

Plutarch's Dualism and the Delphic Cult

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ABSTRACT

The article interprets Plutarch's dualism in the light of the Apollo-Dionysus opposition as presented in De E 388e-389c, arguing that Plutarch is no dualist in the strict sense of the word. A comparison of De E 393f-394a with De Iside 369b-d shows that it is only in the sublunary realm of Nature that Plutarch assumes a duality of two distinct Powers; at the higher levels of reality the divine is unified and harmonious. If Plutarch fails to emphasize this point clearly enough, it is because his primary philosophical interests were ethical, not metaphysical.

Plutarch's so-called 'dualism'¹ has long attracted the attention of scholars, being the most striking feature that distinguishes Plutarch from the majority of his fellow-Platonists.² In my article I am going to approach this remarkable aspect of Plutarch's thought from a hitherto unnoticed perspective. It is well known that Plutarch was a priest of Apollo in Delphi and that his Delphic religious background played an important part in his philosophy as well.³ The famous example is the speech of Ammonius at the end of De E in which Apollo is identified with the supreme god of Platonism. Yet the philosophical implications of the Delphic cult reach much further than that. As Plutarch himself tells us (De E 388e-389c), Delphi is not just the home of Apollo but of Dionysus as well.⁴ It was the unique partnership of these contrary divinities that greatly contributed to the authority and power of the Delphic cult. In what follows I would like to suggest that this alliance between Apollo and Dionysus exercised an

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¹ I shall mostly put the word 'dualism' into inverted commas, for as I hope to show in the course of my article, Plutarch's 'dualism' is a very limited one.

² Cf. e.g. J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (Duckworth 1977), pp. 202-8; Ch. Froidefond, *Plutarque et le platonisme* (in: ANRW II 36.1), pp. 215-24; U. Bianchi, *Plutarch und der Dualismus* (in: ANRW II 36.1).

³ See e.g. J. Dillon, *Plutarch and Second Century Platonism* (in: *The Great Tradition*, Variorum 1997), pp. 215-7. Cf. also F. E. Brenk's analysis of Plutarch's 'prejudice for Delphi' in the *Lives* (*The Religious Spirit of Plutarch*, in: ANRW II 36.1, pp. 330-6). The Apollonian religious background was already crucial for Plato, as has been recently demonstrated by Christina Schefer, *Platon und Apollon*, Academia Verlag 1996.

⁴ A detailed account of Dionysus' presence in Delphi is given by K. Kerényi, *Dionysos* (English tr. by Ralph Manheim, Princeton University Press 1976), pp. 204-37.

important influence on Plutarch's thought and that it can help us understand the nature, and above all the meaning of his 'dualism'.

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The most systematic account of Plutarch's dualism is to be found in his major scholarly treatise *On the Generation of the Soul* in the *Timaeus*. Formally, this is supposed to be a commentary on *Timaeus* 35a-36b, but in its most interesting passages it deals with the Platonic doctrine of soul as such. The basic problem Plutarch needs to resolve is that while in the *Timaeus* the soul is described as generated, in *Phaedrus* 245c-246a it is characterized as immortal and not subject to generation (*ἀγένητον*), being a permanent source of motion. Plutarch's interpretation is that there are in fact two different senses in which Plato speaks about the soul. In the *Phaedrus* he means the 'soul in itself' (*ψυχή καθ' ἑαυτήν* – 1014e) which is indeed an unborn and everlasting source of motion, but its movements are irrational and blind. This is, in Plutarch's view, what Plato has in mind when in the *Timaeus* he repeatedly refers to the chaotic and disorderly movements which existed even before the generation of the cosmos.⁵

Yet the irrational soul was not the only thing that there was before the birth of the world. Opposed to it there stood Intelligence which is the source of order and form. The starting point for the creation of the cosmos, therefore, is the fundamental opposition of Soul (*ψυχή*) and Intelligence (*νοῦς*). These two are independent of each other and have entirely different functions: 'For soul is cause and principle of motion, but intelligence of order and consonance in motion.'⁶ Soul is a powerful source of energy and movement, but in itself this movement is entirely irregular and disorderly. Intelligence, on the other hand, is perfectly orderly and regular, but in itself it is quite powerless, being unable to move.⁷ When Plato describes the generation of the Soul in *Timaeus* 35a-36b, what he really means, in Plutarch's view, is that the Demiurge puts the primordial Soul and Intelligence together, creating a harmonious whole which is full both

⁵ Notably at 30a and 52d-53b.

⁶ 1015e: *ψυχή γὰρ αἰτία κινήσεως καὶ ἀρχή, νοῦς δὲ τάξεως καὶ συμφωνίας περὶ κίνησιν*. Throughout the article, my quotations of Plutarch are based on their respective Loeb Classical Library editions, though I feel free to modify both the texts and translations to reflect my own reading of the passage in question. For this reason all the main departures from the MSS are indicated in brackets.

⁷ Cf. 1024a: 'By itself, Intelligence was abiding and immobile' (*ὁ δὲ νοῦς αὐτὸς μὲν ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ μόνιμος ἦν καὶ ἀκίνητος*).

of order and of energy. The result is the orderly World Soul which can indeed be spoken of as generated, for it is the product of the coming together at some point in time of two unborn elements which had previously existed separately. When Plato speaks of the World Soul as being compounded of such contrary elements as difference – sameness (τὸ ἕτερον – τὸ αὐτό) and divisible – indivisible (τὸ μεριστόν – τὸ ἀμερές), Plutarch understands these components precisely in the light of his Soul – Intelligence opposition.

We need not go into the details of Plutarch's exegesis of Timaeus 35a-36b. As Harold Cherniss demonstrated in his LCL introduction and notes to the treatise, the whole interpretation is irreconcilable with many Platonic passages, and to pursue it, Plutarch has to commit himself to many misrepresentations of Plato's meaning. What is more, Plutarch is not even entirely consistent with himself and it seems that he is really expounding the Timaeus passage at two different levels. His primary tendency is to reduce all the components of the rational World Soul to the basic Soul – Intelligence opposition. Yet when it comes to more subtle problems, he is ready to draw much neater distinctions and it becomes difficult to see how all of them fit in with the elementary antithesis of Soul and Intelligence.⁸ In fact, at such moments Plutarch even gets close to the Xenocratean arithmetical interpretation which he criticizes at the beginning of the treatise.⁹ The overall impression is that Plutarch basically follows the traditional Academic speculations, but at the same time tries to accommodate them to a rather different dualist scheme of his own.

That Plutarch was fascinated by the idea of two fundamental Powers struggling against each other in our world is clear from his famous summary of ancient theories of opposing Principles in *De Iside* 369a-371c. Yet there is also another interesting passage in the *Moralia* which has generally received little attention in this connection but which I would suggest as the true key to Plutarch's notion of opposing Powers: it is a part of the speech of Plutarch in *De E* 388c-389c. In this passage, the old Plutarch presents himself as a young man giving his interpretation of the mysterious letter E inscribed on the Delphic temple of Apollo. Plutarch

⁸ Thus, while in different parts of the essay the Soul – Intelligence opposition is associated with such pairs of contraries as divisible – indivisible (1014d-e), difference – sameness (1026e), or motion – rest (1015e), in 1024b-1026a Plutarch strictly distinguishes between all of these pairs. The two approaches need not be incompatible: the divisible, difference and motion can easily be seen as different aspects of the irrational Soul. But even so Plutarch's exposition would seem to be far from coherent.

