the later work, written when the ideas were more firmly and distinctly fixed in his mind.

152 Plutarch: De Facie Quae In Orbe Lunae Apparet 945c.

153 Hamilton: op.cit. p. 179.

Plutarch must have realised that his revision of his scheme agreed better with the teaching of Plato, who had declared that it was impossible to separate life and motion. In the Laws Plato had defined soul as self-moving, and in the Sophist he had maintained that what exists absolutely cannot be supposed to have mind and not live. If it has mind and is alive, it must have a soul; and if it has a soul it cannot remain eternally motionless, but must have movement.¹⁵⁴ In the Phaedrus he argued that the soul, being self-moved, must be both uncreate and immortal, while being the source and beginning of motion in all other things that are moved.¹⁵⁵

Plutarch, therefore, must have decided to leave out of his revised scheme the possibility of life existing on its own without motion, and he was doubtless pleased with the resulting triad, which enabled him to devise a series of symmetrical relations: sun, moon, earth-mind, soul, body. The distinction between mind and soul and their combination and separation in the lunar region form the basis of both myths. But in the Myth of Sulla, in keeping with its theme, the role of the moon as the mediatrix has been duly highlighted by giving it a central position within a grand and symmetrical picture of the cosmic order.

Although Brenk has called it the least Platonic of Plutarch's myths, Plato's influence on the Myth of Sulla is considerable in particular, the impact of the Timaeus and of the Phaedrus has been duly recognized.¹⁵⁶ However, despite its Platonic borrowings, the myth is Plutarch's original creation, reflecting the wide range of his philosophical and scientific reading and the grandeur of his conception. Working within a Platonic framework and drawing on the philosophical, astrological, literary and popular traditions, he has evolved a scheme which reflects the spirit and speculative trends of his age.

154 Plato: Laws 796b, Sophist 249c.

155 Plato Phaedrus.

156 Brenk: op.cit. p. 134.

Platonic thought has received new life and vigour through simplification and adaptation to contemporary taste; witness the reinterpretation of daemons as souls on the way to their final destiny. Behind the speculations on the fate of the departed lies the conviction that the moon is of earthly substance and is inhabitable, while the distinction between mortal soul and immortal mind forms the psychological basis of his eschatology. As Brenk observes,¹⁵⁷ Plutarch "has very skillfully integrated the physical and religious cosmos, putting his most developed myth at the end of his most scientific treatise and integrating the two most skillfully."

VI. The Consolations

The Moralia include two 'consolations' or extended letters of condolence. One is addressed to a certain Apollonius on the occasion of his son's death. The other was written by Plutarch to his wife on the death of their two-year old daughter.

By Plutarch's time the Consolatio as a literary form already had a long history and had accumulated conventions regarding structure, style and content. Indeed, conventions gather round any literary form; but the Consolatio, being a form of occasional expression was particularly inclined to do so. For maximum impact, it had to be produced within a limited time. Thus, the author was forced to draw upon traditional material, which could be modified to suit the occasion. A recent analysis classifies this material into (1) that which relates to the idea that the bereaved have no cause to grieve because nothing evil has happened or is happening to the dead, and (2) that which concerns the ill effects of grief and ways to alleviate or avoid them.¹⁵⁸

The most obvious source of this material was "the common cultural heritage, the accumulated folk wisdom that spoke to

157 ibid. p. 144.

158 H. Martin Jr. and J.E. Phillips: 'Consolation ad Uxorem' in: H.D. Betz., ed.: Plutarch's Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature, Leiden (1978) p. 394-443; cf. p. 401.

generation after generation through the old poets and tragedians on the one hand, and through proverbs and wise saying on the other."¹⁵⁹ But there were two other important sources of influence which served to develop and systematize this material, namely, the Hellenistic philosophical schools (chiefly the Stoics, Peripatetics and Epicureans) and the rhetoricians.

The role of rhetorical teachings in shaping the structure of the Consolatio is particularly noteworthy. Significant in this connection is the rhetorical treatise falsely attributed to Dionysus of Hallicarnassus.¹⁶⁰ Its recommendations for funeral orations appear to have been closely followed in the two consolations of the Moralia. The Consolatio ad Uxoram adopts a considerably free and imaginative attitude to these conventions; but the Consolatio ad Apollonium generally follows them to the letter. One of the recommendations is that the oration should end with a discussion of the immortal nature and blessed state of the soul presented in a style like that of Plato.¹⁶¹ Both our consolations end with a discussion of the soul: the Consolatio ad Apollonium even reproducing a Platonic passage from the Gorgilas.

The Consolatio ad Apollonium is thought by some to be a spurious work attributed to Plutarch. The title is not found in the catalogue of Lamprias. However, arguments based on

159 ibid.

