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## Is dualism a Greek word? Plutarch's dualism as a cultural and historical phenomenon<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Throughout his oeuvre, Plutarch offers different presentations of dualism (the notion that reality ultimately consists of two non-reducible principles). This contribution looks at the function of space (Greek vs. non-Greek) and time (pre-Platonic past vs. Plutarch's Platonic stance) in some of these accounts. The presentation of dualism through a comparison with music in the works *On Tranquillity of Mind* and *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus* serves as a yardstick. Next, Plutarch's use of the Greek (esp. Euripides, Heraclitus and Plato) and non-Greek (viz. Egyptian and Zoroastrian) past in the works *On Tranquillity of Mind*, *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus* and *On Isis and Osiris* is considered. It is argued that Plutarch reverts to a more rudimentary dualism in order to create room for non-Greek material without shaking the foundations of his Platonism, in this way combining cultural introversion (i.e. hellenocentrism) with extroversion (i.e. openness to other cultures).

In his seminal study of Plutarch's dualism (the notion that reality ultimately consists of two non-reducible principles<sup>2</sup>), Ugo Bianchi quotes and affirms the conclusion of Julien Ries that, in Plutarch's time, 'la pensée grecque, fatiguée, s'ouvrait largement aux religions de salut venues d'Égypte et du Proche-Orient'.<sup>3</sup> Given this perspective, it is not surprising that Bianchi's discussion starts from and focusses on the influence of non-Greek religion found in Plutarch's treatise *On Isis and Osiris*. Although, eventually, Bianchi does not fail to point out that Plutarch platonises the Egyptian and Near Eastern material, this focus risks underplaying the importance of Plutarch's identity as a Greek and a Platonist in his reception of the history of dualism, which will be the focus of this chapter.

In the first section, I will bear with the rather short-sighted sympotic advice of Florus and 'leave the Egyptians'—and the Near Eastern Zoroastrians for that matter—'out of it',<sup>4</sup> while discussing the different presentations of dualism in Plutarch's so-called 'practical ethics' (especially in the work *On Tranquillity of Mind*) and in his interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* (in the work *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus*). This exploration of different brands of dualism will serve as a yardstick for

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1 I would like to thank Daniel S. Richter and Michiel Meeusen for their Delphic comments and Liesbeth Schulpé for correcting my English.

2 This is, of course, an imperfect working definition of a philosophical concept which is notoriously hard to define. See, e.g., Alt (1993) 10–11.

3 Bianchi (1987) 350.

4 QC 5.10, 684F (transl. Hoffleit): ἔαν ἐκέλευε τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους. On this *quaestio* and the involvement of the Egyptians, see Meeusen's contribution in this volume.

the second part, in which I will address the role played by the reception of the history of early Greek philosophy and non-Greek religion in Plutarch's Platonism by including *On Isis and Osiris* in the discussion. This approach will yield a clearer view of how considerations of space (Greek vs. non-Greek) and time (pre-Platonic past vs. Plutarch's Platonic stance) interact to form the multi-layered, culturally and historically informed notion that is Plutarch's dualism.

## Dualism(s) in Plutarch's practical ethics and in *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus*

In the Plutarchan texts which can be labelled as 'practical ethics', writings in which Plutarch is less concerned with the technical subtleties of Platonic ontology<sup>5</sup>, we encounter several passages which assume a plain dualistic worldview. From the work *How to tell a Flatterer from a Friend* (61D–E) we learn that we should always keep in mind that our soul has two opposed parts—the one rational, the other irrational—and that friends side with the better part, whereas flatterers try to appeal to the bad part. In *Concerning Talkativeness* (506F–507A) Plutarch suddenly introduces the monad and the dyad, not, as one would expect when such terms are mentioned, in a technical discussion of their ontological status,<sup>6</sup> but in an explanation of how gossip works: while a secret stays with its possessor in a monadic fashion, a dyadic rumour tends to be dissipated incessantly and unstoppably.