⁹ See Cherniss' notes f on 1024d and b on 1025a.

interprets the E as 'the symbol of a universally great and sovereign number' five (387e). One of the main features of this number is the mathematical fact that when added to itself it always produces either itself or the perfect number ten¹⁰ (i.e. a number ending in 5 or 0). In this way number five imitates 'the primal principle which orders the whole' (τὴν τὰ ὅλα διακοσμοῦσαν ἀρχήν) – for this principle, too, 'by its changes creates a universe out of itself, and then in turn out of the universe creates itself again' (ὑπαλλάττουσαν¹¹ ἐκ μὲν ἑαυτῆς τὸν κόσμον ἐκ δὲ τοῦ κόσμου πάλιν ἑαυτὴν ἀποτελεῖν – 388d).

In itself, such a theory could be seen simply as a piece of Stoic philosophy that Plutarch quotes in order to provide a contrast with the truly Platonic solution presented later by Ammonius, and most commentators have treated it as such.¹² Yet the matter is much more complicated. Not only would it be strange if Plutarch decided to present through his own mouth a theory he would not in the least approve of. What is even more important, he immediately hastens to relate this interpretation to the Delphic cult:

If, then, anyone ask, 'What has this to do with Apollo?', we shall say that it concerns not only him, but also Dionysus, whose share in Delphi is no less than that of Apollo. Now we hear the theologians affirming and reciting, sometimes in verse and sometimes in prose, that the god is deathless and eternal in his nature, but, owing forsooth to some predestined design and reason, he undergoes transformations of his person, and at one time enkindles his nature into fire and makes it altogether like all else, while at another time he becomes manifold in his form, his affects and his various powers, even as the cosmos does right now.¹³

In what follows, Plutarch makes it clear that this god is no one other than Apollo, though in the multiple and manifold phase of his cycle he is usually called Dionysus. This makes it impossible to dismiss the passage as merely a piece of Stoicism which is not to be taken seriously. It is hardly

¹⁰ For the Pythagorean perfect number ten cf. e.g. Aristotle, *Met.* 986a8.

¹¹ ὑπαλλάττουσαν Wilamowitz (Babbitt reads ἀλλάττουσαν): φύλαττουσαν MSS.

¹² E.g. D. Babut, *Plutarque et le Stoïcisme* (Paris 1969), pp. 149-54; R. M. Jones, *The Platonism of Plutarch* (Wisconsin 1916), pp. 15-6; F. E. Brenk, *The Religious Spirit of Plutarch*, in: *ANRW II* 36.1, p. 304.

¹³ 388e-f: ἐὰν οὖν ἔρηται τις, τί ταῦτα πρὸς τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα, φήσομεν οὐχὶ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς τὸν Διόνυσον, ᾧ τῶν Δελφῶν οὐδὲν ἦττον ἢ τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι μέτεστιν. ἀκούομεν οὖν τῶν θεολόγων τὰ μὲν ἐν ποιήμασι τὰ δ' ἄνευ μέτρου λεγόντων καὶ ὑμνοῦντων, ὡς ἄφθαρτος ὁ θεὸς καὶ ἀίδιος πεφυκώς, ὑπὸ δὴ τινος εἰμαρμένης γνώμης καὶ λόγου μεταβολαῖς ἑαυτοῦ χρώμενος ἄλλοτε μὲν εἰς πῦρ ἀνήψε τὴν φύσιν [sic Reiske: τῇ φύσει MSS] πάντα ὁμοιάσας πάσιν, ἄλλοτε δὲ παντοδαπὸς ἐν τε μορφαῖς καὶ ἐν πάθεσι καὶ δυνάμεσι διαφόροις γιγνόμενος, ὡς γίγνεται νῦν (ὁ) κόσμος.

thinkable that Plutarch would associate with the Delphic cult a philosophical theory he would not take seriously in one way or another. On the contrary, the consequent paragraphs up to 389c suggest that this interpretation of the Apollo-Dionysus relation was quite crucial for him and that he was more than excited about it.

This being the case, it is interesting to see how exactly Plutarch characterizes the difference between Apollo and Dionysus:

To Dionysus they sing the dithyrambic strains laden with emotion and with a transformation that includes a certain erratic wandering and dispersion . . . But to Apollo they sing the paeon, music orderly and temperate. Apollo the artists represent in paintings and sculptures as ever ageless and young, but Dionysus they depict in many shapes and forms; and they attribute to Apollo in general a similarity, order, and unadulterated seriousness, but to Dionysus a certain irregularity combined with playfulness, wantonness, seriousness, and frenzy.¹⁴

It is striking that while the passage can easily be read as a purely literary description with no philosophical significance whatsoever,¹⁵ it is in fact packed with Platonic terminology. Thus we have Apollo associated with order (τεταγμένην, τάξιν), temperance (σώφρονα), agelessness (ἀγήρων) and similarity (ὁμοιότητα), while Dionysus with emotions (παθῶν), change (μεταβολῆς), erratic wandering (πλάνην), multiplicity of shapes (πολυειδῆ καὶ πολύμορφον) and irregularity (ἀνωμαλίαν). All of these terms are used both by Plato and by Plutarch as expressions of philosophical ideas which are closely associated with what Plutarch himself interprets as the Soul – Intelligence dualism.¹⁶

¹⁴ 389a-b: ὄδουσι τῷ μὲν διθυραμβικὰ μέλη παθῶν μεστὰ καὶ μεταβολῆς πλάνην τινὰ καὶ διαφόρησιν ἐχούσης . . . τῷ δὲ παιᾶνα, τεταγμένην καὶ σώφρονα μοῦσαν, ἀγήρων τε τοῦτον ἀεὶ καὶ νέον, ἐκείνον δὲ πολυειδῆ καὶ πολύμορφον ἐν γραφαῖς καὶ πλάσμασι δημιουργοῦσι· καὶ ὅλως τῷ μὲν ὁμοιότητα καὶ τάξιν καὶ σπουδὴν ἄκρατον, τῷ δὲ μεμιγμένην τινὰ παιδιᾷ καὶ ὕβρει καὶ σπουδῇ καὶ μανίᾳ προσφέροντες ἀνωμαλίαν.

¹⁵ An example of this is Babbitt's non-philosophical translation which entirely obscures all the technical terms contained in these sentences.

¹⁶ The significance of concepts like σωφροσύνη, τάξις or πάθος needs hardly to be pointed out. For πλάνη cf. e.g. Phaedo 79c-d (πλάνη of the soul in the realm of the ever variable), Republic 485b (eternal being contrasted with the πλάνη of γένεσις and φθορά), Timaeus 48a (Necessity as πλανωμένη αἰτία). For Plutarch's usage see e.g. De an. procr. 1024a (the irrational element of Soul and Nature is μεριστὸν καὶ πλανητόν). For πολυειδῆς see e.g. Phaedo 80b (the uniform and invariable contrasted with the ever-changing and πολυειδές). Ἀγήρων is not a strict philosophical term, but it is worth mentioning that in Politicus 273e Plato uses this adjective to characterize the cosmos in its divine-governed phase in which god κοσμεῖ τε καὶ ἐπανορθῶν ἀθάνατον αὐτὸν [sc. τὸν κόσμον] καὶ ἀγήρων ἀπεργάζεται.