160 ibid. p. 410-413.

161 ibid. p. 400; ps. Dion. Halicar : Rhetoric vi.2,278-283 [Usener-Rademacher]. An earlier treatise of Menander even offers a choice, in describing the state of the dead man's soul, between the traditional underworld of Homer and the divine mansions of the mystics and philosophers. The Epicurean concept of total annihilation is not even mentioned, perhaps owing to its limited effectiveness in consoling the average mourner.

stylistic features have largely remained inconclusive, and there are comparatively early references to this work. The extraordinary length and abundance of quotations has led to the supposition that what we have is only a rough draft, and not the finished product. There are frequent echoes of Cicero's Tusculan Disputations, but these may be explained by assuming that both authors derived from a common source, most probably a lost work by the Academic philosopher, Crantor of Soli (c 335-c 275 B.C.).

The letter was written to console Appolonius, who had recently lost his son. Its message may be summarized in the author's own words: "It is the mark of educated and disciplined men to keep the same habit of mind towards seeming prosperity, and nobly to maintain a becoming attitude towards adversity." This ancient teaching occurs in many texts, both eastern and western. We may compare the following verse from the Dhammapada;¹⁶²

"As a solid rock is not shaken by the wind,
So wise men are not moved amidst blame and praise."

In trying to convince Apollonius that death is not an evil, the author draws upon the views of Socrates represented in Plato's Apology and Phaedo. Socrates said that death resembled either (1) a deep sleep, or (2) a long and distant journey, or (3) a sort of destruction, an extinction of both body and soul. In none of these cases would death be an evil.¹⁶³

Sleep is no evil; in fact, the deepest sleep is the sweetest. If therefore death is a sleep, there can be nothing evil in the state of those who are dead.

162 [Plutarch]: Consolatio ad Apollonium 102f; Dhammapada vi (Panditavaggo), 6, p. 85 [Radhakrishnan]:
Selo vatha ekaghano vatena na samirati.
Evam nindapasamsasu na saminjanti pandita.

163 [Plutarch]: op.cit. 108b ff; cf. Plato: Apology 40c and 29a, Phaedo 66b.

Neither would death be an evil if it resembled a journey. On the contrary it may even be a good, in as much as it liberates us from the enslavement of the flesh and its needs and emotions, which distract and taint the mind with human folly and hinder the pursuit of true knowledge:

Nay, the fact has been thoroughly demonstrated to us that, if we are ever going to have any pure knowledge, we must divest ourselves of the body, and with the soul itself observe the realities. And, as it appears, we shall possess what we desire and what we profess to long for--and that is wisdom--only, as our reasoning shows, after we are dead, but not while we are alive.

This idea finds artistic expression in the myth from Plato's Gorgias, reproduced at the end of the work, about the naked souls judged by naked judges.¹⁶⁴ The reproduction is thus no mere compliance with the rhetoricians' requirement that the discourse should end with a discussion of the soul in the style of Plato, but rather a natural follow-up to the Platonic teachings which find expression within the dialogue.

Even if death were really the total destruction and dissolution of body and soul, it would not be an evil; for it would result in the liberation from all pain and anxiety.¹⁶⁵

Now, those who have died return to the same state in which they were before birth; therefore, as nothing was either good or evil for us before birth, even so will it be with us after death. And just as all events before our lifetime were nothing to us, even so will all events subsequent to our lifetime be nothing to us. For in reality no suffering affects the dead, since not to be born I count the same as death.

¹⁶⁴ [Plutarch]: op.cit. 120e; cf. Plato: Gorgias 523a. The quotation differs slightly from the received text of Plato, but the general sense is preserved.

¹⁶⁵ [Plutarch]: op.cit. 109e; cf. Aeschylus: fr.255 [Nauck]; Euripides: Trojan Women 236.

This sentiment became a standard with the Epicureans and found poetic expression in the third book of Lucretius' De Rerum Natura ["On the Nature of the Universe"]. In the Consolatio Ad Uxorem Plutarch effects an interesting transformation of this idea by shifting the focus from the dead to the bereaved: after the child's death, the parents are in the same position as before its birth.¹⁶⁶

This conviction that death is not an evil but a good permeates the whole work, and is supported by a multitude of popular sayings and quotations from poets and philosophers. As many wise men of the past have held, life is a punishment, and to be born is the greatest calamity. Therefore, since the dead are in no evil state, grief must be got rid of, following the old advice to magnify the good and minimize evil.

Following Aristotles the author points out that the dead are not only blessed and happy, but that they are already our betters and superiors, so that it would be impious to say anything false or scandalous against them.¹⁶⁷ Not to be born is the best of all; and, as the gods have frequently revealed, to be dead is better than to live. The righteous dead enjoy honour and preferment in a place set apart for them. Apollonius, too, can hope that his son is among them. Being with the gods and feasting with them, he would not approve of his father's present conduct.