A passage from *On Tranquillity of Mind* is more complicated and deserves a closer look. Plutarch's advice to Paccius on how to achieve εὐθυμία includes a warning not to get bogged down in worries about past misfortunes. This is illustrated by a comparison: in our souls, we should combine the inevitable bad with the good like the musician combining low notes and high notes or the grammarian combining vowels and consonants.

[L]ike colours in a painting, so in the soul it is right that we should place in the foreground bright and cheerful experiences and conceal and suppress the gloomy; for to wipe them out and be rid of them altogether is impossible. 'For the harmony of the universe, like that of a lyre or a bow, is by alternatives,' [Heraclitus fr. B51 DK] and in mortal affairs there is nothing pure and unmixed (καθαρὸν οὐδὲν οὐδ' ἀμιγές). But as in music there are low notes and high notes (βαρεῖς φθόγγοι καὶ ὀξεῖς), and in grammar there are vowels and consonants (φωνήεντα καὶ ἄφωνα γράμματα), yet a musician or a grammarian is not the man who dislikes and avoids the one or the other, but rather the man who knows how to use all and to blend (μυγνύναι) them properly, so also in human affairs, which contain the principles of opposition to each other (since, as Euripides [*Aeolus*, fr. 21 *TrGF*] has it, 'The good and bad cannot be kept apart, / But there's some blending, so that all is well'), we should not be disheartened or despondent

<sup>5</sup> Van Hoof (2010) 37–40.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the significantly different approach in the more technical works *Quaest. Plat.* 1002A and *De an. procr.* 1012E; 1025C–D.

in adversity, but like musicians who achieve harmony by consistently deadening bad music with better and encompassing the bad with the good (ὥσπερ ἁρμονικοὺς ἀμβλύνοντας ἀεὶ τοῖς κρείττοσι τὰ φαῦλα καὶ τὰ χείρονα τοῖς χρηστοῖς ἐμπεριλαμβάνοντας<sup>7</sup>), we should make the blending (μῖγμα) of our life harmonious (ἐμμελές) and conformable to our own nature. For it is not true, as Menander [fr. 500 PCG VI.2] says, that 'By every man at birth a Spirit stands / A guide of virtue for life's mysteries'; but rather, as Empedocles [fr. B122 DK] affirms, two Fates, as it were, or Spirits, receive in their care each one of us at birth and consecrate us ... (De tranq. an. 473F–474B, transl. Helmbold<sup>8</sup>)

This comparison might perplex the reader in two ways: (1) Plutarch introduces the musician alongside the grammarian, but in the second part of the comparison the grammarian is left out. The musician is indeed the more fitting analogy when one wants to describe the result as a harmony (ἁρμονικούς, ἐμμελές); (2) The exact nature of the resulting mixture (οὐδ' ἀμιγές, μῖγμα, μινύναι) remains unclear. Is it in the objects and events themselves, as is suggested by the quotations from Heraclitus, Euripides and Empedocles and Plutarch's comments on them? Or is it only in the psychological perception of objects and events, as the comparison itself and the general message of the essay suggest?<sup>9</sup> Plutarch does not really seem to be concerned with the distinction in this case. What matters is that we are presented with a clear-cut opposition between good and bad and with some kind of immediate mixture of these opposed elements in human life.

Turning from practical ethics to more technical philosophy, a passage from *On the Generation of the Soul* seems to provide a parallel with the *On Tranquillity of Mind* passage.<sup>10</sup> Plutarch is again talking about matters of the human life in a dualistic fashion. The same fragment from Heraclitus is quoted and Empedocles is mentioned again. Once again, it is the comparison which throws us off balance:

As some sound (φωνή τις) is not speech and not significant but speech (λόγος) is an utterance in sound (ἐν φωνῇ) that signifies thought (διανοίας), and as concord is what consists of sounds and intervals (ἐκ φθόγγων καὶ διαστημάτων) and a sound is one and the same thing, an interval the diversity and difference of sounds, and the mixture of these results in song and melody (ὥδῃ ... καὶ μέλος), so the affective part (παθητικόν) of the soul was indeterminate and unstable and then was bounded when there came to be limit and form (πέρατος ἐγγενομένου καὶ εἵδους) in

7 This is the reading in the Loeb. Pohlenz' Teubner edition follows a group of manuscripts reading ὥσπερ ἁρμονικοὺς ἀμβλύνοντας τοῖς κρείττοσι τὰ χείρονα καὶ τὰ φαῦλα τοῖς χρηστοῖς ἐμπεριλαμβάνοντας. Since the different *ordo verborum* does not yield a different meaning, this should not concern us here, but see the comments by Martinelli Tempesta reported by Volpe Cacciatore (2007) 100, n. 16.