For our purpose, the most important pair, perhaps, is the seemingly asymmetrical¹⁷ antithesis similarity – irregularity, for these terms are to be found in *Timaeus* 52d-e. Here we learn that before the generation of the universe ‘the nurse of generation, becoming watery and fiery, and receiving the forms of earth and air, and experiencing all kind of other affections that accompany these, presented a variety of appearances, and being full of powers which were neither similar nor equally balanced, was never in any part in a state of equipoise, but swaying irregularly hither and thither, was shaken by them, and by its motion again shook them.’¹⁸ For Plutarch, of course, this was a description of the state in which the irrational Soul is by itself, before being ordered by Intelligence. And there can be little doubt that he associated this state with the Dionysian aspect of reality which is characterized precisely by irregularity, incessant changes in shape and appearance, and going through all kinds of emotional affects. For Plutarch, the Dionysian flavour of the *Timaeus* passage must certainly have been further strengthened by the subsequent imagery of ‘winnowing-baskets’ in which even Cornford could not help seeing the image of the infant god Dionysus carried in a *liknon* by his nurses.¹⁹

The agreement of the Apollo-Dionysian imagery in *De E* and Plutarch’s philosophical concepts in *De animae procreatione* is obvious. In view of this, it might seem rather puzzling that in *De E* the Apollo-Dionysus opposition is associated with something that one would be inclined to identify as the Stoic theory of cosmic cycles. Yet the passage in question hardly needs to be taken so literally. Clearly, what appeals to Plutarch

¹⁷ Some editors have even gone so far as to emend *ὁμοιότητα* into *ὁμαλότητα*. Yet this is merely a misunderstanding of the Platonic background of the passage. For Plato, similarity means similarity to oneself (*ὁμοιότητα αὐτοῦ ἑαυτῷ* – *Phaedo* 109a), and thus regularity, identity and uniformity. Moreover, Apollo can rightly be associated with similarity in that most of his statues and images actually are very similar to each other, always showing the same beautiful youth with a slightly ‘detached’ expression. For Plutarch’s use of *ὁμοιότης* in metaphysical contexts cf. *De an. procr.* 1017a, 1022f, 1025c, 1026a, 1027a.

¹⁸ τὴν δὲ δὴ γενέσεως τιθῆναι ὑγραινόμενην καὶ πυρουμένην καὶ τὰς γῆς τε καὶ ἀέρος μορφὰς δεχομένην, καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τούτοις πάθη συνέπεται πάσχουσαν, παντοδαπὴν μὲν ἰδεῖν φαίνεσθαι, διὰ δὲ τὸ μῆθ’ ὁμοίων δυνάμεων μήτε ἰσορρόπων ἐπιμίπλασθαι κατ’ οὐδὲν αὐτῆς ἰσορροπεῖν, ἀλλ’ ἀνωμάλως πάντη ταλαντουμένην σείεσθαι μὲν ὑπ’ ἐκεῖνων αὐτὴν, κινουμένην δ’ αὖ πάλιν ἐκεῖνα σείειν. The translation is based on that by Jowett.

¹⁹ Plato’s *Cosmology*, p. 201, n. 2, where Cornford also quotes the Orphic fragment 199 (Kern) in which Dionysus is carried in a *liknon* by the Earth Mother. In *Tim.* 52e6 the Greek word translated as ‘winnowing-basket’ is actually *πλόκανον*, but *liknon* is present through the verb *ἀναλκιδόμενα* in some of the MSS at 53a1.

in the first place is the notion of cyclicity as such which he finds easy to connect with the cyclical alternations of Apollo and Dionysus in their presiding over Delphi (389c). It is this idea of cyclicity (as manifested in the properties of number five) that he starts to develop at 388c, producing the obvious example of Nature which 'first receives wheat in the form of seed and dissolves it in herself,²⁰ and then creates in its midst many shapes and forms through which she carries out the process of growth to its end, but, to crown all, displays wheat again, and thus presents as her result the beginning at the end of the whole.'²¹ Having explained that, Plutarch proceeds to show that this pattern is not confined to the vegetative realm only but is in some way typical for all cosmic processes. It is at this point that he introduces the theory of *ekpyrôsis*, for which, however, he does not quote the Stoics but rather his favourite Heraclitus, according to whom 'all things are exchanged for fire and fire for all things, as goods are for gold and gold for goods' (B 90).

The fullest account of the *ekpyrôsis* doctrine is given at 388f. But neither here the Stoics are mentioned. Instead, Plutarch mysteriously attributes it to the 'theologians' who affirm their doctrines 'sometimes in verse and sometimes in prose'. Whom does he have in mind? Typically, by οἱ θεόλογοι Plutarch refers to those ancient authors standing on the border between poetry and philosophy. Thus in *Sulla* 36.3 Pherecydes is called a theologian, while in *De Iside* 360d Plato, Pythagoras, Xenocrates, and Chrysippus are said to have followed 'the ancient theologians' (i.e. probably Hesiod and some of the Presocratics) for their daimonological theories. Similarly, in *De Defectu* 436d a distinction is introduced between οἱ μὲν σφόδρα παλαιοὶ θεολόγοι καὶ ποιηταί (as an example of which Orpheus is quoted) and οἱ δὲ νεώτεροι τούτων καὶ φυσικοὶ προσαγορευόμενοι. From this point of view, Plutarch might be alluding to authors such as Empedocles (verse) and Heraclitus (prose) in our passage, the evidence for the latter being further strengthened by the reference to *κόρος* and *χρημοσύνη* at 389c.²²

²⁰ I retain the MSS reading *χαμένη*, though no modern editor does so. Babbitt conjectures *χρησαμένη*, Strijd *δεξαμένη*.

²¹ 388c: ἡ φύσις λαβοῦσα πυρὸν ἐν σπέρματι καὶ χαμένη πολλὰ μὲν ἐν μέσῳ φύει σχήματα καὶ εἶδη, δι' ὧν ἐπὶ τέλος ἐξάγει τὸ ἔργον, ἐπὶ πᾶσι δὲ πυρὸν ἀνέδειξεν ἀποδοῦσα τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐν τῷ τέλει τοῦ παντός.

²² Cf. Heraclitus B 65. For Empedocles cf. B 17, B 26; Simplicius, In *De caelo* 293.16-294.6; In *Phys.* 157.25ff. etc. A counter-argument would be that even Heraclitus himself is referred to as *φυσικός* in *De Iside* 362a, while Empedocles in *De curiositate* 515c.

On the other hand, there are passages in which οἱ θεόλογοι seem to be associated rather with the very founders and promoters of religious cults. Thus 'the theologians of Delphi' are mentioned in *De Defectu* 417f (οἱ Δελφῶν θεολόγοι – obviously meaning some officials who are in charge of relating the stories associated with the shrine), while in *De Iside* 369b we are told that the 'very ancient opinion' according to which good is always mixed with evil in our world 'has come down to poets and philosophers ἐκ θεολόγων καὶ νομοθετῶν' (giving sacrifices and mysteries as an example). It is possible, therefore, that Plutarch actually saw the doctrine of cyclic transformations of Apollo as embedded in the Delphic religious tradition itself (about which he was, of course, infinitely better informed than we are).²³

Whatever Plutarch's exact idea was, his reference to οἱ θεόλογοι is extremely important, for since he normally tends to ally theologians with poets rather than philosophers, this seems to suggest that he considers the cosmic cycle important precisely as a myth and poetic symbol whose profound significance can only be revealed through proper philosophical interpretation.²⁴ If he is ready elsewhere to criticise this theory sharply in its Stoic form,²⁵ it is simply because he disapproves of their taking it literally. We are not directly told what Plutarch himself considers the appropriate interpretation, but we can gain some help from passages in which he comments on the Platonic version of the cosmic cycles doctrine, the famous Politicus myth. In this case, Plutarch is in no doubt that the conflict between divine guidance and the inborn chaotic nature of the cosmos is to be read as an illustration of the Soul – Intelligence opposition as defended in *De animae procreatione*.²⁶ The interesting thing is that Plutarch is apparently able to read the myth both temporally and metaphorically. The best example is a passage in *De animae procreatione* 1026e-f where Plutarch starts by once again describing the opposition of Soul and Intelligence:

²³ In the text this would be particularly supported by 389c where it is those who organize the sacrifices at Delphi who call the Apollonian part of the cycle κόρος and the Bacchic one χρημοσύνη. Plutarch apparently assumes the officials at Delphi did think of the periodical alternations of Apollo and Dionysus in terms of cosmic cycles.