The occasion of Plutarch's consolatory letter to his wife, the Consolatio Ad Uxorem, was the death of their two-year old daughter, Timoxena. As we learn from the opening words, her death occurred while Plutarch was away from home. He learned about it from a relative when he reached Tanagra, the messenger having missed him on the road to Athens. We are thus given the impression that he wrote the letter at Tanagra, and dispatched it to his wife before setting for home.

¹⁶⁶ Plutarch: Consolatio Ad Uxorem 610d.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Aristotle fr. 54 [Rose].

The accuracy of this information has been questioned on the ground that, rather than taking time and trouble to compose and send a lengthy epistle, Plutarch would have immediately made the homeward journey to Chaeroneia, which could have been accomplished within a couple of days. It has therefore been argued that the consolation was composed at leisure after the event, and that the opening details are there to give verisimilitude to the literary form in which the author chose to express himself.¹⁶⁸

Yet one cannot miss the note of sincerity and genuine feeling in the pages of the *Consolatio Ad Uxorem*. Unlike the *Consolatio Ad Apollonius*, which is brimming with quotations, this work is virtually free from literary references, except for one Aesopic fable, a couple of lines from Theognis and Euripides and an occasional reminiscence of Homer. It is true that he uses many of the standard consolatory themes in the recommended arrangement for funeral orations. However, he does not follow rhetorical tradition slavishly, but exercises freedom and imagination in handling conventional themes.

I have already referred to Plutarch's transformation of the traditional comparison of man's state before birth with that after death, by transferring its application to the bereaved. Similarly, instead of the usual representation of death as an escape from life which is mostly evil, there is a more balanced attitude to life which takes account of its numerous blessings.¹⁶⁹ This attitude is counter-balanced by an awareness of the futility of grieving for the dead: "That she has passed into a state where there is no pain need not be painful to us; for what sorrow can come to us through her, if nothing now can make her grieve?"

One factor that may have led Plutarch to modify traditional themes could be the philosophy of Plato, from

¹⁶⁸ On this point compare Loeb ed. vol.vii, p. 576 with Martin and Phillips: op.cit. p. 395.

¹⁶⁹ Plutarch: op.cit. 610e ff.

which he drew unbounded inspiration. There are also the particular circumstances: the deceased is his own daughter, and the consolation is addressed to his wife. This is the third death in their family; they have already lost two sons. But Plutarch finds a source of strength not only in philosophy, but also, and chiefly, in religion.

The modifying effect of these circumstances is especially evident in the account of the soul with which Plutarch ends his letter, following the recommendations of the ~~historians~~¹⁷⁰:

Furthermore, I know that you are kept from believing the statements of that other set, who win many to their way of thinking when they say that nothing is in any way evil or painful to "what has undergone dissolution," by the teaching of our fathers and by the mystic formulas of the Dionysiac rites, the knowledge of which we who are participants share with each other. Consider then that the soul, which is imperishable, is affected like a captive bird: if it has long been reared in the body and has become tamed to this life by many activities and long familiarity, it alights again and re-enters the body, and does not leave off or cease from becoming entangled in the passions and fortunes of this world through repeated births. For, do not fancy that old age is vilified and ill spoken of because of the wrinkles, the grey hairs, and the debility of the body; no, its most grievous fault is to render the soul stale in its memories of the other world and make it cling tenaciously to this one, and to warp and cramp it, since it retains in this strong attachment the shape imposed upon it by the body. Whereas the soul that tarries after its capture but a brief space in the body before it is set free by higher powers proceeds to its natural state as though released from a bent position with flexibility and resilience unimpaired. For, just as a fire flares up again and quickly recovers, if a person who has extinguished it immediately lights it again, but is harder to rekindle if it remains extinguished for some time, so too those souls fare

170 ibid. 611d-612e.

best whose lot it is, according to the poet,

Soon as they may to pass through Hades' gates

before much love of the business of our life here has been engendered in them, and before they have been adapted to the body by becoming softened and fused with it as by reagents. It is rather in our ancestral and ancient usages and laws that the truth of these matters is to be seen; for our people do not bring libations to those of their children who die in infancy, nor do they observe in their case any of the other rites that the living are expected to perform for the dead, as such children have no part in earth or earthly things; nor yet do they tarry where the burial is celebrated, at the graves, or at the laying out of the dead, and sit by the bodies. For the laws forbid us to mourn for infants, holding it impiety to mourn for those who have departed to a dispensation and a region too that is better and more divine. And since this is harder to disbelieve than to believe, let us keep our outward conduct as the laws command, and keep ourselves within yet freer from pollution and purer and more temperate.