8 All translations are taken from the Loeb, except for *De Is. et Os.*, for which Griffiths (1970) is used.

9 Cf., e.g., *De tranq. an.* 469A: we should, 'mingling (μινύντας) good with bad, cause the better to outshine the worse'; 473B: 'But that every man has within himself the storerooms of tranquillity and discontent, and that the jars containing blessings and evils are not stored 'on the threshold of Zeus', but are in the soul, is made plain by the differences in men's passions'.

10 Cf. Broecker (1954) 149–151, who also mentions the parallel with *De Is. et Os.* 369B–D, which will be discussed below.

the divisible and omnifarious character of the motion. And, once having comprehended sameness (τὸ ταῦτόν) and difference (τὸ θάτερον) with the similarities and dissimilarities of numbers that produced consensus out of dissension, it is for the sum of things rational life and concord and reason guiding necessity that has been tempered with persuasion and which by most people is called destiny, by Empedocles [fr. A45 DK] love together with strife, by Heraclitus [fr. B51 DK] concord of the universe retroverse like that of lyre and bow, by Parmenides light and darkness, by Anaxagoras intelligence and infinitude, and by Zoroaster god and spirit, the former called by him Oromasdes and the latter Areimanius. Euripides [*Troiaides* 886] has erred in using the disjunctive instead of the copulative conjunction in the prayer, 'Zeus, whether natural necessity / Or the intelligence of mortal men', for the power that pervades all things is both necessity and intelligence. Now, the Egyptians in a mythical account say enigmatically (Αἰγύπτιοι μὲν οὖν μυθολογούντες αἰνίττονται) that, when Horus was convicted, the breath and blood were assigned to his father and the flesh and fat to his mother. Of the soul, however (τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς) nothing remains pure or unmixed or separate from the rest. (*De an. procr.* 1026A–C, transl. Cherniss)

At first sight Plutarch seems to be doing exactly the same thing as in *On Tranquillity of Mind*: explaining dualism by comparing it to the production of harmonic music from opposed elements. However, in this case, the *comparans* is not simply music. The element of language, used in *On Tranquillity of Mind* only to be dismissed, is re-introduced here. Plutarch is talking about the production of a *song*, i.e. of music *with* words. This complicates the previous, straightforwardly dualistic scheme. Suddenly, there are four elements instead of two; their combination is presented in two stages. First, φωνή receives διάνοια and thus becomes λόγος. At this point, there is meaningful speech, but not yet a song: harmony is still lacking. Therefore, in a second move, λόγος (the resulting mixture from the first stage) is mixed with monotone noise (φθόγγος) and interval (διάστημα). The result is a song. This more complex comparison reflects Plutarch's interpretation of the generation of the soul in Plato's *Timaeus*, according to which, as he clarifies, the affective part (παθητικόν, which is called divisible being elsewhere), receives limit and form (πέρας and εἶδος, the features of indivisible being), before being inserted in the mix with sameness (τὸ ταῦτόν) and difference (τὸ θάτερον).<sup>11</sup> This is not simply a more awkwardly worded presentation of the dualism found in *On Tranquillity of Mind* but an ontologically different view. In this case, the mixture of the extremes is not immediate. Although they share an affinity with them, the middle terms inserted between the extremes (the lyrics of the song) are not *reducible* to these extreme terms (monotone noise and interval): they have their own nature and specific functions, as is the case for the four entities involved in the composition of the soul, which the comparison intends to clarify.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, it would be too simple to identify the extremes from *On the Generation of the Soul* with good and bad, as was the case in the comparison

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the analysis of this passage by Opsomer (1994) 40–41.