²⁴ This is also why the *ekpyrōsis* account is so much intermingled with religious material throughout the passage up to 389c. Evidently, for Plutarch the *ekpyrōsis* doctrine too is a part of the religious tradition.

²⁵ Cf. *De Defectu* 415f–416a.

²⁶ Cf. 1015a, 1015c, 1017c.

The Soul puts forth of herself the emotive part, but partook of Intelligence because it got into her from the superior principle. From this dual association the nature of the heavens is not exempt either; but it inclines this way and that, at present being kept straight by the dominant revolution of sameness and piloting the universe, whereas there will be and often has already been a period of time in which its prudential part becomes dull and falls asleep, filled with forgetfulness of what is proper to it, while the part intimate with body from the beginning and connected to it in its affections puts a heavy drag on the right-hand course of the sum of things and rolls it back without being able, however, to disrupt it entirely, but the better part recovers again and looks up at the pattern when god helps with the turning and guidance.²⁷

It is obvious that, on the one hand, Plutarch reads the myth in the light of his Soul – Intelligence opposition and regards the two phases of the cycle – the divine revolution aiming at unity on the one hand and the reverse course bringing about multiplicity on the other – as two simultaneous tendencies within the universe, the effort of Intelligence to bring things to order versus the tendency of Soul to set them into irrational motion. To emphasize this, he even connects the two motions of the universe of the Politicus myth with the two movements of the heaven as described in Timaeus 36c-d, the revolution of the Same and the revolution of the Different, thus leaving us in no doubt that they both take place simultaneously and their struggle is going on even at this very moment.²⁸ At the same time, however, Plutarch also reads the myth literally, seeing the backward course and the divine revolution as two alternate temporal stages in the history of the universe. It is not clear what his exact idea of these historical movements is, but it seems not unlikely that he connected them to some cyclic scheme of the rise and fall of civilisations.²⁹ Be that

²⁷ τὸ γὰρ παθητικὸν ἀναδίδωσιν ἐξ ἑαυτῆς ἡ ψυχὴ, τοῦ δὲ νοῦ μετέσχευ ἀπὸ τῆς κρείττονος ἀρχῆς ἐγγενομένου. τῆς δὲ διπλῆς κοινωνίας ταύτης οὐδ' ἡ περὶ τὸν οὐρανὸν ἀπήλλακται φύσις, ἀλλ' ἑτερορρεπούσα νῦν μὲν ὀρθοῦται τῇ ταύτου περιόδῳ κράτος ἐχούσῃ καὶ διακυβερνήτῃ τὸν κόσμον· ἔσται δὲ τις χρόνου μοῖρα καὶ γέγονεν ἤδη πολ- λάκις, ἐν ᾗ τὸ μὲν φρόνιμον ἀμβλύνεται καὶ καταδαρθάνει λήθης ἐπιπλάμενον τοῦ οἰκείου, τὸ δὲ σώματι σύνηθες ἐξ ἀρχῆς καὶ συμπαθεῖς ἐφέλκεται καὶ βαρύνει καὶ ἀνε- λίσσει τὴν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ παντὸς πορείαν, ἀναρρηξάει δ' οὐ δύναται παντάπασιν, ἀλλ' ἀνήνεγκεν αἰθις τὰ βελτίω καὶ ἀνέβλεψε πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα θεοῦ συνεπιστρέφοντος καὶ συναπευθύνοντος.

²⁸ Cf. De Iside 369c (quoted below) where Plutarch interprets the Timaeus movements of the Same and of the Different as respective representations of the Cosmic principles of good and evil that the sublunary Nature contains in itself.

²⁹ Cf. passages such as De Pythiae oraculis 408b-c or De fortuna Romanorum 316e-317c, both analysed by Dillon in his article Plutarch and the End of History (in: The Great Tradition, Variorum 1997). Dillon interprets Plutarch as saying that just as

as it may, Plutarch stresses that the chaotic nature of the universe will never be able to disrupt the guidance of god entirely, thus refusing the idea of the world being ever totally disrupted.

We can see, therefore, that the myth of cosmic cycles is in no way inconsistent with Plutarch's Platonism, being present even in such a scholarly work as *De animae procreatione*. Accordingly, there is no reason to regard Plutarch's speech in *De E* as a Stoic borrowing presented only to be refuted later. It is fully in agreement with his ideas elsewhere and helps us uncover a possible religious background of Plutarch's interpretation of the generation of the soul.

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The comparison between *De animae procreatione* and the speech of Plutarch in *De E* has helped us throw a new light on the problem of Plutarch's 'dualism'. We have seen that it strikingly corresponds to the opposition of Apollo and Dionysus in the Delphic cult with which Plutarch deeply identified himself.³⁰ The question is how this parallel fits the rest of his philosophy. The most important question we have to ask is to what extent Plutarch's thought is actually dualistic. Strictly speaking, dualism means the belief in the existence of two opposite principles which are ultimately independent of each other. Now, it can hardly be denied that Plutarch frequently does give the impression of looking at things in this way. Throughout

the cosmos has been ordered by god to subsist in its orderly state forever, even so the development of human civilisation has reached its end with the establishing of the Roman Empire. It is true that in itself *De fort. Rom.* 316e-317c makes this reading possible, but in view of *De an. procr.* it seems more probable that not even the Roman Empire will last forever, for there not only 'has been' but also once again 'will be . . . a period of time in which its prudential part becomes dull', leaving the ancient chaotic nature of the universe to roll things back (1026e). Even at 317c Plutarch talks of the world's government being brought 'within an orderly and single cycle of peace' (εἰς κόσμον εἰρήνης καὶ ἑνα κύκλον), which suggests that the Roman sway, too, will have its end. That Plutarch does not say so directly is not surprising, as it would hardly suit his purpose in an essay celebrating the Romans.

³⁰ It is necessary to mention, however, that the relation between religion and philosophy in Plutarch is actually rather more complicated than I have presented it here. For Plutarch, the gods cannot be identified with philosophical concepts and it is fully legitimate to interpret one and the same god in several different ways. Thus e.g. in *De* Inside the situation is exactly the reverse of what we have in *De E*: it is Osiris-Dionysus who stands for Being, while Apollo-Horus represents the visible cosmos. To explain why this is possible would require a separate detailed analysis, and I hope to treat the subject at some time in the future.

De animae procreatione Soul and Intelligence certainly are described as entirely independent forces and there is not a single hint at their being derived from a single source. When Plutarch talks about ‘god’ in De animae procreatione, it is clear that he more or less identifies him with Intelligence,³¹ just as Plato occasionally does in the mythical scheme of the Timaeus.³² All this would suggest downright dualism.

On the other hand, it is doubtful that Plutarch actually means to assert the ultimate metaphysical independence of his two cosmic principles. While he certainly seems to do so in the context of the Timaeus exegesis, the situation looks quite different in some of the other treatises. In this respect, De E is particularly interesting, for here the Apollo-Dionysus antithesis which we have shown as the possible background of Plutarch’s ‘dualism’ is actually described as two aspects of one and the same divinity. On the mythical level these aspects have the form of alternating phases of a cycle, but we have seen that this is hardly to be taken literally and that Plutarch apparently saw Apollo and Dionysus as two co-existing forces.