As in the Consolatio Ad Apollonium, the prevailing sentiment here too is that death is not an evil, prevailing sentiment here too is that death is not an evil, but rather that which liberates the soul from evil. However, this escape from evil and pain is not the result of dissolution, as the Epicureans would have us believe.

Although Plutarch is hostile to Epicurean eschatology, he does not hesitate to adopt their approach to grief, which consists in turning the mind's attention from the evil side of things to the good. One form of this approach was to persuade the bereaved that the lot of the dead is not pitiable; another was the distraction of the mind from distress by turning its attention to past, present or future pleasures.¹⁷¹ But,

¹⁷¹ C.E. Manning: 'The Consolatory Tradition and Seneca's Attitude to the Emotions' G. & R. xxi (1974) appendix, p.79 ff.

whereas for Epicurus and Lucretius the conviction that death is no evil was a deduction from their premise that death is annihilation, in Plutarch's case it generates from hope in the blissful state of the soul inculcated by ancient teachings and the formulae of the Dionysiac mysteries in which both he and his wife shared as participants.

It has sometimes been argued that the mysteries were concerned not so much with the after-life as with mundane matters and blessings for the present life. But their eschatological dimension is witnessed not only by the Bacchic images adorning various kinds of monuments, altars, stelae and sarcophagi, but also by documents such as the Hipponion Gold Leaf, published in 1974, describing the mystae and Bacchoi in the netherworld proceeding on the sacred way towards eternal bliss.¹⁷²

Plutarch's eschatological myths reveal the strong impact the mysteries had on him. But, unlike the myths, the consolation makes no explicit reference to reincarnation, which is so fundamental to both the mysteries of Dionysus and the philosophy of Plato. Even the immortality of the soul is not asserted with any degree of conviction. (The Myth of Sulla suggests that only mind is immortal.) What we find is the doctrine of the soul's survival after death, which leads Plutarch to affirm merely that his daughter's soul did not have time to become attached to the body and the things of this world but has quickly made the journey to the world beyond.

It is also surprising that he should speak of the Epicureans as winning many converts, since by his time Epicureanism had declined in popularity. It was giving way to a renewed interest in Platonic thought, which is reflected in Plutarch's own writings and those of his contemporaries, and which culminated in the appearance of the Neoplatonic school of thought.

¹⁷² W. Burkert: op.cit. p. 21 ff.

Plutarch is convinced that death is not an evil. But this is not because the soul is destroyed by death, as the Epicureans taught, but because it survives death; not only survives but attains liberation from the slavery of the body - and the earlier this is achieved, the better. He thus gives expression to yet another sentiment traditionally associated with funerals of the young, namely, the commendation of an early death - "whom the gods love die young", as Byron says.¹⁷³

The longer the soul has been in a body, the harder it will find to free itself, like a tame bird in a cage. But the soul that is freed early from its body attains its natural state "with flexibility and resilience unimpaired." This sentiment, also shared by the Consolatio ad Apollonium, is reinforced by a reference to usage, which does not allow the offering of libations or the performance of other funeral rites in the case of children. It would be impious to mourn for those who have achieved a better and more divine state.

This assertion sharply contrasts with other passages of Plutarch, such as the Myth of Timarchus, where he appears to subscribe to the view that those who die young find no rest in the other life, but that their souls wander on earth, presumably for the number of years their life would otherwise

¹⁷³ This is not the sentiment of Byron's original, from Plautus' Bacchides; "Quem di diligunt adulescens moritur". The words are sarcastic: Chrysalus, the tricky slave who utters them, goes on to say that if the gods had loved Nicobulus, he would have died long ago and not lived to be such a "rotten mushroom". Plautus' comedy was based on the Disexapaton, ("The Two-Time Trickster"), a lost play of Menander, where the line occurs as Hon hoi theoi philousin apothneskei neos. Incidentally, Byron has not only transformed the line, but he has also mistranslated it: both Menander and Plautus say "Whom the gods love dies young", not "...die young".

have lasted.¹⁷⁴ On the other hand, like most intelligent men of his time, he must have felt that these children did not deserve any chastisement. Their souls, which were not weighed down by prolonged contact with matter, and which were free from earthly pollution, would have risen without difficulty to a happier life in a better place.¹⁷⁵ This feeling, supported by his deep conviction about the justice and wisdom of Providence and the transcendental nature of the human soul, no doubt gave him the strength, not only to sustain a personal tragedy, but also to transform his tragic experience into a beautiful artistic creation of unsurpassed serenity and enduring moral significance.

D.P.M. Weerakkody

174 Plutarch: De Genio Socratis 590 f.

175 Cumont: op.cit. p. 136.