<sup>12</sup> Plutarch criticises Xenocrates precisely for not distinguishing being (the first mixture which is put in the middle) from sameness and difference (*De an. procr.* 1013D). He makes it clear that this first mixture is needed as 'some third principle', since mutual participation of sameness and difference alone cannot have a 'fruitful' (γόνιμον) result (1025F).

from *On Tranquillity of Mind*. Although difference is associated with evil, it should be pointed out that it is not evil and that it has its own merits. Without difference, there would be no motion, perception of sensible reality, or practical activity—in fact, no γένεσις at all (e.g., 1025E–F).<sup>13</sup>

The detail of the presentation of dualism in musical terms has revealed crucial differences between the dualism of *On Tranquillity of Mind* and that of *On the Generation of the Soul*. In the former work, as in the other works of practical ethics mentioned earlier, the dualism is plain: two opposed entities enter into combination. In the latter work, on the other hand, we are confronted with a mitigated dualism, with non-reducible middle terms complementing the extreme entities. Moreover, the dualism of *On the Generation of the Soul* dovetails with the rest of the treatise and with other passages devoted to Platonic exegesis, whereas in *On Tranquillity of Mind* we indicated some degree of carelessness as to the exact nature of the mixture. Then, which dualism is really Plutarch's dualism? Perhaps this is not the right question. It is undeniable that Plutarch found a basic truth in the dualistic scheme. He considered this scheme to be relevant to questions pertaining to ontology and epistemology (as in *On the Generation of the Soul*), but also to moral questions (as in *On Tranquillity of Mind* and in the other works of practical ethics). At the same time it is clear that Plutarch allows himself to do different things starting from this basic scheme: while it is presented in its most rudimentary form in *On Tranquillity of Mind* by reference to Heraclitus and Empedocles, it is developed more subtly in *On the Generation of the Soul*, where the doctrines of the past play a role, but the focus is much rather on Plato's fine tuning (or at least on Plutarch's interpretation of it). Neither version is to be preferred overall: a detailed exegesis of a sentence in Plato and a friend needing moral advice are two different things—and luckily so. The reader is reminded of this by the fact that, at the beginning of *On Tranquillity of Mind*, Plutarch, although he mentions that Paccius requested this from him, does not send him elucidations on certain subjects in the *Timaeus*: *On Tranquillity of Mind* is not *On the Generation of the Soul*.<sup>14</sup>

## Contextualising dualism in space and time

After this sketch of Plutarch's dualism, which has shown that perhaps we should rather speak of Plutarch's *dualisms* (plural) or of a dualistic *spectrum*,<sup>15</sup> we can finally discuss where negotiations with space (Greek vs. non-Greek) and time (pre-Platonic history vs. Plutarch's post-Platonic stance) fit in this general picture. The passages from *On Tranquillity of Mind* and *On the Generation of the Soul* share some informa-

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Opsomer (2007) 383.

<sup>14</sup> See Van Hoof (2010) 113–115 for a more detailed analysis of this issue.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Almagor (2013a), although I think I am more prepared than him to see a coherent *substratum* underneath Plutarch's different dualistic endeavours.

tion on this matter, namely, Heraclitus' fr. B51 and the testimony of Empedocles. Moreover, Euripides occurs in both passages, but—and this is not entirely unexpected for a dramatic poet<sup>16</sup>—he turns out to be a philosophical flip-flop: in *On Tranquility of Mind* he endorses dualism (in this case, Menander serves as the ignorant playwright who only recognises one principle), whereas in *On the Generation of the Soul* he is on record as speaking out against it. In the latter treatise, Plutarch offers us more authorities: along with the other pre-Platonic philosophers Parmenides and Anaxagoras, the Persian tradition is represented by Zoroaster and the Egyptians are mentioned. Plutarch's way of presenting the latter is remarkable.