Further light on the matter is thrown by Ammonius who delivers the next speech in De E, one that is presented as the final and most important account. Ammonius understands the letter E as εἶ, ‘you are’. For him, Apollo is no longer a changing god but rather the true archetype of unchangeable Being and Unity which is in sharp contrast with all multiplicity and change. The very name A-pollo signifies that he refuses multiplicity (ta polla), while he is also called Ieiuis, as being One (alluding to ia, the epic variant for mia, ‘one’). All transformations of the god are emphatically

³¹ See. Platonicæ Quaestiones 1001c: In itself, Soul was not begotten by god; ‘but once the Soul has partaken of Intelligence and reason and concord, it is not merely a work but also a part of god and has come to be not by his agency but both from him as source and out of his being’ (ἡ δὲ ψυχή, νοῦ μετασχούσα καὶ λογισμοῦ καὶ ἀρμονίας, οὐκ ἔργον ἐστὶ τοῦ θεοῦ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ μέρος, οὐδ’ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἀλλ’ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ γέγονεν.) In De an. procr. 1016c god provides τὸ νοερόν and τὸ τεταγμένον ‘from himself’ (where ἄφ’ αὐτοῦ is a necessary emendation from the MSS ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, there being nothing else in the text αὐτοῦ could refer to), while at 1017a he is ‘the father of similarity’ for all body, normally this being the role of Intelligence.

³² Cf. e.g. 47e where Necessity is being persuaded by νοῦς with 56c where the same thing is being done by θεός. This does not mean, of course, that Plato entirely identified the two. Rather, I would agree with Cherniss (The Sources of Evil according to Plato, in: Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society 98 [1954], p. 24) that the Demiurge (who in the Timaeus is called ὁ θεός) represents simply ‘the factor of rational causation in this universe’ on all levels of reality, which is why he sometimes appears to exercise the functions of Intelligence and at other times those of the World Soul.

denied; 'to such tales it is irreverent even to listen' (393e), not only because god must be free from all kinds of change but also because the function of divinity is never the destruction but always the preservation of the world which of itself tends toward dissolution.

And it seems to me right to address to the god the words 'You are,' which are most opposed to this account [i.e. the one about Apollo's changes], and testify against it, believing that never does any vagary or transformation take place near him, but that such acts and experiences are related to some other god, or rather to some daimon, whose office is concerned with Nature in dissolution and generation; and this is clear at once from the names which are, as it were, correspondingly antithetic. For the one is spoken of as Apollo (not many), the other as Pluto (abounding); the one Delian (clear), the other Aïdoneus (unseen); the one Phoebus (bright), the other Scotios (dark).³³

At first sight this might seem as a clear rebuttal of Plutarch's speech – for there is no doubt that the dark daimon Pluto depicted here is just another version of the Dionysian god described in 388c-389c.³⁴ Yet on close reading one can see that Ammonius does not, in fact, refuse Plutarch's 'dynamic' account as such but merely puts it in its right place. It is true that the highest god is exempt from all change and his function is never destructive but always sustaining and preservative. But this does not mean that the account of divine transformations would be entirely absurd. It is valid, but only in the realm of Physis over which this dark 'daimon' presides, being apparently subordinated to the true god who is ever identical, pure and One. In other words, it is just on the level of Nature that the opposition of Apollo and Dionysus exists. Once we ascend to the higher levels of reality, all we find is unity and harmony.

As has been recently shown by John Dillon,³⁵ such a view appears to be further confirmed by the theology of *De Iside et Osiride*, an essay that gives us the clearest expression of Plutarch's 'dualism'. Here, at first, we

³³ 393f-394a: *καὶ μοι δοκεῖ μάλιστα πρὸς τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ἀντιταπτόμενον τὸ ῥῆμα καὶ μαρτυρούμενον 'εἶ' φάναι πρὸς τὸν θεόν, ὡς οὐδέποτε γινομένης περὶ αὐτὸν ἐκστάσεως καὶ μεταβολῆς, ἀλλ' ἑτέρῳ τινὶ θεῷ, μάλλον δὲ δαίμονι τεταγμένῳ περὶ τὴν ἐν φθορᾷ καὶ γενέσει φύσιν τοῦτο ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν προσήκον [sic Reiske: προσήκεν MSS]: ὡς δηλὸν ἐστὶν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀνομάτων εὐθύς οἶον ἐναντίων ὄντων καὶ ἀντιφώνων. λέγεται γὰρ ὁ μὲν Ἀπόλλων ὁ δὲ Πλούτων, καὶ ὁ μὲν Δῆλιος ὁ δ' Ἀιδωνεύς, καὶ ὁ μὲν Φοῖβος ὁ δὲ Σκότιος.*

³⁴ That Dionysus is identified by Ammonius with Hades should not surprise us, the identity of the two having already been asserted by Heraclitus in the B 15 fragment that Plutarch himself quotes in *De Iside* 362a.

³⁵ Plutarch and God: Theodicy and Cosmogony in the Thought of Plutarch [forthcoming], a paper delivered to Symposium Hellenisticum VIII, Lille, August 1998. I

are told that ‘it is impossible for anything bad whatsoever to be engendered where god is the author of all, or anything good where god is the author of nothing.’³⁶ In itself this would suggest that evil must spring from some other Power which is independent from god. Yet, as the following texts shows clearly, the situation is more complex than that:

There has, therefore, come down from theologians and lawgivers to poets and philosophers this very ancient opinion which can be traced to no source, but which is widely and almost indelibly believed in, and is in circulation in many places among barbarians and Greeks alike, not only in story and tradition but also in rites and sacrifices – namely that the Universe is not of itself suspended aloft without sense or reason or guidance, nor is there one Reason which rules and guides it by rudders, as it were, or by controlling reins. On the contrary: since Nature brings, in this life of ours, many experiences in which both evil and good are commingled – or rather, to put it simply, since Nature brings nothing unmixed – we may assert that it is not one keeper of two great vases who deals out to us our failures and successes after the manner of a barman mixing drinks, but that our life is complex as a result of two opposed principles and two antagonistic forces, one of which guides us along a straight course to the right, while the other turns us aside and backward. And similarly, the cosmos – although not the whole of it, but just the terrestrial part below the moon – is irregular and variable and subject to all manner of changes. For if it is natural that nothing comes into being without a cause, and if the good cannot provide a cause for evil, then it follows that Nature must have in herself the source and origin of evil, just as she contains the source and origin of good.³⁷

owe my thanks to Prof. Dillon for giving me a copy of this excellent article to which I am much indebted for many of the points I am making in this section.

³⁶ 369a: ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἢ φλαῦρον ὀτιοῦν, ὅπου πάντων, ἢ χρηστόν, ὅπου [sic Meziriacus: ὁμοῦ MSS] μηδενὸς ὁ θεὸς αἴτιος, ἐγγενέσθαι.