First of all, Plutarch stresses the non-philosophical character of the Egyptian tradition by saying that they present us with a mythical account (μυθολογοῦντες).<sup>17</sup> After this reservation, which contrasts with the mention of Zoroaster, who is apparently included among the philosophers, a dualistic doctrine involving the story of the dismemberment of Horus is mentioned.<sup>18</sup> As it turns out—and as is suggested by the μέν-δέ structure—the Egyptian dualism is not adduced in support of Plutarch's Platonic exegesis. On the contrary: the essence of Plutarch's dualism—and the conclusion of his historical overview of dualism—is that all elements get thoroughly mixed and very little dualism remains after the intervention of the demiurge, whereas the Egyptians are presented as reversing the cosmic order by first assuming unity, which later gets disrupted. Compared to the Platonic harmony, in which—so Plutarch writes just after mentioning the Egyptians—'god, making the mixture, sank and concealed the differences and the diversities' (1026C), Egyptian dualism remains too extreme for Plutarch's taste since it does not allow for any mixture.

The conclusion drawn from this particular episode of Egyptian mythology is confirmed when we look for the same story in Plutarch's main account on Egyptian culture, *On Isis and Osiris*. As it turns out, the story of the dismemberment of Horus is explicitly excluded from 'the main points' of the myth; Plutarch omits it by calling it one of the 'most outrageous' of the tales (358E). However, we should not reject the Egyptian religion *tout court* as an important predecessor in the dualistic doctrine just yet. Further on (369A–371A), Plutarch gives a doxographical overview of dualistic doctrines very similar to the one in *On the Generation of the Soul*. Although it has been convincingly argued that both overviews point to the same source, it would be misguided to assume that Plutarch thoughtlessly copied this list on different occasions.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, we should consider how he adapted the doxographical information for his own purposes.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Van der Stockt (1992) 164, on the connection of tragedy with falsehood in Plutarch.

<sup>17</sup> Although myth can have philosophical potential, Plutarch tends to distinguish it clearly from philosophy (and the philosophical explanation of myth). Cf. Hardie (1992) 4743–4749.

<sup>18</sup> On Plutarch's use of this myth, see Hani (1976) 102–104.

<sup>19</sup> See the references to Mansfeld and Donini in Opsomer (2007) 385, for a doxographical analysis of this passage.



Introducing dualistic doxography in the context of his interpretation of the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris, Plutarch starts off with a pair of quotations found also in the *On Tranquillity of Mind* passage (Heraclitus fr. B15 DK and Euripides, *Aeolus*, fr. 21 TrGF). Interestingly, by being linked to Euripides' verses in both passages, the function of the Heraclitean fragment changes compared to *On the Generation of the Soul*. In the latter treatise it was used to count Heraclitus among those who discerned an opposition in the cosmos, whereas in *On Isis and Osiris* and *On Tranquillity of Mind*, the focus is on the harmony of these opposites. Both in *On Isis and Osiris* and in *On the Generation of the Soul* this focus is balanced out later on by reference to other Heraclitean fragments (fr. B53 DK and fr. B54 respectively). This corresponds to the general development of the passages: in *On the Generation of the Soul*, there is a shift from opposition to harmony, whereas the shift in *On Isis and Osiris*, just like in *On Tranquillity of Mind*, is the other way around.

After the Heraclitus-Euripides sequence, Zoroaster's doctrine is not just summarised in a few words, as it was in *On the Generation of the Soul*: it is treated at relatively great length (369E–370C). Notwithstanding the amount of space awarded to this doctrine and the ranking of Zoroaster among 'the majority and the wisest' (369D), that is, those who rightly maintained a dualistic world view, John Dillon's interpretation that Plutarch 'bestows high praise on the Zoroastrian theology' in this passage might not tell the whole story.<sup>20</sup> The mention of, for instance, the Zoroastrian practice of apotropaic offerings to the negative divine force and their superstitions about plants and animals is not followed by a reference to a philosophical interpretation of these habits, as is the case with the Egyptian material.<sup>21</sup> While Egyptian rituals and beliefs—somewhat paradoxically—contain nothing 'fabulous' (μυθῶδες, 353E), the Zoroastrian material is presented as containing 'many fabulous stories' (πολλὰ μυθῶδη, 369E).<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it is likely that the excursus on Zoroastrianism serves as a reminder of what had been said in the first chapters of *On Isis and Osiris*: that rituals and myths are in need of such philosophical explanation (355B–D), an effort at the very heart of *On Isis and Osiris* which reaches its climax shortly after this reminder. Consequently, the presentation of Zoroastrianism here contrasts to some extent with the mention of it in *On the Generation of the Soul*, where Zoroaster was ranked among philosophers without further ado: in *On Isis and Osiris*, Zoroastrianism plays the rather negative role the Egyptians played in the doxography in *On the Generation of the Soul*.

After the Zoroastrian excursus, and after briefly mentioning the Chaldeans and the beliefs of the Greeks concerning the Olympians (370C), Plutarch turns to a group which he labels 'philosophers' (thus, again as opposed to what he suggested in *On the Generation of the Soul*, implying Zoroaster's separation from the group)

<sup>20</sup> Dillon (1996) 203.

<sup>21</sup> On the similarities of Egyptian and Zoroastrian myths and rituals in *De Is. et Os.*, see Brout (2004) 73–79 (with further references on p. 74, n. 10).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. 376E, but see 365D for a more neutral use of the term. See also, e.g., *De Pyth. or.* 406E.



(370D–371A). The group consists of Heraclitus (fr. B53 DK), Empedocles (parts of fr. B122, which we know only from the *On Tranquillity of Mind* passage otherwise), Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Aristotle and, ultimately, Plato. After the mention of the principles of sameness and difference, which, as we saw in *On the Generation of the Soul*, are familiar candidates for a dualistic opposition in Plato, Plutarch explains his interpretation of Plato's *Laws* (10, 896d–897d), which he takes to provide a more explicit account of what was stated in the *Timaeus*.

He [sc. Plato] states that the cosmos is moved not by one soul, but probably by more, and at least by no fewer than two. Of these he states that one is beneficent and the other is opposed to it and is the creator of opposed qualities. He leaves room for a certain third nature also to exist between them, one which is neither inanimate, nor without reason nor unable to move of itself, as some think, but which depends on the other two, and constantly desires and longs for and pursues what is better. (*De Is. et Os.* 370F–371A, transl. Griffiths)

If we take the interpretation Plutarch provided in *On the Generation of the Soul* to be his definitive account on the issue, as he himself indicates we should (1012B), we are faced with some problems: (1) In *On Isis and Osiris* Plutarch equates the principles of sameness and difference with the beneficent soul and its opposite, respectively. In other words: principles that were painstakingly distinguished there, are conflated: the maleficent soul is in fact divisible being (*De an. procr.* 1014E), which—together with divisible being—forms the substrate for sameness and difference without being reducible to the latter; (2) In *On Isis and Osiris* Plutarch treats the souls from the *Laws* as two different, simultaneously active cosmic souls, whereas in *On the Generation of the Soul* it seems as if we should take Plato to be talking about two successive states of soul, i.e. pre-cosmic and cosmic (*De an. procr.* 1015E);<sup>23</sup> (3) In *On Isis and Osiris*, Plutarch states that Plato leaves (ἀπολείπει) a middle nature, which acts in the cosmos as a mediator between sameness and difference, whereas in *On the Generation of the Soul*, as we have seen, the resulting world soul is a mixture, including sameness and difference.

What these issues have in common, is that they facilitate Plutarch's respectful interpretation of the Egyptian myth without shaking the foundations of his philosophical views.<sup>24</sup> The first two adaptations render a clear-cut scheme of oppositions in which Osiris and Typhon fit more easily than in the scheme of *On the Generation of the Soul*. The description of the middle nature allows for a philosophical interpretation of the figure of Isis, who combines features of matter and soul. And this is indeed what follows, as Plutarch announces: 'we shall relate the theology of the Egyptians especially to this [i.e. Plato's] philosophy' (371A).

<sup>23</sup> For a more charitable interpretation regarding Plutarch's consistency on this point, see Opsomer (2007) 385.

<sup>24</sup> Griffiths (1970) and Hani (1976) generally point out Plutarch's truthful presentation of the Egyptian material. For an interpretation which contrasts the dualisms in *De an. procr.* and *De Is. et Os.* more than I do, see Alt (1993) 16–29.