³⁷ 369b-d: διὸ καὶ παμπάλαιος αὐτὴ κάτεισιν ἐκ θεολόγων καὶ νομοθετῶν εἰς τε ποιητὰς καὶ φιλοσόφους δόξα, τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀδέσποτον ἔχουσα, τὴν δὲ πίστιν ἰσχυρὰν καὶ δυσεξάλειπτον, οὐκ ἐν λόγοις μόνον οὐδ’ ἐν φήμαις, ἀλλ’ ἐν τε τελεταῖς ἐν τε θυσίαις καὶ βαρβάροις καὶ Ἑλλησι πολλαχοῦ περιφερομένη [sic Holverda: περιφερομένη MSS], ὡς οὗτ’ ἄνουν καὶ ἄλογον καὶ ἀκυβέρνητον αἰωρεῖται τῷ αὐτομάτῳ τὸ πᾶν, οὐθ’ εἰς ἐστὶν ὁ κρατῶν καὶ κατευθύνων ὡσπερ οἴαζιν ἢ τισι πειθηνίοις χαλινοῖς λόγος, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ καὶ μεμιγμένα κακοῖς καὶ ἀγαθοῖς, μᾶλλον δὲ μηδέν, ὡς ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν, ἄκρατον ἐνταῦθα τῆς φύσεως φεροῦσης, οὐ δυεῖν πίθων εἰς ταμίαις ὡσπερ νάματα τὰ πράγματα καπηλικῶς διανεμὸν ἀνακεράννυσιν ἡμῖν, ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ δυεῖν ἐναντίων ἀρχῶν καὶ δυεῖν ἀντιπάλων δυνάμεων, τῆς μὲν ἐπὶ τὰ δεξιὰ καὶ κατ’ εὐθείαν ὑψηλομένης, τῆς δ’ ἔμπαλιν ἀναστρεφούσης καὶ ἀνακλώσης, ὅ τε βίος μικτὸς, ὅ τε κόσμος, εἰ καὶ μὴ πάς, ἀλλ’ ὁ περίγειος οὗτος καὶ μετὰ σελήνην ἀνώμαλος καὶ ποικίλος γέγονε καὶ μεταβολὰς πάσας δεχόμενος. εἰ γὰρ οὐδὲν ἀναίτιως πέφυκε γίνεσθαι, αἰτίαν δὲ κακοῦ τὰγαθὸν οὐκ ἔν παρασχοι, δεῖ γένεσιν ἰδίαν καὶ ἀρχὴν ὡσπερ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ τὴν φύσιν ἔχειν.

In other words, although evil does spring from an independent principle of its own, this principle only exists in the sublunary world. Once again, as in *De E*, Plutarch introduces the notion of Nature that contains evil within herself.³⁸ The parallel is confirmed in the next paragraph where Plutarch gives the religious system of Zoroaster as one of the proofs of the ancient theological origin of this attitude. In Plutarch's view, Zoroaster called the better principle 'a god' (θεόν), while its adversary 'a daimon' (δαίμονα – 369d) – just as in the speech of Ammonius.³⁹ As Dillon points out,⁴⁰ it makes little difference whether these words have anything to do with historical Zoroastrianism. The crucial fact is that such a distinction appealed to Plutarch, being apparently in harmony with what he himself considered the correct interpretation. From this point of view, it is even more significant that at 370c Plutarch actually mentions a third factor in his Zoroastrian account, relating that after the victory of Areimanus 'the god who has contrived all these things shall have quiet and shall repose for a time' (τὸν δὲ ταῦτα μηχανησάμενον θεὸν ἡρεμεῖν καὶ ἀναπαύεσθαι χρόνον). Apparently, this refers to some higher deity transcending the fight (a higher form of Ahura Mazda, perhaps?). Again, we can ignore the historical reality of Zoroastrianism;⁴¹ all that is important is that such a thing was worth mentioning from Plutarch's point of view.

The problem with Plutarch is that he never really tries to fit all this into a coherent metaphysical scheme. While it seems clear, for instance, that the evil principle (identified by Plutarch with Typhon) only exists on the level of Nature, we are never quite sure about the ontological status of its good rival, which in the Isis myth corresponds to Osiris. Sometimes Osiris is being spoken of as existing on the same level as Typhon, yet at other times he appears to be clearly ontologically superior. Fortunately, this confusion can largely be cleared up if we take seriously the distinction between a 'god' and a 'daimon' and interpret it from the point of view

³⁸ Cf. already 369a: 'everything harmful and destructive that Nature contains is to be regarded as a part of Typhon' (πάν ὅσον ἢ φύσις βλαβερὸν καὶ φθαρτικὸν ἔχει, μόνιον τοῦ Τυφῶνος ἔστιν <εἰπεῖν>).

³⁹ The god-daimon distinction is also repeated in the Zoroastrian reference in *De an. procr.* 1026b.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* (see note 35).

⁴¹ J. Hani was not able to find any Iranian parallels to this sentence. Cf. Plutarque en face du dualisme iranien (in: *REG* 77, 1964), p. 509: 'Sur la phase ultime d l'eschatologie indiquée par Plutarque, à savoir le «repos de Dieu» qui «cesse d'agir», aucune explication sûre ne peut être fournie.'

of Plutarch's daimonology as he himself presents it earlier in *De Iside*.⁴² As Plutarch explains, the dreadful myths about Typhon, Osiris and Isis record 'the experiences of neither gods nor men, but of powerful daimons (δαίμωνων μεγάλων – 360d)' who have a mixed nature, and while greatly surpassing us in power, they also have a share in mortal affections. The crucial thing is that Isis and Osiris are both daimons and gods. At 361e this is explained by the fact that after having gone through all their

⁴² In his desperate attempt to absolve Plutarch from all daimonological 'superstition', F. E. Brenk argued in his *In Mist Apparelled* (Leiden 1977), pp. 102-4, that Plutarch does not really take seriously the daimonological account he describes at such length in *De Iside*, his true interpretation of the Isis myth being allegorical (so also Froidefond in the introduction to his Budé edition of *De Iside*, pp. 96 ff.). Yet as Jones observed already (*The Platonism of Plutarch*, p. 38), there is no reason to see any discrepancy between these two approaches to the myth. It is perfectly meaningful to say that while myths express the ontological structure of the whole of reality, at the same time they describe the archetypal psychic patterns (which is, I believe, what is ultimately meant by the 'daimons') by which the sublunary world is structured. Both of these descriptions are treated as parallel e.g. by Proclus, in *Remp.* I 87.29 ff. That even Plutarch himself sees them as two complementary explanations of which one cannot replace the other is clear from *De Iside* 363d where, passing from the daimonological account to the philosophical ones, Plutarch claims to be taking an entirely different starting-point (ἀπ' ἄλλης δ' ἀρχῆς . . . σκεψώμεθα). Brenk also claimed that the daimonological theories presented in *De defectu* are deliberately downgraded by being put into the mouth of Cleombrotus who 'is no intellectual genius and the rest of the company delight in manifesting his incompetence in handling philosophical and religious problems' (op. cit., p. 111). Now, it is true that Cleombrotus is far less respectable than Lamprias and Ammonius and that his views are certainly not accepted by Plutarch to the letter. Yet as regards the basic daimonological theory of Cleombrotus, one must agree with Jones that 'none of the other speakers in the dialogue refutes the ideas set forth in his speech' (op. cit., p. 38). All that Ammonius and Lamprias do is that they specify the psychic nature of the daimons (431a ff.) – something that Cleombrotus suggests himself at 415b (Brenk's attempts to drive a wedge between the concept of daimons as souls and as intermediaries between gods and men – cf. pp. 99, 113 – just show how much he misunderstands the daimons). Ammonius himself clearly accepts the daimonological explanation of oracles (cf. 435a ff., 436f-437a) and in *De E* 394c he even emphasizes that 'it is especially by confounding what belongs to the gods with what belongs to the daimons that some people got themselves into confusion' (μάλιστα δὲ τὰ θεῖα πρὸς τὰ δαιμόνια συγχέοντες εἰς ταραχὴν αὐτοὺς κατέστησαν), thus showing how crucial the distinction between the divine and the daimonic was for Plutarch even at his most earnest moments. Ultimately, Brenk's problem is simply that he himself imagines daimons as some kind of ghostly 'pernicious monsters' (p. 113) and consequently does all he can to acquit Plutarch of this superstitious projection which has nothing to do with Platonic daimonology.

daimonic struggles, they were transformed into gods due to their virtue, and now 'enjoy double honours, both those of gods and those of daimons' (ἅμα καὶ θεῶν καὶ δαιμόνων . . . μεμιγμένας τιμὰς ἔχουσι). Similarly, in *De defectu* 421e we are told not to wonder if the daimons are called by the names of gods: 'for each daimon likes to be called after that god with whom he is co-ordinated and in whose power and honour he participates' (ὧ γὰρ ἕκαστος θεῷ συντέτακται καὶ οὗ τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ τιμῆς μετείληχεν, ἀπὸ τούτου φιλεῖ καλεῖσθαι).