Actually, the real discussion about dualism in *On Isis and Osiris* and its relation to Plutarch's Platonism begins here, but these preliminary points have yielded some important indications as to how space and time play a significant role in how Plutarch judges earlier formulations of dualism. First, non-Greek is distinguished from Greek: whereas the history of Greek philosophy is invariably adduced in support of Plutarch's thesis, the non-Greek influence is ambivalent and depends on the possibility of a Greek interpretation (Egyptian religion being treated favourably in *On Isis and Osiris* but receiving a more critical treatment in *On the Generation of the Soul*, Zoroastrianism the other way around). Second, while accounts from the past are appreciated as unveiling the rudimentary dualistic scheme, it is only since Plato, who explicitly distinguished non-reducible middle terms between the extremes, that the whole truth has been brought to light. However, this Greek and Platonic superiority should not be seen as a rejection of non-Greek influence and pre-Platonic history. As was shown in the first section of this chapter, Plutarch's notion of dualism allows for a whole spectrum of valid presentations. What is more, even the account of Platonic dualism turned out to be adaptable in order to facilitate the insertion of non-Greek religion into the account. Therefore, the question why Plutarch makes such an effort to adduce non-Greek and pre-Platonic support if Plato is most truthful after all, deserves some further thought by way of concluding remark.

## Cultural extroversion *and* introversion

Plutarch's interpretation of the myth of Isis and Osiris has generally been described as either cultural extroversion or introversion, that is to say, either a genuine interest in Egyptian matters or a subordination of Egyptian theology to Greek and Platonic standards.<sup>25</sup> However, in Plutarch's mind, the one did not exclude the other. Indeed, Plutarch's final interpretation of the Egyptian myth is thoroughly Platonic and this causes problems for the Egyptian material. Isis, for instance, gets dragged to the middle perhaps more than she should be and, in any case, more than she was in the demonological part of the treatise.<sup>26</sup> But at the same time Plutarch chooses to omit some of the important points of *On the Generation of the Soul* and reverts to a more basic, less subtle dualistic scheme, with a focus on opposition rather than on mixture. This is not due to the ethical character of the text, as it was in *On Tranquillity of Mind*. Rather, by opting for the less detailed scheme, Plutarch leaves more room for the peculiarities of Egyptian theology.

This combination of extroversion *and* introversion occurs at a time when this is a culturally significant dynamic, as other chapters in this volume point out. This dynamic goes hand in hand with what George Boys-Stones describes as the essence of the

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., the excellent analysis by Brenk (1999) and Richter (2001) respectively.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Griffiths (1970) 26–27 and 58.

development of dogmatic Platonism: the exploration of ancient wisdom, which contained basic truths from which non-Platonic philosophers had deviated and of which myths and rituals still preserved traces.<sup>27</sup> The most complete reconstruction of this ancient wisdom, however, is to be found in Plato, at least according to the Platonists. An exploration of traditions like the Egyptians' was a way to prove Plato right *and* to broaden and deepen the understanding of Plato. Accordingly, in his interpretation of the Egyptian tradition Plutarch creates room for Plato, but also leaves room for Egypt. Plutarch's negotiations with space and time in developing his notion of dualism are thus multi-layered and significant: while Greekness and the revelation of Platonic truth are unquestionably superior to non-Greek influences and the pre-Platonic past, Plutarch's use of the latter endows the basic truth of dualism with a spatial and temporal universality, which in turn again raises the importance of Greece and Plato as offering the acme of this universal truth. As it turns out, dualism is at the same time 'a Greek word', as Plutarch says about Isis at the beginning of *On Isis and Osiris* (351F), and 'a very ancient opinion', in circulation 'among barbarians and Greeks alike' (369B)<sup>28</sup> and it is precisely this combination which makes it so valuable in Plutarch's Greek and Platonic philosophy.

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<sup>27</sup> Boys-Stones (2001) 99–122.

<sup>28</sup> In this sentence as an exception the Loeb translation is used.