Clearly, this is an earlier form of the Neoplatonic view according to which daimons are simply what happens to divine powers once they emanate down to this world of ours. The idea is that in themselves the gods are simple, unchangeable and unified, but the sublunary region is unable to participate in them in this pure form of theirs, and in our world, therefore, divine power can only be present in a more complex manner, undergoing changes and leading to conflicts.⁴³ Thus while the god Osiris is pure and invariable in himself, once he gives a share of himself to our level of reality, becoming actively present in it as a daimonic power, he starts to behave as mutable and is involved in conflicts. Significantly, the daimon Typhon differs from Osiris in that he does not have a corresponding partner on the divine level. He embodies the daimonic as such. Indeed, we might say that he is a kind of sublunary 'shadow' of Osiris. To put it philosophically, whenever the divine Logos becomes creatively involved in our world, he is automatically 'split', so to speak, and becomes accompanied by another dark principle, by destructive formlessness which is the necessary accompaniment of form on the sublunary level.

Were Plutarch a Neoplatonist, he could have said with Proclus that this destructive force is a sublunary *παρπρόστασις*, an unavoidable by-product of divine activity on lower levels of reality. Were he a follower of Eudorus, he could have described the good and evil principles as the Monad-Dyad opposition subordinated to the higher unity of the One.⁴⁴ Plutarch does indeed connect the irrational Soul with the Dyad in *De animae procreatione* 1025d (cf. 1024d), but he never really specifies the metaphysical relation between the Monad and the Dyad, and he does not raise

⁴³ Cf. Proclus, in *Remp.* I 89.10 ff.

⁴⁴ See Simplicius, *In Phys.* 181.10 ff. (ed. Diels). Cf. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, pp. 126-8. There are indeed some similarities between Plutarch and Eudorus, but as Brenk comments (*The Religious Spirit of Plutarch*, in: *ANRW* II 36.1, p. 270), in *De E* 'Ammonius seems to be describing God-One in terms of both Eudorus' supreme and second One.'

the question whether the latter should be subordinated to the former, or even both to some yet higher unity above them.⁴⁵ If he had dealt with these problems in greater detail, no doubt his position would have become more acceptable to many of his future readers (both ancient and modern). But the truth seems to be that although Plutarch is well aware of these metaphysical speculations, they are of marginal importance for him. He is ready to use them as illustrations, but they exercised no formative influence on him and he does not look at things from their perspective. If he did, he would hardly interpret the *Timaeus* in the way he does. Besides, the idea that what exists on the highest level as unity becomes duality and conflict as it proceeds downwards would inevitably lead to a negative concept of evil such as we find in Neoplatonism.

But if Plutarch is not really interested in metaphysics, what is the real ethos of his philosophical works? A glance at the whole of Plutarch's writings and at what we know about his own life gives us a clear answer: unlike any other Platonist after Plato, Plutarch is primarily a man of this world. For him, philosophy is meant not to indulge in abstract speculations but to help us deal with everyday problems. To do this, naturally, the study of Platonic metaphysics is indispensable, since to live correctly, one needs some transcendent criteria for making one's decisions. But for Plutarch, metaphysics is just the horizon of everyday ethics (and religion – for that is the same thing) and it is of little interest in itself.

This is how we should understand Plutarch's 'dualism'. To him, the existence of two opposing principles struggling with each other is an indisputable fact confirmed both by religious traditions and by our everyday experience of the fight between good and evil in our world. The task of philosophy is to provide a clear explanation for this situation and show us how to deal with it. *De animae procreatione* 1015a-f demonstrates plainly that it was precisely the need to account for the power of evil that made Plutarch formulate his irrational Soul theory. The only other alternative he was aware of was to attribute evil to either god or matter. The

⁴⁵ In *De defectu* 428f-429d Plutarch argues that the Monad and the Dyad are 'the ultimate principles' (τῶν ἀνωτάτω ἀρχῶν – 428f), because every number has to be composed of both form (εἶδος) and infinitude (ἀπειρία). Yet this does not tell us anything about the relation of the Monad and Dyad in themselves. That Plutarch found it possible to see the Dyad as subordinate to the Monad is clear from *Aetia Romana et Graeca* 270a: 'Generally, time is a kind of number, and the original principle of number is divinity, for it is Unity. Duality, however, which comes after Unity, is opposed to the original principle.' (καὶ ὅλως ἀριθμὸς τις ὁ χρόνος, ἀριθμοῦ δὲ θεῖον ἡ ἀρχή· μονὰς γὰρ ἐστίν· ἡ δὲ μετ' αὐτὴν δυὰς ἀντίπαλος τῆ ἀρχῆς.)

first solution was absurd and the second no less so. Do we not experience evil as something immensely powerful and active? How could matter, being a pure passive potency, ever produce as much force and energy as evil activities are endowed with?⁴⁶

Plutarch needed a theory which would make the power of evil understandable at first sight, and his postulation of an irrational Soul and a destructive Principle within Nature appeared to fulfil this task very effectively, while being also in agreement with religious traditions. Unfortunately for many of his readers, Plutarch failed to support it by a coherent metaphysical explanation which would clarify the relation of the dark Principle to the highest levels of reality. Apparently, it seemed to him that an all too abstract investigation into the origins of evil would merely complicate the problem while making it no easier to cope with it in our lives – which for him was the main task of philosophy. The crucial question is thus not metaphysical but ethical. And it is here that Plutarch behaves as a fundamental non-dualist, for he repeatedly emphasizes that our task is not to suppress the troublesome Soul-principle on behalf of Intelligence but rather to achieve a union of the two in which the power of Soul would be cultivated and brought into intelligent order.

All this becomes apparent if we compare the scheme of *De animae procreatione* with *De virtute morali*, which is one of Plutarch's purely moral treatises. Here Plutarch takes up the cosmological theme, explaining that according to Plato the Soul of the Universe is not simple but compounded of the potentialities of sameness and otherness (ἐκ τῆς ταύτου καὶ τῆς τοῦ ἑτέρου μεμιγμένον δυνάμεως):

In one part it is ever arranged in uniformity and revolves in but one and the same order, which maintains control, yet in another part it is split into movements and circles which go in contrariety to each other and wander about, thus implanting the beginning of differentiation and change and dissimilarity in all that comes into being and passes away on earth; and similarly, the soul of man, since it is a portion or a copy of the Soul of the Universe and is joined together on principles and in proportions corresponding to those which govern the Universe, is not simple nor unified in its affections, but has as one part the intelligent and rational, whose natural duty it is to govern and rule the individual, and as another

⁴⁶ The correct Platonic answer is that the power of evil comes from the Good, being either its by-product (ontological evil) or its perversion (moral evil). Plutarch, however, found this view too abstract and difficult to relate to everyday moral dilemmas. This is where his 'applied' ethical approach to philosophy differs from true metaphysics (such as practised e.g. by the Neoplatonists).

part the passionate, irrational and disorderly, which wanders erratically and has need of a director.⁴⁷

This parallel between the Soul of the Universe and the soul of man forms the basis of Plutarch's ethical teaching. Just as the Demiurge did not annihilate the Soul but rather joined it with Intelligence and made it orderly and proportionate, even so it is the task of man to cultivate his emotions and bring them into harmony with reason:

(Man) has, therefore, some portion of the irrational also and has innate within him the source of emotions, not as an adventitious accessory, but as a necessary part of his being, which should never be done away with entirely, but which is in need of careful tending and education. Thus the work of reason is not Thracian, not like that of Lycurgus – to cut down and destroy the helpful elements of emotion together with the harmful – but to do as the god who watches over crops⁴⁸ and the god who guards the vine⁴⁹ do: to lop off the wild growth and to clip away all that exceeds the appropriate measure, and then to cultivate and dispose for use the serviceable remainder. For neither do those who fear drunkenness pour out their wine upon the ground, nor do those who fear passion eradicate the disturbing element, but both temper what they fear.⁵⁰ It is, in fact, the rebellious kicking and plunging of oxen and horses that men do away with, not their movements and activities; even so reason makes use of the emotions when they have been subdued and are tame, and does not excise nor cut out like sinews⁵¹ that part of the soul which should be its servant.⁵²

⁴⁷ 441f-442a: πῆ μὲν αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτὰ κοσμεῖται καὶ περιπολεῖ μιᾶς τάξεϊ κράτος ἐχούση χρώμενον, πῆ δ' εἷς τε κινήσεις καὶ κύκλους σχιζόμενον ὑπεναντίους καὶ πλανητοὺς ἀρχὴν διαφορᾶς καὶ μεταβολῆς καὶ ἀνομοιότητος ἐνδίδωσι ταῖς περὶ γῆν φθοραῖς καὶ γενέσεσιν, ἢ τ' ἀνθρώπου ψυχῆ μέρος ἢ [τι] μίμημα τῆς τοῦ παντὸς οὐσα καὶ συνηρμοσμένη κατὰ λόγους καὶ ἀριθμοὺς εὐκοκίας ἐκείνοις οὐχ ἀπλῆ τις ἐστὶν οὐδ' ὁμοιοπαθής, ἀλλ' ἕτερον μὲν ἔχει τὸ νοερὸν καὶ λογιστικόν, ᾧ κρατεῖν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατὰ φύσιν καὶ ἄρχειν προσήκον ἐστίν, ἕτερον δὲ τὸ παθητικὸν καὶ ἄλογον καὶ πολυπλανές καὶ ἄτακτον ἐξεταστοῦ [sic van Herwerden: ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ MSS] δεόμενον.

⁴⁸ I.e. Poseidon, who is also called φυτάμιος by Plutarch at 158e, 675f and 730d.

⁴⁹ I.e. Dionysus who is also called ἡμερίδης at 994a.

⁵⁰ I.e. passion is tempered by reason just as wine is tempered by water; for the image cf. Plato's Laws 773d.

⁵¹ For a similar criticism of 'cutting out the sinews' of θυμός cf. Plato's Republic 411b.

⁵² 451c-d: μέτεστιν οὖν αὐτῷ καὶ τοῦ ἀλόγου, καὶ σύμφυτον ἔχει τὴν τοῦ πάθους ἀρχὴν, οὐκ ἐπεισόδιον ἀλλ' ἀναγκαίαν οὖσαν, οὐδ' ἀναιρετέαν παντάσῃσιν ἀλλὰ θεραπείας καὶ παιδαγωγίας δεομένην. ὅθεν οὐ Θράκιον οὐδὲ Λυκούργειον τοῦ λόγου τὸ ἔργον ἐστί, συνεκκόπτειν καὶ συνδιαφθεῖρειν τὰ ὠφέλιμα τοῖς βλαβεροῖς τοῦ πάθους, ἀλλ' ἦπερ ὁ φυτάμιος θεὸς καὶ ἡμερίδης, τὸ ἄγριον κολοῦσαι καὶ ἀφελεῖν τὴν ἀμετρίαν, εἴτα

The Dionysian imagery of this passage is telling. The irrational soul behaves just like Dionysus in his moments of uncontrolled frenzy. Yet this does not mean that it is essentially evil and harmful. Like Dionysus in his more cultivated forms (e.g. as the guardian of vine growth in our passage), it can be useful and beneficent.⁵³ Apollo is not mentioned, but the antithesis of reason vs emotions makes it clear that once again, the Apollo – Dionysus pattern hovers at the back of Plutarch's mind, this time as an ethical paradigm. We are not supposed to behave like Lycurgus, suppressing violent emotions and pretending to be rational only. Such an approach would be doubly unfortunate: not only would it force the irrational element within us to strike back all the more fiercely (in the manner of Dionysus in the *Bacchae* of Euripides), but it would also deprive our reason of all energy. For our reason, just like the cosmic Intelligence, has no motion of itself, being in the position of the Phaedran charioteer who has to struggle with his horses (= the irrational soul) all the time but at the same time he knows that, nice chap as he is, he could not move an inch without their help. For 'if it were actually possible to do away with the passions entirely, in many respects reason would be too inactive and dull, like a pilot when the wind dies down.'⁵⁴

Instead, therefore, we should follow god who created the world by combining harmoniously the irrational and the rational element, Soul and Intelligence. For Plutarch, the Delphic cult was no doubt a ritual image and re-enactment of this ancient powerful fusion. The meaning of these rituals was to teach their participants to imitate god and to harmonize the Apollonian and Dionysian element within them just as skilfully as he did in the case of the World Soul. The cosmos and its ontological background

τιθασεύειν καὶ παρίστασθαι τὸ χρήσιμον. οὔτε γὰρ οἶνον οἱ φοβούμενοι τὸ μεθύειν ἐκχέουσιν οὔτε πάθος οἱ δεδιότες τὸ ταρακτικὸν ἀναιροῦσιν ἀλλὰ κεραννύουσι. καὶ γὰρ βῶθον καὶ ἵππων τὰ πηδήματα καὶ τοὺς ἀφηνιασμοὺς οὐ τὰς κινήσεις οὐδὲ τὰς ἐνεργείας ἀφαιροῦσι, καὶ τοῖς πάθεσι δεδαμασμένοις χρήται καὶ χειροῦθεσιν ὁ λογισμὸς, οὐκ ἐκνευρίσας οὐδ' ἐκτεμὼν παντάπασιν τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ ὑπηρετικόν.

⁵³ It should be said that for Plutarch, Dionysus always seems to be the cultivated Dionysus as joined with and ordered by Apollo – which is natural, for it was this Dionysus that Plutarch served as a priest. In philosophical terms, this Dionysus corresponds to the harmonized emotional component of the created soul. Whenever Plutarch wants to refer to the soul element in its pure, irrational and disruptive form, he uses such mythical figures as Typhon or Python (cf. *De Facie* 945b-c).

⁵⁴ *De virtute morali* 452b: τῶν δὲ παθῶν παντάπασιν ἀναρεθέντων, εἰ καὶ δυνατόν ἐστιν, ἐν πολλοῖς ἀργότερος ὁ λόγος καὶ ἀμβλύτερος, ὥσπερ κυβερνήτης πνεύματος ἐπιλείποντος.

is thus interesting for Plutarch mainly as an ethical paradeigma we should look up to and imitate. This is why in his cosmological expositions Plutarch never systematically describes the origins of his two cosmic Principles, being more interested in the ethical τέλος rather than the ontological ἀρχή of their strife.⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ One might argue, of course, that a clear denial of dualism at the beginning of things would make it much easier to deny it at the end as well; for if Plutarch emphasized the ultimate dependence of both his principles on God, it would become much more understandable why the ethical ideal is to unite these two forces in our lives rather than to suppress the one on behalf of the other. But Plutarch apparently did not think in this Neoplatonic way.

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